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**Carl & Mary Koehler History Center Buys Douglas Mansion  
Museum will relocate following 12-month renovation**

CEDAR RAPIDS, Sept. 4, 2014—The Carl & Mary Koehler History Center became caretakers of a beloved symbol of Cedar Rapids history on Tuesday when its board of directors voted to purchase the Douglas Mansion at 800 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SE. The History Center plans to sell its current building at 615 First Ave. SE and following renovations, move into the Douglas Mansion in late 2015. “We are moving to a historic house, which feels like the right home for the History Center,” says Caitlin Treece, the museum’s director. “We are excited to become the stewards of the Douglas Mansion, a much-loved artifact of local history.”

The History Center bought the 10,000-square-foot Douglas Mansion from The Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation for \$365,000. As part of the agreement, the Foundation will cover the loan for the purchase, with the museum repaying the loan with proceeds from the sale of their current building. The Linge family gifted the building, used as a funeral home since 1924, to the Foundation in October 2013. The home was constructed in 1896 for George Bruce Douglas, one of Cedar Rapids’ early businessmen. He and his brother founded the company that eventually became Penford Products. In 1906, he moved his family “to the country” and named their home Brucemore.

Treece said the idea of moving the History Center surfaced following board and staff discussions regarding long-range planning. While the museum has a modern exterior, the building is 75 years old and in need of \$250,000 in improvements. Stiff utility bills, in large part a result of the building’s high ceilings, is also a concern. One day Treece was in a staff meeting and sat facing a photo of the Douglas Mansion. She remembers thinking, “Isn’t that house for sale?” That thought led to months of research and discussion, bringing the board to the conclusion that the Douglas Mansion needed to be central to their long-range plan.

The move’s biggest impact will be on the museum’s collections storage. While the History Center currently houses most of its 50,000 objects on site, the move from a 40,000-square-foot facility to 10,000-square-foot-facility will mean relocating most of the artifacts to off-site storage. Artifacts that require controlled environments, such as textiles, will be stored at the Douglas Mansion. “Our archives will be moved to the Douglas Mansion so that researchers still have access to them in our library,” says Treece.

While a square footage comparison seems to indicate they are downsizing in a big way, Treece says not to be deceived. Their current offices are more space than they need and the move will allow them to update 15-year-old exhibits to incorporate interactive technology such as touch screens, audio and visual components—all of which require more compact space. While all exhibits are currently housed in one large area, exhibits will be on two floors at the Douglas Mansion.

Treece says the move is the best option for a museum that has been struggling since opening its doors at the current location in 1999. “There was no nest egg to pay the mortgage, which led to the crisis in 2003,” she explains. That’s the year local philanthropist Mary Koehler, Guaranty Bank, Linn County and the city of Cedar Rapids rallied to help the History Center retire its mortgage. The board, faced with a series of tough decisions, released the staff of seven full-time and five part-time employees. The board assigned director duties to Jim White, a volunteer with management experience who offered to work for free. “Jim White deserves credit for taking the reins during a difficult time and keeping our mission alive,” says Treece.

From 2006-2009, Jim White managed operations with a volunteer staff and a part-time facility manager who was eventually transitioned back to full time. Over a two-year period, the History Center added more salaried staff and in August 2009, hired a first full-time director. Treece joined the museum in December 2010 as director of education and was appointed museum director in May 2013. Today the museum has four full-time and four part-time employees. Treece says the museum’s \$380,000 in annual income comes from grants, private donations and interest from several endowments administered by the Foundation. “We cover expenses and we’re stable, but there is always a concern for the museum’s long-term sustainability. We are not able to address emergency maintenance or exhibit and building updates,” says Treece.

The Douglas Mansion is expected to change that. Because the History Center owns its current building, sale proceeds will be used to immediately pay off the loan for the Douglas Mansion with the balance used to fund the \$500,000 renovation and the museum’s operations. “The exterior of the Douglas Mansion will be restored to look exactly as it has in the past,” says Treece. Repairs will include a new roof, new front steps, landscaping, repairs to the brick wall and exterior painting. Interior plans call for restoring the original hardwood floors and as much of the wood trim as possible. Rooms will be decorated with deference to the mansion’s era.

To prepare for long-term sustainability, the History Center will also soon kick off a capital campaign with naming opportunities at the Douglas Mansion. During the anticipated 12-month renovation, the History Center may move to a temporary

location or, depending on negotiations with the buyer of their building, they may remain at their current location.

Treece and the museum board believe the Douglas Mansion will attract Cedar Rapidsians who are excited about their city's history and curious to see inside the mansion. The building has a stained glass window and front gate designed by Grant Wood. She predicts the second-floor round room will be a popular feature with visitors. "It is such a unique design with so much character," says Treece. "It will be a wonderful space to rent for meetings and we plan to use it as our boardroom." Treece believes the Grant Wood influence, along with the home's inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, will attract visitors from outside the area as well.

"The History Center is re-imagining what we can be," says Treece. "We looked into the future and saw ourselves as stewards of one of Cedar Rapids' best-loved historic landmarks. The Douglas Mansion opens up new opportunities for education and exhibits. We are excited to call it home."

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