

KENTUCKY MUSEUM

@ WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY



ANNUAL
REPORT
2020-21



Greetings Friends and Supporters,

How does a director begin an introduction to an annual report during such times other than with, "What a year!" As we continue our important work in a changing world, I can say emphatically that I am proud of the Kentucky Museum team for continuing to produce and deliver innovative exhibits, research, and programming during these times of adversity. Over the course of this past year, we rallied around our collective need to continue generating museum content that centered on sharing our rich collection while celebrating the art, history, and culture of Kentucky in innovative ways.

Early on in the pandemic, when we needed to be closed to the public, our museum team inventively began producing 360-degree tours of our in-house exhibits as a way to share our work with thousands of virtual visitors. At the same time, on-site collection conservation efforts continued as we prepared for our *Whitework* and *Styles & thegistofig* exhibits. The *US Bank Celebration of the Arts* show this past spring was delivered to our community via our website, and our Carpenter Foundation-sponsored Felts House restoration and Jonesville fresco project were completed this summer, furthering our desire to share the unique stories of our region.

In March, we received the wonderful news that Charles and Caroline Hardcastle, longtime Bowling Green community advocates, established The Charles Hardcastle Endowed Fund for Excellence to assist us. This gift will, in upcoming years, fund preservation and cultural research, provide internship funding, and help maintain our beloved building, an architectural gem of WKU's campus.

Although faced with everchanging challenges, we are proud of our accomplishments over the last year. I hope you will take a moment to read these highlights of the efforts so many put forward, including you, our supporters. I also hope you will continue to assist in keeping the Kentucky Museum a prideful place for preservation, a growing learning lab for our students, and a community space where we can all continue to explore Kentucky and our interconnected world together.

We look forward to seeing you at the Kentucky Museum. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Brent Bjorkman
Director

SERVING DURING COVID

Our 2020-21 year was full of challenges and opportunities. COVID-19 resulted in the Museum's closure from March 2020 to February 2021.

During closure, we transitioned many of our exhibits to 3-D virtual tours, compiled virtual resources for home and classroom use, and served WKU faculty and students by appointment.

IN-PERSON



VIRTUAL



REOPENING

In February 2021, the Museum implemented a scaled reopening of two days per week. We resumed full operations - four days per week - in June 2021. We continue our Free Admission program thanks to the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, and look forward to serving our campus and community.

IN SUMMARY

The following exhibitions opened during 2020-21:

- *Whitework: Women Stitching Identity*, curated by Laurel Horton
- *Welcome to the 60s*, in partnership with Prof. Shura Pollatsek and THEA 323 Period Styles in Design students (Fall 2020)
- *Kentucky Women Rising*
- *A Seat at the Table*
- *Jonesville Mural*
- *US Bank Celebration of the Arts 2021* (virtual only)

The following projects were undertaken by Museum staff and students during the 2020-21 year:

- Museum Luce Term Curator of Folk Art, Jackson Medel, began a three-year project to research and digitize our Folk Art collections.
- Digitization of the Contemporary Art Collection.
- Rehousing of, and conservation of select garments in, the Mrs. A. H. Taylor costume collection.
- Conservation of whitework quilts.
- Creation of virtual 360-degree tours and a podcast series.
- Restoration of the Felts Log House.



LUCE TERM CURATOR OF FOLK ART

In November 2020, we welcomed Jackson Medel as the Luce Term Assistant Curator of Folk Art. Funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, this three-year position will fully document and digitize our Folk Art collections, increasing accessibility and potentials for use. Medel is a graduate of the University of Missouri, holding a PhD (ABD) in English with an emphasis in Folklore and Culture Studies.

"One reason I wanted to be here is the stellar reputation of Western as a home for folk studies and the Kentucky Museum, as well as the opportunity it presented to make a mark on the museum's collections and inform the community about their own artistic past and present."



From November to May, Jackson created or edited 163 catalog entries, including the Handmade Harvest collection that spans utilitarian objects like tobacco knives or hand carved dough bowls to purely decorative objects like carvings and decoys.



360-DEGREE TOURS

Eleanor Davidson, Exhibits Preparator, was integral to helping us pivot to virtual programs. She created four 360-degree tours of our in-house exhibits for *Gazing Deeply*, *Kentucky Women Rising*, *Stickwork*, *HAD Artist Collective Murals*, and *Whitework: Women Stitching Identity*.



PODCAST

Tiffany Isselhardt led the creation of our podcast series, *Dime Stories*, which linked collections to contemporary discussions of politics, art, history, and culture. Episodes included interviews with WKU faculty, Kentucky Forge Council blacksmiths, and US Bank Art Show award-winning artists.

DIGITIZATION

Lynne Ferguson and university photographer Clinton Lewis photographed, researched, and documented our collection of 140 contemporary art prints, uploading them to Flickr and KenCat for public viewing and student use.



STUDENT PROJECTS

As a teaching museum, our primary mission is to serve as a space for WKU faculty and students to encounter, work in, and examine museums. Despite public closure, we continued to welcome in classes, interns, and student researchers.

Madison Rippy (MA, Folk Studies) served as Graduate Assistant for Collection, helping clean galleries, document and photograph collections, and conduct research.



Stella Smain (Fashion Merchandising) researched turn-of-the-century dressmakers in preparation for the Styles & thegistoif exhibition.

WKU classes also utilized the Museum while adhering to COVID-19 mandates. Meghen McKinley's **Dance Improvisation** students selected various Museum spaces and collections to reflect upon through journaling and then to interact with kinetically. Mike Nichols's **drawing students** took advantage of amazing weather to draw structures around the Museum's exterior, including the Felts Log House and *Highbrow Stickwork* sculpture. **Gatton Academy** students took soil samples from our courtyard as part of the Genome Discovery Project, a multi-year effort between Gatton and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute to explore the ecosystem. Trees also came to attention when WKU senior **Ellen Danford** measured trees in our courtyard as part of her Honors thesis on carbon sequestration in campus trees. Dr. Chris Groves's **geology students** and **Gatton Academy** students attended in-person tours of *Gazing Deeply* in small groups, discussing introductory geological concepts and interdisciplinary collaboration between artists and scientists.

CONSERVATION

Thanks to the Adopt-an-Artifact program, the Museum was able to send two collections out for conservation - select whitework quilts and garments from the Mrs. A. H. Taylor collection. During the Taylor assessment, conservators Colleen Callahan and Newbold Richardson visited the Museum and created videos for Fashion Merchandising students to learn about costume conservation as a potential career path. Pictures from the assessment are featured below.



AWARD WINNERS

In November, Sandy Staebell received the Klotter Lifetime Dedication to Kentucky History award, in recognition of her consistent support for history in our community. Sandy has served as our Registrar/Collections Curator and for over 30 years was involved in all aspects of collections and exhibitions.

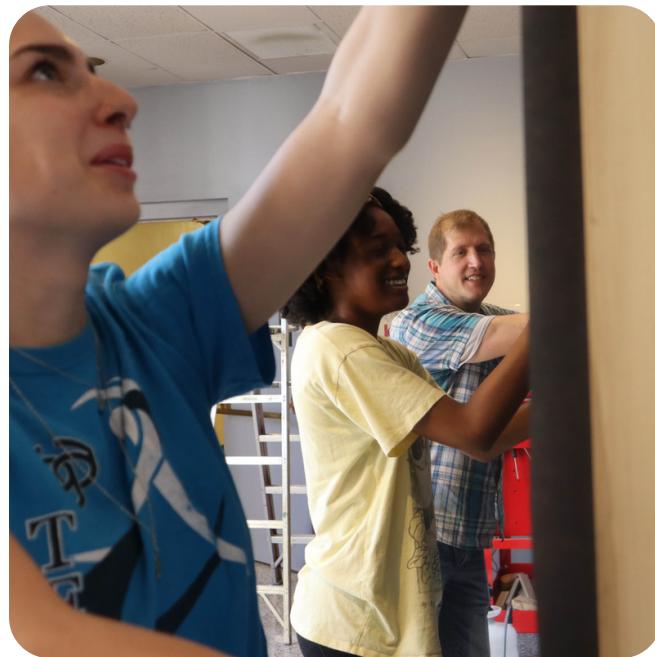
Journey to the Vote - led by Education Curator Dr. Christy Spurlock and Dr. Victoria Gordon - received the Kentucky History Programming award in recognition of their rigor, value, relevance, and multiple forms of accessibility for our community while celebrating the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and the 150th anniversary of the 15th Amendment.

JONESVILLE MURAL

Local artist Alice Gatewood Waddell and WKU professor and artist Mike Nichols collaborated on a buon fresco mural commemorating Bowling Green's Jonesville community. Supported by a grant from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, the mural also provided internships for three WKU students – Aisha Salifu, Cecilia Morris, and Riley O'Loane – who are working alongside Waddell and Nichols to make the vision come to life.

Jonesville was established by freed slaves shortly after the Civil War. It became a thriving African American neighborhood but was demolished to expand WKU's footprint in the 1960s. Today, the land is the location of Diddle Arena, Smith Stadium, Downing Student Union, and Bates Runner Hall.

“Being given the opportunity to create the image for the fresco mural has allowed me to share the story about people who once lived in a thriving community and the unfortunate transition that occurred in many Black neighborhoods like Jonesville,” shared artist Alice Gatewood Waddell. “I hope this project will serve as a small tribute of remembrance for those who knew of its existence and an enlightening story to others who are unaware of how swiftly generations of families can be demolished without fair compensation or respect.”



Above: WKU students Cecilia Morris and Aisha Salifu work with art professor Mike Nichols to prepare the wall for the fresco mural. / Below: The final mural design by Alice Gatewood Waddell.



ARTS FOR ALL

We continued our partnership with Arts for All Kentucky through the Side by Side program. Participating children attended virtual arts classes, led by professional artists, to create works of art and reinforce positive self-image. Their works are on display in our Flickr gallery.



CONFERENCES

Tiffany Isselhardt provided a virtual tour of our *Gazing Deeply* exhibition for Dr. Tehmina Pirzada's introductory humanities course at Texas A&M University at Qatar, discussing how museums provide venues for interdisciplinary and international collaboration.

TOYS

Dr. Tim Frandy's Museum Studies students spent the spring semester researching our toy collection and interpreting select objects through the lenses of memory, culture, and adult play. Their interpretations will be on display in *Remembering Childhood*.





KENTUCKY BUILDING NAMED

For Charles and Carolyn Hardcastle, caring for their community is second nature. A former mayor of Bowling Green and current President of Consolidated Paper Group, Charles has been a prominent member of the community for many years. Now, his dedication is permanently memorialized as the Charles Hardcastle Kentucky Building, in honor of a \$1.5 million gift made by the Hardcastles. The naming was approved by the WKU Board of Regents on March 5, 2021.

"History is important, and it has a way of repeating itself. It is essential to remember our history and keep things that tell those stories. The Kentucky Museum is a resource for the city of Bowling Green and the community, and I wanted to make sure it was always accessible."

The Charles Hardcastle Endowed Fund for Excellence will provide annual support for the Kentucky Building facility and related university programming, including the Kentucky Museum. The fund will specifically support our ongoing Preservation Environment Improvement Project as well as internships for students and support for student-produced exhibitions.

Charles said that he was inspired to make this gift to his alma mater to "pay it forward." "The youth are the future of the world, and we need to make sure that they are taken care of," stated Charles. "I didn't get a scholarship when I came to Western, but my tuition was only \$35. This is a way for me to pay it forward to others."

CASE AWARD

Our exhibition *Facing the Freshmen Year* was honored with the "Events on a Shoestring" award from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District III, which recognizes the very best in advancement across the Southeast. Graphic Designer Scott French and University Photographer Clinton Lewis were recognized for their exceptional work in designing this exhibition.

PEIP CONTINUES

Our Preservation Environment Improvement Plan continued thanks to two federal grants. An IMLS Inspire! grant funded HVAC improvements at our offsite collections storage, while an NEH Preservation Assistance Grant funded new cabinetry for the Mrs. A. H. Taylor costume collection.

CELEBRATION GOES VIRTUAL

The 2021 *US Bank Celebration of the Arts* was virtual this year, with artist fees waived thanks to sponsorship from US Bank. This year's show included 83 amateur and 146 professional works, with 41 of those being from WKU alumni. The show featured an online Flickr gallery and Zoom awards show.



The virtual exhibition was a great solution to keeping the show going in these unusual times and it really represents the work and feel of this particular exhibition so well."
- Yvonne Petkus, whose work, "Diagnosis" (above), won the Best of Show award for 2021

FELTS HOUSE RESTORED



The Kentucky Museum has finished restoration work on the Felts Log House, a circa 1810 historic structure from Logan County that now resides on WKU's campus. The restoration was supported by a grant from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and a gift from WKU alum Allen Shipp (Class of 1980).

Andy Mills of the American Antique Cabin Company completed restoration work over the spring and summer, as one of his final projects before retirement. Mills built new period-appropriate doors and sill beams using reclaimed materials, installed copper flashing to protect from leaks due to rain/snow, and re-chinked the exterior logs to prevent moisture from seeping into the structure. These restorations protect and restore the home closer to its original appearance.

During restoration, Folk Studies student Ginny Willoughby and Brooklyn Hagan worked with Mills to document his work and research the home's architecture and history. Their findings are incorporated into the forthcoming *Finding Felts* exhibit, which provides deeper exploration of the Felts family and their way of life.

"That person who built that structure came here with just a broad axe, a double bid axe, and an adze and made a house, and we are still using these houses 200 years later," stated Mills. "I think people just love the simplicity of these homes and what they represent on a personal level. I know I do."

CSA PRESENTATION

Last March, the Costume Society of America (CSA) welcomed Sandy Staebell, Dr. Carrie Cox, and Nancy Richey as guest speakers for their *Conversations on Dress* program. Notably, we discussed how our units - the Museum, Fashion Merchandising, and Special Collections - work together to provide students with applied learning opportunities.

"Thank you for putting this all together. Your perspective on racial and gender issues was very insightful."
- CSA attendee

WHITWORK CATALOG

As part of the exhibition, the Museum partnered with IngramSpark to publish our first widely-available catalog for *Whitework: Women Stitching Identity*. Featuring contributions from guest curator Laurel M. Horton (at right), conservator Margaret Ordonez, and WKU professor Dr. Kate Brown, the catalog is now available via all major book retailers.



TIFFANY CO-AUTHORS BOOK ON AMERICAN GIRLHOOD

Exploring American Girlhood through 50 Historic Treasures debuted in Spring 2021, co-authored by Tiffany Isselhardt. The volume showcases girls and their experiences through the lens of place and material culture. Each chapter investigates an object or historic site in American history where young girls made their mark or were profoundly effected by key events. Published by Rowman & Littlefield, the volume is part of the American Association for State & Local History's *Exploring America* series.

FINIS

So much happens at the Kentucky Museum each year that we don't have room to highlight it all. Here are notable mentions of other projects and collaborations that took place this year.



Our summer docents led the charge to reopening. Special thanks to **Molly Shaddix, Cassidy Resch, and McKenna Arnold** (pictured above) for their dedication to serving the Museum and WKU.

Special thanks to **Sarah Olive**, a graduate student in Creative Writing, who returned to the Museum as our Front Desk Supervisor from May through August 2021. Sarah previously served as a docent with us, and her continued dedication to our mission and knowledge of front-of-house operations has been invaluable as we reopen to the public.

This year, we said goodbye to *A Star in Each Flag* to make way for our new **Teaching Gallery**, a flexible pod-structured space dedicated to exhibitions produced in collaboration with WKU faculty and students. The first exhibits - *Kentucky Women Rising* and *A Seat at the Table* - are now on view, with more to open in Fall 2021.



Special thanks to **Dr. Carrie Cox** and WKU alum **Pat Chapman** for their assistance in dressing mannequins for Whitework and completing photography of late 19th century dress patterns for the forthcoming *Styles & thegistofigit*.

LOOKING FORWARD

Dr. Christy Spurlock and Sandy Staebell are working with history professors **Marc Eagle, David Serafini, and Jeff Miner** on *Ancient Near East in Kentucky*, which links our Sumerian and Egyptian artifacts to human communication throughout time.

Brent Bjorkman, Charles Hurst, Eleanor Davidson, and Tiffany Isselhardt are collaborating with the **Kentucky Archaeological Society** on *First Farmers*, an exhibition that will highlight recent excavations of Mississippian era settlements along the Barren River. The team visited the excavation site in June 2021 to photograph the archaeologists at work and learn about the excavation process.

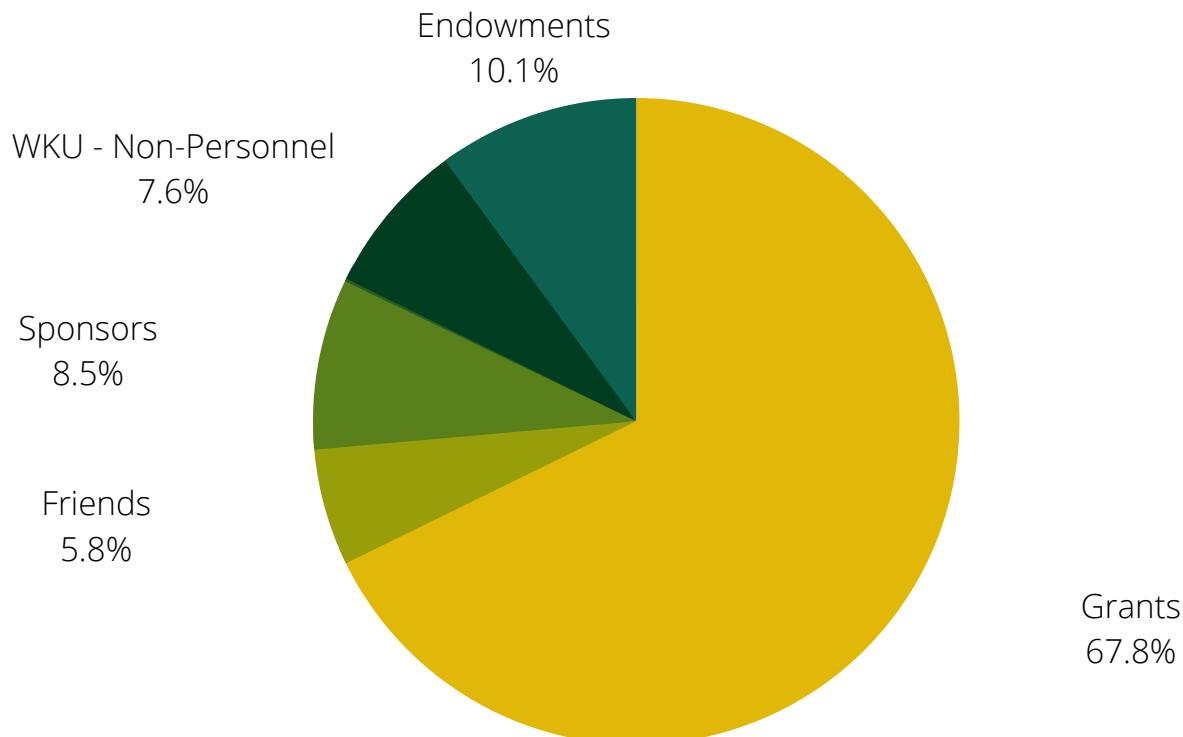
Our **Adopt-an-Artifact program** will continue. Having raised over \$10,000 to support collections, future campaigns will focus on our contemporary art and toy collections. Stay tuned!



FINANCIALS

Support for the Kentucky Museum comes from a variety of sources. In 2020-21, we were fortunate to receive the following support:

- \$ 14,379 from Friends members
- \$ 20,999 from Sponsors
- \$ 5,755 to support the Adopt-an-Artifact campaign, which provides funding for collections research, care, and conservation.
- \$ 347 from merchandise sales.
- \$ 166,720 from grants, including
 - E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation,
 - The Henry Luce Foundation,
 - Institute of Museum and Library Services,
 - Kentucky Humanities,
 - Kroger, and
 - National Endowment for the Humanities.



HONOR ROLL

Thank you for helping to further our mission this year.

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Thank you.