Annual Report 2014

Freedom’s Frontier and partners garner national awards and recognition

Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area recently received an Award of Merit from the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), at its 2014 Annual Meeting, for the project #QR1863: A Twitter Reenactment of Quantrill’s Raid. The project was also selected among the top 5% or less of Award of Merit winners for the History in Progress award.

FFNHA Managing Director Julie McPike, Christine Metz Howard with University of Kansas (formerly at Lawrence CVB) and Abby Magariel with the Watkins Community Museum, presented a well-received #QR1863 session at the AASLH annual meeting. AASLH also featured #QR1863 in the Fall 2014 issue of History News magazine. In 2013, Freedom's Frontier and its partners had produced a Twitter-based reenactment of Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence to commemorate the raid's sesquicentennial. Community members adopted personas of those involved in the raid and tweeted as though events were happening in real time.

“Reentweeters” began tweeting as their characters in early summer 2013, but the bulk of the action occurred in the early morning hours of Aug. 21, 2013, the day 150 years earlier that William Quantrill rode with 400 men into Lawrence murdering and burning as they went.

The hashtag #QR1863 trended worldwide the day of the reenactment with over one million Twitter users seeing or using the hashtag a total of five million times. The reenactment garnered national press and has won two state awards and four national awards.

Freedom's Frontier was also honored with the 2014 National Park Service (NPS) Midwest Region Outstanding Trail/Heritage Area Partnership Award. Staff at Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site nominated the heritage area for this award which recognizes Freedom's Frontier for its spirit of service to all partners, including those within the NPS.

Expanded staff builds capacity in the National Heritage Area

Freedom's Frontier added two staff members in 2014 to expand assistance to partners, develop new sustainability strategies and improve educational outreach within the heritage area.

Kathleen Quigley, Partnership and Development Coordinator, and Elizabeth Hobson, Education and Interpretation Manager, bring a wealth of expertise to the existing staff and have already made a significant impact. Kathleen’s position is funded in part through an investment by Douglas County, Kansas, allowing her to develop and manage giving campaigns. Private unrestricted giving reached an all-time high in 2014. Kathleen has also been hard at work developing and strengthening relationships with museum and historic site partners. Elizabeth has been busy working on bus grants for school field trips and developing relationships with area teachers.
Achieving our goals

In 2014, staff, trustees and friends in Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area:

- Hosted a Kansas Sampler Festival tent with booths for heritage area partners, and a stage for reenactors, authors and musicians. The festival in Wamego, Kansas drew about 11,000 visitors.
- Partnered with Brown v. Board of Education and Fort Scott national historic sites to secure an $18,000 National Park Foundation, America’s Best Ideas grant to produce summer daycamp for 200 Boys and Girls Club 4th-6th grade students in Topeka, Lawrence, and Greater Kansas City, and students from the Fort Scott area. Students explored the Civil War to Civil Rights theme while exploring park service units and local history sites.
- Completed a heritage area Outreach and Marketing Plan which has resulted in an additional 200 Facebook followers, and expanded regional media attention, including featured articles in KC Studio and Gladstone magazines and the Topeka Capital Journal.
- Participated in Downtown Lawrence’s Final Fridays, showcasing partners to a new audience. We also created an event focused on the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry, which featured Missouri Department of Natural Resources’ documentary, The Battle of Island Mound. Speakers for the event were Fort Scott National Historic Site’s historian, and Retired Brigadier General Donald Scott, a former Deputy Librarian of Congress.

Interpretive Grant investments in our partners go a long way

Our Interpretive Grants offer partners seed money to leverage funding and in-kind contributions to get projects off the ground. In 2014, eight grant proposals totaling $34,679 were approved. Our partners’ matching investment in their grants is estimated at $71,333. The following four projects represent a small portion of the impact of 2014 Interpretive Grants:

- Black Jack Battlefield National Historic Landmark: Baldwin City leaders make a concerted effort to leverage local heritage to fuel economic growth. With an Interpretive Grant, Black Jack Battlefield Trust produced a high-quality Walking Tour Brochure to enhance its participation in the burgeoning heritage tourism district. Thanks to efforts from Black Jack, the Historic Baldwin Sites Trolley Tour and other tourism and heritage entities, Baldwin City draws out-of-state and international visitors.
- Watkins Museum of History: Maggie Herrington's Lawrence was created with an Interpretive Grant. Last year, half of the Lawrence, Kansas, third-graders read excerpts from Maggie’s 1867 journal and explored their city in her time with free, hands-on activities. The program emphasizes communication and critical thinking skills with interactive activities aligned to curriculum standards. In 2015, the program will expand with an interactive, multisensory exhibit designed for children.
- Watkins Museum of History: Maggie Herrington's Lawrence was created with an Interpretive Grant. Last year, half of the Lawrence, Kansas, third-graders read excerpts from Maggie’s 1867 journal and explored their city in her time with free, hands-on activities. The program emphasizes communication and critical thinking skills with interactive activities aligned to curriculum standards. In 2015, the program will expand with an interactive, multisensory exhibit designed for children.
- 1855 Harris-Kearney House: The museum restored Hattie’s Room. Hattie, purchased as a slave girl, was freed by the Harris-Kearney family prior to the Civil War. Hattie stayed on as a paid servant, living with the family until her death. With support from an Interpretive Grant, Hattie’s story is now interpreted as a visible and important part of 19th century Kansas City. Structural damage to the home uncovered during renovation was repaired, and an educational program on Hattie’s life is underway.
- Vernon County Historical Society: The Bushwhacker Museum’s Civil War exhibit got a major redesign thanks to an Interpretive Grant. The new exhibit tells stories of the Border War/Civil War in Vernon County, and engages visitors with thought-provoking questions. The exhibit brings new visitors to the museum and reengages community members to invest in the privately-supported historical society.
Successful annual campaign builds momentum for sustainability

In 2014, Freedom’s Frontier mounted a successful year-end giving campaign, bookended by our inaugural participation in #GivingTuesday and a generous donation to the heritage area, and selected partners, from the Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Charitable Trust.

In fall 2014, we joined Network for Good to prepare for a more aggressive year-end campaign and manage online giving opportunities. We also started redesigning our Web site to maximize giving opportunities for our partner nonprofits and for Freedom’s Frontier. We kicked off our year-end giving campaign with a Thanksgiving mailer and eblast and followed up with emails over the holiday season. With these concerted efforts, we saw an increase of 534% in year-end giving over 2013 and brought in 21 new donors in December. Beginning in 2014, all our donors receive a monthly Heritage Traveler newsletter, promoting partner museums, historic sites, recreation, nature-based experiences, locally-owned shopping, dining and accommodations.

Within this successful year-end campaign, we received a $5,000 donation from the Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Charitable Trust and facilitated $5,000 donations from the Trust to the Bates County Historical Society, Little House on the Prairie Museum, Watkins Museum of History, Eudora Area Historical Society, Constitution Hall-Topeka, 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum and Black Jack Battlefield and Nature Park.

Thanks to this successful campaign, in 2015, the Board of Trustees will designate a set percentage of each unrestricted donation to be added to our endowment fund with the goal of sustaining the work of Freedom’s Frontier and our partners in the future.

For a broader look at what happened in Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area, check out 2014 In Review online at: http://tinyurl.com/lobsv8r

Leveraging funds for 41 counties and hundreds of partners

In 2014, Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area saw growth in private donations, increased infrastructure to solicit donations on behalf of our partners, and the development of more diversified revenue streams. In 2015, we intend to continue these trends in order to allow our friends more ways to invest in our shared stories and our partner organizations.

For many of our partners, a small investment goes a long way. Freedom’s Frontier operates with the same mindset at our partners, working to stretch a small investment over 41 counties and putting that money to work to assist with preserving and interpreting our shared history.

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Advisory Committee

Cheryl Collins, Chair, Riley County Historical Society, Chair • Paul Bahnsmaier, Lecompton Historical Society • Peggy Buhr, Bates County Museum • Bill Fischer, Fort Scott National Historic Site (non-voting member) • Lisa Irle, Johnson County (MO) Historical Society • Kristi Lee, Franklin County Convention & Visitors Bureau • Alinda Miller, Lone Jack Historical Society • Alana Smith, Westport Historical Society • Alexis Woodall, Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop and Farm

Guiding Principles

1. We will be tolerant and respectful of diverse stories from multiple perspectives.
2. We will respect property rights.
3. We will focus on authentic and engaging experiences.
4. We will honor the region’s peoples, past and present.
5. We will appreciate unique cultural and historic assets within the nationally important landscape.
6. We will invest in community engagement, education and empowerment.
7. We will sustain and grow a sense of place.
8. We will value and protect the natural environment.
9. We will consider future generations in everything we do.

2014 Partner Spotlight: Lecompton Historical Society

Lecompton Historical Society had a busy year. While the society continued to support the popular Bleeding Kansas Series and Bald Eagle Rendezvous events, its first paid staff member, curator Lynn Ward, was hired. An exhibit of Territorial Kansas maps was funded in part by a Freedom’s Frontier Interpretive Grant. The society also received Kansas Humanities Council and Douglas County Heritage Conservation Council grants for collections inventory. The society partnered with Kansas Dept. of Wildlife to install signage along the Kansas National River Trail and worked with local businesses to promote the town and enrich its economy. A new Web site is in the works for 2015, with an FFNHA grant.
From the Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area Board Chair

At the ripe old age of eight, Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area has settled in for the long haul. We have some well-established programs, like the summer camps we coordinate with the Boys and Girls Clubs in Topeka, Kansas City, Mo., and Ft. Scott that have won accolades from sponsors and wild enthusiasm from the young participants.

And we have some new offerings that we’re just rolling out, like the Heritage Traveler program, open to anyone interested in the Heritage Traveler program, that we’re just rolling out, like the Heritage Traveler program, open to anyone interested in the Heritage Traveler program, open to anyone interested in the Heritage Traveler program, open to anyone interested in the Heritage Traveler program, open to anyone interested in the Heritage Traveler program, open to anyone interested in the Heritage Traveler program.

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We have completed our third year of making grants to partner organizations to help them offer new programs, improve their interpretation and increase their outreach. This work recognizes that, like any entity composed of multiple partners, we are only as strong as the individual members. And our partners report to us that these grants are making a difference and allowing them to undertake things they’ve put off for years.

The comprehensive signage plan we undertook a little more than a year ago is complete. With it in hand, we will begin the long and challenging work to implement it across the heritage area, working with the state departments of transportation as well as local governments to bring much anticipated visibility to the marvelous sites within our boundaries.

Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area’s Board of Trustees and staff continue to dedicate their time and talent to assuring the long-term well-being of the area and all its partners. To do that, we must work to build a strong financial base for operations and programs that will enhance the story told uniquely in our heritage area – that of the enduring struggle for freedom.

As we observe the tragedies in the world around us, we understand even more the importance of this struggle and we rededicate ourselves to this work.

Jody Ladd Craig

On the horizon: Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area projects

Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area staff are working on these and other projects for 2015 and beyond:

• Monthly feature about our shared history in the *Topeka Capital Journal*.

• Bus grants to help schools afford educational field trips

Who we are: Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area

Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area, consisting of 41 counties in western Missouri and eastern Kansas, is a grassroots effort to share nationally significant stories about struggles for freedom on the frontier.

While this area’s history often divided citizens, today residents are integrating differing points of view into a shared story.

FFNHA became a National Heritage Area on October 12, 2006. FFNHA involves residents, public and private organizations working together to build awareness of our freedom stories.

Leveraging federal, state, local and private funding, we empower communities and individuals to serve as stewards of their stories. We strive to build new alliances to support our heritage.

FFNHA is a partnership unit of the National Park Service.

Vision for 2028

Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area is an internationally recognized region in western Missouri and eastern Kansas where a young nation’s diverse definitions of freedom collided. Through sharing authentic and honestly interpreted stories, residents respect multiple views of freedom. Compelling learning experiences, interpretation and preservation offer visitors and residents of all ages an understanding of the region’s importance. Historically aware citizens collaborate to build diverse economies for current and future generations.

2014 Partner Spotlight: Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop and Farm

In 2014, Mahaffie Stagecoach Stop and Farm, in Olathe, Kansas, launched a new Web site and completed a new Agricultural Heritage Barn and livestock pens to increase its ability to interpret 19th century agriculture in Johnson County, Kansas. Attendance at Mahaffie was up 15% over 2013 totals within the first three quarters of 2014. Volunteers from the Olathe community assisted with Mahaffie’s 2014 successes, by contributing 5,000 volunteer hours.