



Comprehensive Interpretive Plan: Museo de las Tres Colonias

Source: Comprehensive Interpretive Planning,
National Park Service Interpretation and
Education Guideline, Fall 2000

Long Range Interpretive Plan

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

Background

The Museo de las Tres Colonias is a museum of the Poudre Landmark Foundation in Fort Collins, Colorado, and is owned by the City of Fort Collins. The volunteer organization of the Museo is the Amigos. Its core is the adobe family house built by Inez and John Romero in 1927 in Andersonville, a Fort Collins community that, like Buckingham and Alta Vista, has traditionally been home to Hispanic agricultural workers in the sugar beet industry. Andersonville and Buckingham were first settled by German Russian sugar beet workers and their families. The Romeros were Hispanic pioneers who came to Fort Collins in the early 1920's from northern New Mexico to build a better life for their families. The Hispanic families encountered both prejudice and economic hardship, especially during the Great Depression and the decline of the sugar beet industry.

The 540 square foot house is of adobe construction, based on the traditions of their Hispanic New Mexican heritage. The Romeros, like many of the families in the three colonies, Las Tres Colonias, were active in community life and have made many important contributions to Fort Collins.

The museo project was first envisioned by community members who sought historic designation of the Tres Colonias in 2000. These members successfully worked to pass legislation that would prevent the city of Fort Collins from creating a truck bypass on Vine Drive, the road that runs between Andersonville and Alta Vista, two of the Tres Colonias. The Romero home was suggested as a site for the museo as it was on the market in 2001. A commercial developer purchased the home and donated it to the City for the purpose of creating a museum. The City loaned the home to the Poudre

Landmarks Foundation, the Amigos became the museo volunteer auxillary, and the Museo de las Tres Colonias was born. As a result of a successful fundraising campaign over \$80,000 was raised from many segments of the community, including corporate, foundations and individuals. A restoration grant was received from the State Historic Fund and, in 2006, the home was returned to its original 1927 four room adobe structure. It is a designated local historic landmark of the City of Fort Collins.

Mission

The mission of the Poudre Landmarks Foundation, Inc., (PLF) is to preserve, restore, protect, and interpret the architectural and cultural heritage of the Fort Collins area. PLF manages the following historic preservation projects: the Avery House Historic District, the Museo de las Tres Colonias, and the Fort Collins 1882-1883 Water Works. The City of Fort Collins owns these three historical properties and leases them to PLF and provides maintenance to the exterior and grounds. The PLF maintains the interior of the sites, manages and interprets the history of these properties through free tours, seasonal displays, and community events.

The mission of the Museo de las Tres Colonias is to interpret the significance of the Hispanic culture and its impact on the Fort Collins community, and the interpretation of the sugar beet industry in Fort Collins. The contributions of the Hispanic sugar beet workers is an important part of this mission.

Purpose of the Museo

The purpose of the museo is four fold: to interpret family life in the Tres Colonias during the period 1927-1940, to teach about the history and contributions of the Hispanic community in Fort Collins, to teach about the sugar beet industry in Fort Collins and its contribution to the city, to support the continuous celebration of Hispanic culture, and to support the culture of tolerance, understanding, and social justice.

Themes. Four themes are central to the museo: first, the theme of the contributions of Hispanic families to the Fort Collins community, second, the theme of celebrating the community culture, third, the theme of the sugar beet industry, and, fourth, the theme of tolerance, mutual understanding, and social justice.

Sub themes:

Home: this includes the areas of adobe construction, furnishings, clothing, family life, religious beliefs and practices

Work: this includes the areas of kitchen/cooking, gardening/curendera, school work, work out of the home (sugar beet farming, notary public, railroad work, construction/limestone quarry, sheepherding, other agricultural work)

Play: this includes children's toys, music, gardening, baseball

Community: this includes social justice/discrimination, neighborhood, celebrations, holidays, church activities

MANAGEMENT GOALS

The interpretive and educational programs that will be offered by the museo will be in both the historic home, the Romero House, and an adjacent center for exhibits and other related activities .

Historic Home Goals

The goal of the Museo de las Tres Colonias is to have the Romero House fully interpreted as a family historic home of the 1927-1940 period. The interior of the house will be interpreted as a Tres Colonias family home with furniture, clothing, toys, musical instruments, cooking and eating utensils, linen, pictures and books, religious articles and other artifacts so that a visitor will feel as if he/she is entering a busy family home of the time. (See Furnishings Plan)

Home Tour Goals

The house will be open on a regular basis (similar to the Avery House) for drop-in guided tours, and for scheduled group tours. These will include elementary school tours.

Current Status of Home and Tours

The home has been restored and contains many pieces of period and original furniture/artifacts on temporary loan and donation/purchase. The home has been open to the public at community celebrations (Las Posada and Dia des Mortas), for scheduled tours, including several school tours. Amigo volunteers have given the guided tours. The home is now open to the public for free guided tours on the third Saturday of each month.

Exhibit Center

The adjacent exhibit/activity center is in the planning stage. The center will contain exhibits that interpret the history and contributions of the Hispanic community and will also serve as a center to interpret contemporary Hispanic culture. It will also include activities that support the goal of community tolerance. The center will be free and open to the public for visits and tours by trained volunteers, as well as special hours for community celebrations and programs. It may be available for private celebrations to members of the community, managed by Amigos volunteers.

Target Audience

Visitor profiles include: members of the Tres Colonias community, citizens of Fort Collins, northern Colorado and Denver, school children K-12, students at Front Range Community College and Colorado State University, subgroup tours interested in local, regional and state history and social justice issues.

DESIRED VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Historic Home

The visitor is guided to the Museo by street sign markers. The museo sign facing the front street will identify the museo, its relationship to the PLF and City of Fort Collins, drop in visit hours, and currently scheduled community activities. All signs will be in Spanish and English. The visitor will enter the property and experience exterior exhibit signs that provide background information about the museo. It has not been determined if the visitor will be led to enter the house or the exhibit/activity center first. When the visitor approaches the house, he or she will be welcomed by a tour guide. They will then have a guided tour of the historic home and experience family life in the Tres Colonias during the 1927-1940 period. It will feel as if the family just stepped out of the home during a busy day, with dishes on the table, toys and musical instruments, books and music in active use. The smell of chili may from the kitchen, taped family voices and radio show sounds of the era may be heard. The visitor will learn what family life was like, what the home looked like, and will, hopefully, feel a bond with the Tres Colonias and sugar beet workers that reaches across time and culture. These bonds, we believe, are the basis for understanding, mutual respect and tolerance of differences. Artifacts will change with the seasons: Christmas, Easter, Harvest, Dia De Mortes. Student groups will have tours that are appropriate to their age: second graders studying Fort Collins history might learn about the clothing that the family wore for work, worship and play, and the jobs of the various family members. All tours of the museo are free and open to the public.

Exterior Park and Gardens

The visitor will have a self-guided tour of the exterior, with the assistance of permanent exhibit boards that interpret the vegetable and flower gardens, including Mrs. Romero's curendura practice, the dedication brick patio, clothesline, and the outhouse. Plans for interpreting the animal pens are pending further historical research. All print in the exhibits will be in English and Spanish.

Exhibit/Activity Center

The visitor will also have a self-guided tour of the exhibits in the community center adjacent to the house. These exhibits will be both permanent and changing, and will teach about the mission and goals of the museo. Exhibits that have been displayed at the Fiesta, Second Grade Fort Collins Public Library Exhibit, and the 2006 Grand Opening will form the core of the exhibition: text and photos of early Tres Colonias families and stories of their lives, realia and artifacts of their work and play, history of the sugar beet industry and the workers, and history of the community. Adult and student visitors may participate in learning activities, such as adobe brick making, that also teach about this

history and these contributions. Both adult and student visitors will be able to extend their learning via a variety of 10-minute audio visual tapes on the lives and culture of the Tres Colonias community. These tapes are being created using the oral history video tapes of Tres Colonias pioneer families and will be centered on the sub themes of the museo. A library containing books, audiovisual tapes, and historical documents will be available to the visitor. Plans for a gift shop within the center are pending. Such a shop might sell adult and children books on Hispanic family life, salsa, Hispanic community cookbooks, and gardening books.

The visitor may also be able to attend Hispanic cooking classes, utilizing the kitchen within the center. During community celebrations such as la Posada and Dia de Muertos the visitors will gather in the center, again using the kitchen to serve traditional food. The visitor will also be able to join the community in neighborhood meetings and celebration of community culture.

ISSUES AND INFLUENCES AFFECTING INTERPRETATION

Resources

Financial. The museo will continue to seek funding from the community, including corporate and private sponsorship, individual donations, and state and city grants to develop the program, facilities, and cultural events.

Historic documentation. Several published documents on the Hispanic sugar beet agricultural experience and family life in northern Colorado are available at the museo. See Appendix. Additional resources include the Fort Collins History department currently located in the Fort Collins Public Library.

Opportunities

Historical designation will be sought from the National and state Register. The museo will continue to build professional relationships with local, state, and national museums, such as the Fort Collins Museum, Museo de las Americas, Denver, and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, Manhattan. In addition, the museo may pursue membership in the International Coalition of Museums of Conscience, an organization related to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, National Park Service.

Within the community, the museo will continue to develop relationships with Colorado State University, Northside Aztlan Community Center, Poudre School District.

ACTIONS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE MUSEO VISION

Parking: visitor parking area for cars and school buses, van transport to parking at the Streets Facility (currently available)

Handicap Accessibility: deal with lack of handicap accessibility within the house due to door size

Temporary exhibit space: need for temporary exhibit space within the house (currently using tables and wall space)

Restrooms: obtain temporary restrooms during construction of an adjacent exhibit/activity center

Volunteer guides: build and train a core of bilingual volunteer guides

Interpretive Planner: obtain the services of an interpretive planner to guide and facilitate the interpretation at the exhibit center. This includes the tour guide manual, external exhibit signs, and exhibits within the exhibit/activity center. The museo will work closely with the Fort Collins Museum on this goal.

Communication materials: continue to develop communication materials for the community via the web site, city offices and centers, schools, and the media. The City office of Historic Preservation has worked with the museo to provide copies of resource material for visitors.

Furnishing the historic home: continue to obtain furniture and artifact pieces for the house per the Furnishings Plan

Exhibit/community center: continue to develop plans with the City for the adjacent exhibit/activity center; fundraise and build center

Oral History video development: continue to work with Poudre School District to develop the oral histories of Tres Colonias pioneer families from raw video footage into a series of short films that can be seen individually or together as a longer film. Turn the videos into DVDs, CDs.

Exterior signage: work with the City on exterior signage.

SHORT TERM ACTION PLAN

Services of an Interpretive Planner.
Exhibit/activity center
Oral History videos
Exterior signage; Spanish signage
Collections/Furnishings
Tour Guides, manual and training

EXISTING INTERPRETIVE CONDITION

Personal Services.

Scheduled guided tours are available by bilingual volunteers. The museo is open to the public for free guided tours once monthly. Exhibits within the house provide additional interpretation.

Media.

Brochures about the house and historical documents related to the Fort Collins Hispanic community are available to visitors. Oral histories of Tres Colonias pioneer families have been captured on audio/video and are ready for development into finished videos. Photos of Tres Colonias pioneer families are exhibited in the house. Additional photos are in storage. Exhibit boards are on display in the house.

Facility.

The house has been restored to its original 1927 adobe. The garden and landscape has been reconstructed to the target time period with assistance from international locally-based organization Trees, Water and People. Some furnishings original to the Tres Colonias families in the 1927-1940 time period or similar to those items (the altar) have been placed in the house (see Furnishings catalog). Adjacent to the house is a brick patio containing bricks designated by museo donors. A wooden fence has been constructed around the perimeter of the yard.