

Museum of Westward Expansion

Here on the banks of the Mississippi River is a memorial to the vision of President Thomas Jefferson and to the men and women who fulfilled that vision—Jefferson National Expansion Memorial National Historic Site. Here Eero Saarinen's famous arch soars into the sky, a symbol of the gateway to the West.

People crossed this river to go west. They crossed the prairies, the deserts, and the mountains and spread into the sparsely populated land. Some were fortune seekers, some were zealots, some were just restless. Each followed his own vision, but together they developed this vast land into a new nation.

The Indian peoples were independent, free, and equally steadfast in their vision of the land. They fought to defend their cultures that were hundreds of years old. This clash resulted in immeasurable human misery and tragedy.

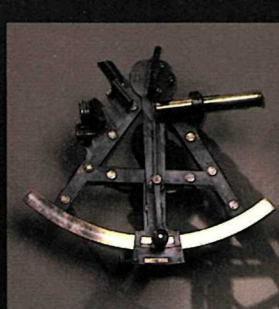
The Museum of Westward Expansion tells the story of man's interaction with man, and with the land. It is a museum about Indians, explorers, sailors, trappers, miners, cowboys, and farmers and their families. The ordinary things they used from day to day appear beside their images. Their own words express their views of themselves, of their time, and of "their" land.

The bison, the beaver, the appaloosa, and the longhorn are here too, for each of them profoundly affected the people, first with their abundance and then with their decline.

Little was known of the West in 1810, so the museum notes only the presence of the Indian peoples and the few explorers who had gone west by that time. The museum contains more and more as you pass through each decade. Milestones of our time are displayed beyond the last decade circle. What will come next?

Objects are not labeled in this museum, for this is primarily a museum of people, not of things. Ideas are expressed by the words of those who were there. Each group had different needs, used different tools, and reaped different rewards. The museum tells their story and, in a broader sense, our story as a nation.





Each gallery overlaps the next because the people interacted with each other. On the gallery walls the thoughts, actions, and tools of the people are displayed in their proper time. Let the exhibits soak in and think what they have to say about us as a people.

The back wall that surrounds the galleries represents the land and how early exploration trips determined this Nation's approach to the land. The murals from left to right follow the course Lewis and Clark took from 1803 through 1806 as they crossed the continent. Join them on their "Voyage of Discovery."

As you slip safely past the grizzly bear that guards the entrance to the museum, turn your mind's eye westward and back to the time when pioneers explored and settled the West. You, like them, are about to enter a vast unknown area.

There was no correct way for them to discover, explore, and settle the West. People just followed their own personal whim; pursued their own interests; found their own way. That is the way to explore the Museum of Westward Expansion.

The bronze statue of Thomas Jefferson stands at the eye of the museum. Repeating circles in the ceiling mark the march of time; these ever-enlarging circles symbolize the expanding horizons of the Nation. The story of the peoples who lived and settled in the West is told in open galleries.

This pamphlet is produced by the Jefferson National Expansion Historical Association in cooperation with the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

