



## Changing Lives on the Plains: The New Museum Exhibits at Fort Larned



In 2014 we identified the need to replace our 40-year-old museum exhibits. The new exhibits will put the complex history of this place into the context of the lives of the people in the area whom the Santa Fe Trail brought together at Fort Larned.

### What's the Big Idea?

Early in the planning stage we worked on coming up with a "big idea" or a central theme that would tie all the stories together.

We wanted to tell the story of how the different people and cultures interacted, how the Santa Fe Trail impacted the Indian tribes living in the area, how the soldiers coped with life at a lonely frontier outpost, and identify the traders on the trail.

*The westward expansion of the United States government, international commerce, and conflicts affected the American Indians, traders, soldiers, and Indian agents in and around Fort Larned. Over time, a series of challenging encounters between these distinct cultures colliding into each other transformed their lives and shaped the history of this region.*

### Visitor Take Aways

We came up with several key points we hope visitors will take away after viewing the exhibits:

1) The fort transformed from improvised shelters to sandstone buildings, to a ranch, to the historic site we see today.

2) Many cultures encountered one another at Fort Larned, including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanch, African Americans, European immigrants, and Hispanic traders.

3) In just two decades, Fort Larned's soldiers played a key role in securing the Santa Fe Trail, protecting the US mail, and engaging in military conflicts.

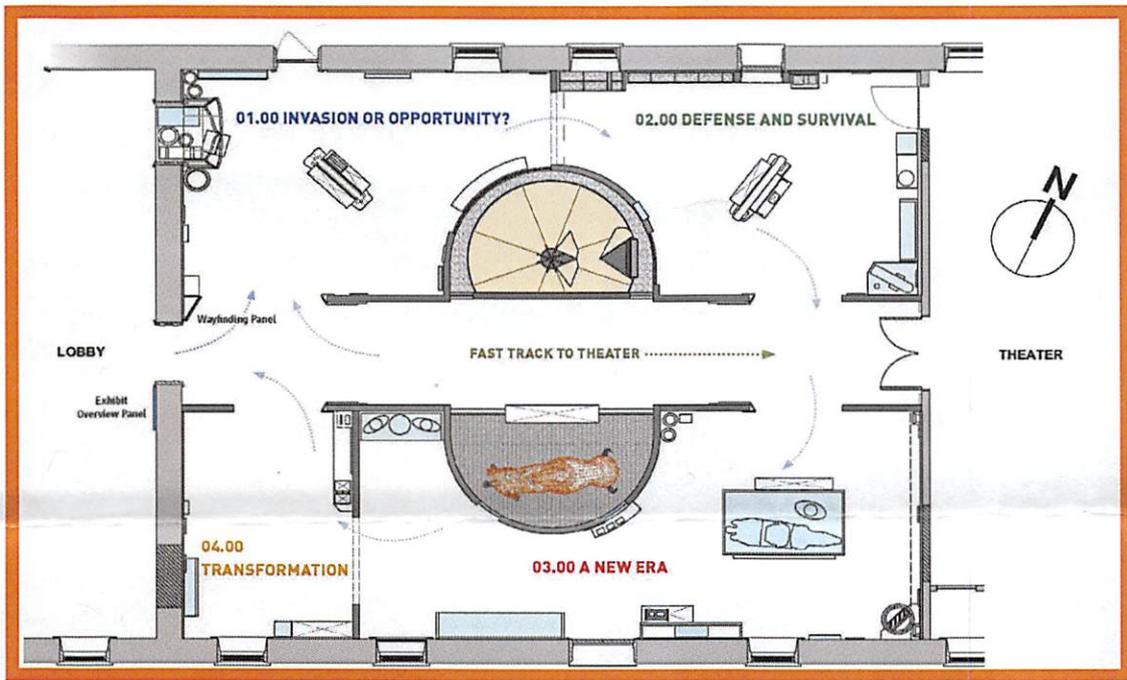
4) Plains Indians had a complicated relationship with this site. This is where they received annuities, but soldiers from Fort Larned also participated in campaigns against Indian populations.

### Putting it all Together



The design approach involves dividing the exhibit area into four sections to tell a sequential story through distinct periods of the fort's history.

Visitors will be asked to interact with the story in each section, putting themselves in the place of the people who lived, worked, and traveled to the fort and along the Santa Fe Trail.

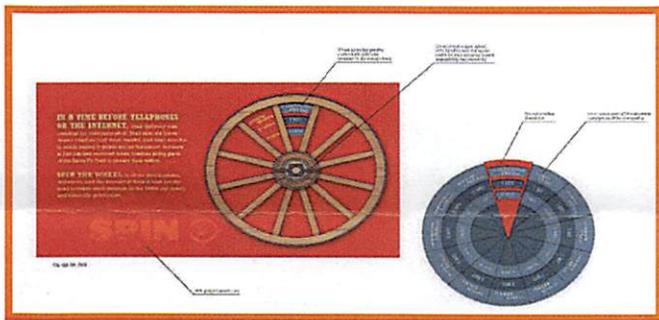


An introductory “fast track” funnels visitors down a hallway and into the theater. The fast track will include overview panels highlighting major stories within the exhibits as well as two “breakout” areas focusing on Plains Indian tribes and bison. The center of each section in the main exhibit area explores cultural interactions between specific groups.

### An Interactive Experience

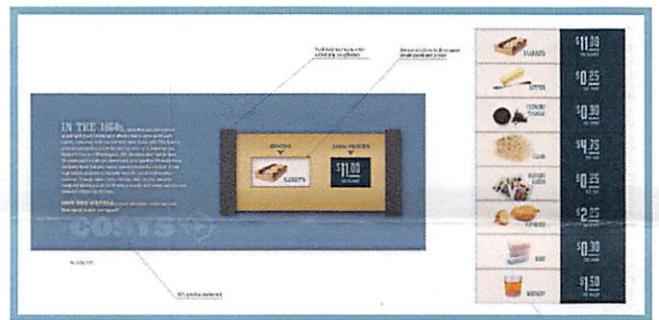
The exhibits will have hands on activities for the visitors to help them engage more fully with the information.

#### Delivering the Mail



Protecting the U.S. mail was one of Fort Larned’s main duties. This interactive display helps visitors understand how long it took the mail to travel in the 1800s.

#### How much can I spend?



Every frontier post had a sutler, a trader operating a store at the fort where people could buy goods not supplied by the army. But prices were high and choice was limited by how much you made.

#### “Welcome to my Home”

Fort Larned will have one of a only a few Pepper’s ghost displays in the entire Park Service. This unique display uses light and mirrors to make a projected image appear 3-dimensional. Our Pepper’s ghost will be a Cheyenne Indian woman in a buffalo hide tipi explaining about her life on the plains and the effect Santa Fe Trail traffic and the army’s presence on the plains has had on the life of her people.

