

You Still Have to Do Library Exhibits in Second Life

by Bill Sowers, Cataloger and Second Life Coordinator

Many years ago when I worked at the Dodge City Public Library I was put in charge of the library's display case. It was a daunting task for a guy right out of library school who owned no matching bathroom towels, wore cowboy boots with dress pants and whose artistic talent was limited to drawing stick people.

After a day or two of creative whining and nasty looks at my boss, Jane Hatch, I reached into my brain and began putting together possible display topics. Slowly, with a few "crash and burn" episodes along the way as well as the assistance of amused co-workers, a series of fairly decent displays went up in the case. My all-time favorite was the bookmark display. I asked patrons, staff and friends to lend me objects they'd used as bookmarks, as long as the item was not going to smell in a few days (e.g. banana peels) or be considered inappropriate for a library display case (I had some very strange friends). The display was amazing and a hit with all who saw it. We had, besides a wide variety of artistic bookmarks, envelopes, rubber bands, doilies, hair pins and a bright crimson and blue striped sock.... Like I said, I'm not a very snappy dresser.



Wall Display for Women's History Month with Biographies Provided for Each Photo

Many years later, I am doing a lot of work in the virtual world of Second Life (SL). Besides promoting the state of Kansas and Kansas library services at the virtual branch of the State Library of Kansas, I was asked if I'd be willing to become the volunteer head of collection development on SL Libraries' Info Island. Alas, much to my virtual surprise, I discovered soon after taking on that job that one of my areas to develop was an Exhibit Room wherein I would be placing rotating displays throughout the year.

Nooooo!!! But after some whining skypes and glare pose animations in the general direction of the project's assistant director, Abbey Zenith, I girded up my pixels and began the task of creating displays in cyberspace.

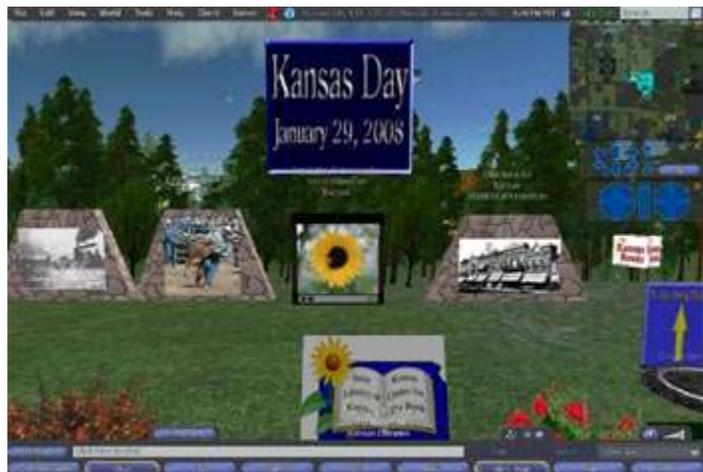
Within the past few months I've set out three displays in the exhibit room centering around the following topics: Martin Luther King, Jr., African American History Month and currently, Women's History Month. An exhibit on Earth Day is planned for April. Each display has included graphic objects (furniture, carpet, plants or flowers), posters, a slide show with pictures, a large wall display and resources for those wanting to know more. Much like my amused co-workers at Dodge City Public, I've been blessed with the assistance of equally amused volunteers from near and far.



Display of Real Life Quilts in Second Life

Second Life, much like Real Life (RL), is much ado about visuals, probably more so. The name of the game is to catch the eye of passing avatars and get them to come over and see what you've got set up. The use of large colorful signs, moving objects, slide shows on big screens, posters and waving banners are among the "bait" set out to lure in the curious. A large wall poster showing the March on Selma or a wall filled with portraits of famous women through the ages elicits attention and then serves as a teaching tool for the interested observer. A "big screen TV" on the wall showing a slide show of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. in pictures is a wonderful draw.

Items like furniture seem like a lot of fluff when one first begins working with displays within Second Life. But cultural and ethnic patterns can be woven into the fabric of a couch bringing out rich testimonies to the pride of a people or group. During African American History Month I used tables, chairs and a carpet imbued with traditional African textures from around the continent... a rich representation of many peoples. Bouquets of African daisies, flame lilies and aloes bedecked the room as well, giving a bit of splash. Obviously, the guy with the cowboy boots had come a long way!



Kansas Day Display Used during January with Graphics and Resources

Incorporated into everything are the resources. They may be links to websites with information on women's history, notecards with Martin Luther King Jr.'s most well known speeches or a large posterboard with various photos depicting Kansas social history and biography. A screen set up in

Second Life might play a video virtual tour of a real life institution. A skydiving platform about the State Library of Kansas Virtual Branch can display a large poster with basic information on the aeronautics industry in Kansas. All tie together to entertain, instruct and inform.

The “playground” that is Second Life offers librarians and educators an opportunity to toy with ideas and concepts that can spill over onto websites, online videos and into real life. I’ve been pondering a display of bookmarks at the Second Life Library’s exhibit room. All I have to do is find a great looking pair of crimson and blue striped socks.