

THE ART OF MEMORY

The Missouri State Capitol complex serves as an epitome art district.

BY W. ARTHUR MEHRHOFF

At 437 feet long and 300 feet wide, the building covers three acres with 500,000 square feet of floor space for legislative assemblies and government offices.

“The setting draws both the teller and the hearers into a larger and older conversation.”

—Harvey Cox, *When Jesus Came to Harvard*

SOME MISSOURI LIFE readers may remember the exciting spring ritual of boarding a yellow school bus to tour the Missouri State Capitol. Although the waiting tour guides may not have shared the excitement, everyone understood that something big was taking place.

In literature, an epitome represents or summarizes something big. The Missouri State Capitol Historic District, in the absolute heart of Missouri, epitomizes a much larger and older conversation about the course of Missouri's life.

NOTLEY HAWKINS

OF TIME AND THE RIVER

The Missouri River flows through more than five hundred miles of the state, several major metropolitan areas, and past the State Capitol. Formed more than 100,000 years ago when the Rocky Mountain streams flowed eastward and confronted the western edge of a massive glacier, these bodies of water wisely diverted southward until reaching present day Kansas City. From there, they flowed east along the glacier's southern border, through what is now central Missouri.

Lewis and Clark noted that the powerful river teemed with islands, side channels, quiet backwaters, and lush marshes. Like Runge Nature Center near Jefferson City, the Missouri River floodplain hosted grasslands, forests, and wetlands that attracted the first native peoples and, later, the westering Americans. Today, more than half of all Missourians receive their drinking water—along with fish, wildlife, outdoor recreation, power generation, and river commerce—from this now heavily channelized river and its alluvial plains. It remains the matrix of Missouri.