

# GARDENS OF COLUMBIA

*The James K. Polk*



*Memorial Association*

*May 16th & 17th, 2025*



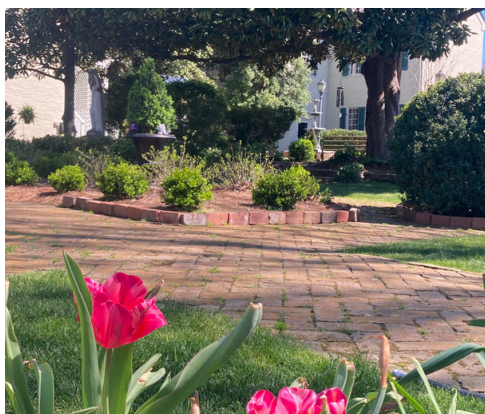


# — Welcome to The Gardens of COLUMBIA

THE GARDENS OF COLUMBIA, presented by the James K. Polk Memorial Association, is a biennial celebration of gardening in our historic town. Since 1929 the Association has preserved the only surviving home of the nation's eleventh President, offering daily tours, original exhibitions, and ongoing events and programs. All proceeds from the Gardens of Columbia support the nonprofit's mission of preservation and education.



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## The 2025 Gardens of Columbia Committee

Sue Nagel, *Maury County Master Gardener*  
Jeff Mingledorff, *Polk Home Gardener/Maury County Master Gardener*  
Rachel Helvering, *President James K. Polk Home & Museum*  
Molly Bentzel, *President James K. Polk Home & Museum*

## *Friday, May 16th*

9:00AM - 4:00PM

All garden tour sites open for self-guided tours.

ONGOING

Plein air painters, Purchase artwork directly from the artists.  
Be sure to browse the plant sales going on at the Polk Home!

11:30 AM

Open Hearth Cooking demonstration at **11:30am**, with samples available throughout the morning. Featuring recipes from the *Provisions & Politics* cookbook. Cookbook can be purchased in the Polk Home's museum gift shop.

**Location:** The President James K. Polk Home's historic kitchen building.

### *Plant Sale*

Plants ranging from \$1.00-\$3.00.  
Abundance of varieties will be available.

**Location:** Side yard of the the President James K. Polk Visitor's Center.



## *Presenters*

### **Phyllis Moore**

James K. Polk Home and Museum





## *Saturday, May 17th*

9:00AM – 4:00PM

All garden tour sites open for self-guided tours.

ONGOING

Plein air painters, Purchase artwork directly from the artists. Be sure to browse the plant sales going on at the Polk Home.

10:00AM

Floral demonstration by Amy Montgomery of Amy Montgomery Home

**Location:** President James K. Polk Home & Museum's Garden (back section)

11:30 AM

Open Hearth Cooking demonstration at **11:30am**, with samples available throughout the morning. Featuring recipes from the *Provisions & Politics* cookbook.

**Location:** The Polk Home's historic kitchen building.

### *Plant Sale*

Plants ranging from \$1.00-\$3.00.  
Abundance of varieties will be available.

**Location:** President James K. Polk Home & Museum's Visitor's Center side yard.



## *Presenters*

### **Amy Montgomery**

Amy Montgomery Home



### **Phyllis Moore**

James K. Polk Home and Museum





## *The Maury County Master Gardeners*



The Maury County Master Gardener program trains and maintains horticultural volunteers for the University of Tennessee Extension, the off-campus educational unit of the UT Institute of Agriculture. It seeks to promote environmental stewardship and provide horticultural information to its members and the community at large, improving the quality of life for all of Maury County.

Members of the Maury County Master Gardeners have completed 40 hours of classes conducted by the Extension Service and sponsored by the University of Tennessee. Master Gardeners also complete community service hours, continuing education classes, and pay dues each year. Learn more at [maurycountymastergardeners.org](http://maurycountymastergardeners.org).

*The Polk Memorial Association thanks the Maury County Master Gardeners for their contributions to the Gardens of Columbia and the Polk Home gardens in 2025!*



## WELCOME TO COLUMBIA.

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# The Gardens



*Photography Allowed*

Tag @polkhome to be featured!



*Leave no trace. Use bins.*



*Do not enter residences.*



*Visit during tour hours only.*

*Welcome to the Gardens of Columbia!* The 2025 tour features nine beautiful gardens in both town and country – each with their own unique features, specimens, and stories. From creative uses of urban spaces to historically-inspired traditions, we hope you will find beauty and inspiration in each site.

**Gardens are self-guided and may be enjoyed in any order.**

Please respect homeowners and other guests by staying in designated areas and removing all trash and personal belongings after your visit. Thank you for your support!

## *Diane and Ray Messick* 403 West 8th Street

Nestled in a lush garden, a variety of plants create beauty, fragrance, and texture. Lily of the Valley signals spring, while azaleas—one over 40 years old—add timeless color. A towering oakleaf hydrangea and a collection of clematis, including the fragrant Sweet Autumn Clematis, add depth and charm, especially in fall. The Hyacinth Vine climbs up to 15 feet, offering vibrant summer blooms, while a boxwood hedge frames the space with structure.

In spring, Peonies take center stage, perfect for cutting, and in summer, annuals in containers and an herb garden keep the garden vibrant. Together, these plants create a harmonious space, offering year-round joy and the simple pleasure of nature's beauty.



1

## *Sue's Riverside Garden* 704 Riverside Drive



2

This Riverside Garden is a hidden gem along the scenic Duck River with garden art, sculptures, and statuary throughout. A member of the Maury County Master Gardeners, Sue Nagel is always developing the garden, which features Iris beds, Roses, Crape Myrtles, a river fenced garden and raised beds. The terraced back area includes various trees, Hydrangeas, and a Shaded Hostas Hill.



## *Porter Home* 305 W 6th Street

In 1833, Irish immigrant Patrick Maguire commissioned architect Adolphus Heiman and builder Nathan Vaught to design a home in downtown Columbia, Tennessee. The home was a wedding gift to Maguire's daughter Ellen and her fiancé Roger Mayes and hosted notable guests like Presidents James K. Polk and Andrew Jackson. Over the years, the house saw several additions, including bedrooms and a back staircase in 1845, and a Victorian wing in 1889. It stayed in the Maguire family for 139 years, until Eleanor Frierson's death in 1972. Ellen Mayes, a passionate gardener, inspired the current owners to revive the grounds, especially her beloved pink and white peonies. The Porters, who took over on Christmas Eve 2020, continue to honor her legacy with ongoing restorations.



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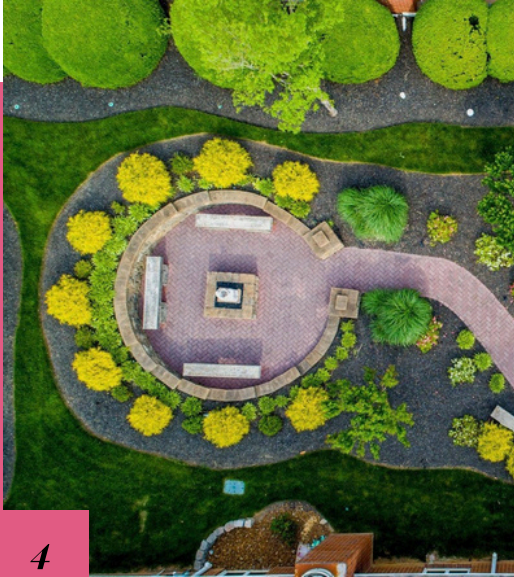


## *First United Methodist Church*

222 West 7th Street

The main garden facing West 7th Street is referred to as the "Prayer Garden." This garden was built in 2007 by our congregation as part of a Eagle Scout Project. The purpose of the garden is to give the community a designated area for individuals to commune with God, reflect, meditate, and pray

in an outdoor space. The garden is used by the congregation as well as used as an outdoor classroom for the Agathos high school students. The second garden faces North High Street. This garden was built as part of a Girl Scout Gold Project in 2013. Both gardens include a history of present and past members using engraved brick pavers. The gardens include a bit of history from our church; the hand carved limestone benches are from the stairs of the original church built in the 1800's.



4

## *Rally Hill*

319 West 8th Street

On April 27, 1863, 71-year-old James Walker of Rally Hill manor in Columbia celebrated the wedding of his granddaughter, Maria Polk Walker, to Confederate Brigadier General Frank Crawford Armstrong. The ceremony drew over 200 attendees, making it a rare moment of joy during a time of conflict. Walker likely reminisced about past events at Rally Hill, such as President James K. Polk's 1849 visit, and the War of 1812, when soldiers mustered there. The house was also linked to Andrew Jackson, with trees planted in his honor by Walker's daughter. In the late 19th century, Dr. William Biddle bought the property, and today, the Seago family has beautifully restored his former office. The current owners, the Whatleys, began restoring the property in 2020 and have uncovered numerous historical artifacts, aiming to return Rally Hill to its former glory.



5



*Flannery Home* 2027 Clara Mathis Rd

6



This garden is a vibrant, ever-evolving tapestry—a whimsical blend of shrubs, perennials, and annuals, each selected for their unique character, texture, and seasonal appeal. Scattered throughout are eclectic pieces of garden art—some quirky, some elegant—that infuse the space with a playful, creative energy and reflect love for the unconventional.

The latest and perhaps most cherished addition is a charming greenhouse, constructed from salvaged vintage windows. It now stands as a striking focal point, catching the light in ever-changing ways and offering a cozy space to nurture seedlings or escape into a quiet moment among the plants.

The garden is never finished, and that's exactly how the Flannerys like it—a living, breathing canvas that surprises and inspires with each passing season.



FLORAL DESIGN    HOUSEPLANTS

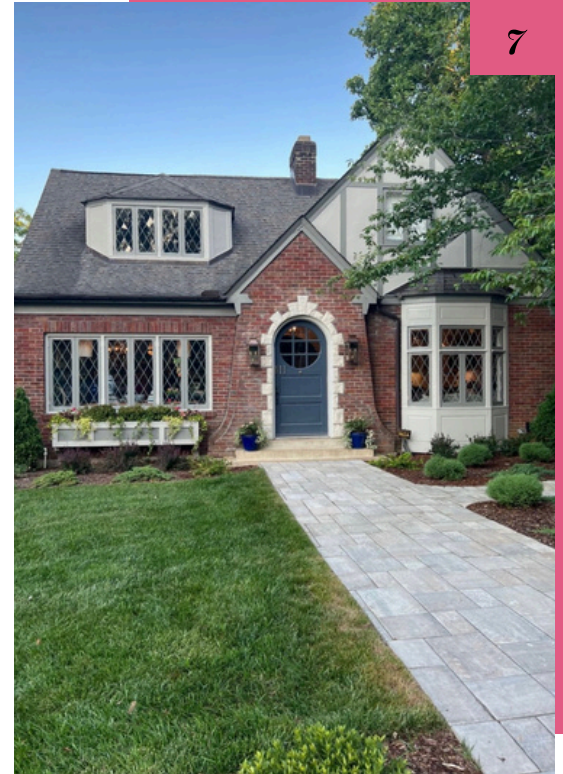
JacksonBlume.com

## *John Gibbons & Amy Montgomery Gibbons*

811 School Street

John and Amy are celebrating four years at 811 School Street. After buying the 1938 Tudor-style home, they opened up the main floor for easier living and entertaining. John soon added a six-bay garage with an office, completing major property improvements. They also enhanced the front of the home with new sidewalks from School Street to the entry and parking area, and installed a charming cottage garden that suits the home's classic style. Currently, they're in phase one of updating the garden—look for a new dry creek bed and other unique touches. Landscaping is underway in the backyard, and the potting shed has been refreshed with new paint. Next up: painting the garage.

Amy owns Amy Montgomery Home at 808 Walker Street, just behind their house. She's styled the veranda with spring tables, fresh flowers, and pieces from her shop to inspire outdoor entertaining. Don't miss the planter boxes John added last year—Amy keeps them beautifully planted for each season.



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*Explore* historic Columbia's horticultural beauty with self-guided tours Friday and Saturday, 9AM to 4PM. All sites included with admission. *Please have tickets ready.*



## Town Sites



*Tour site 6 is located  
toward Spring Hill.*

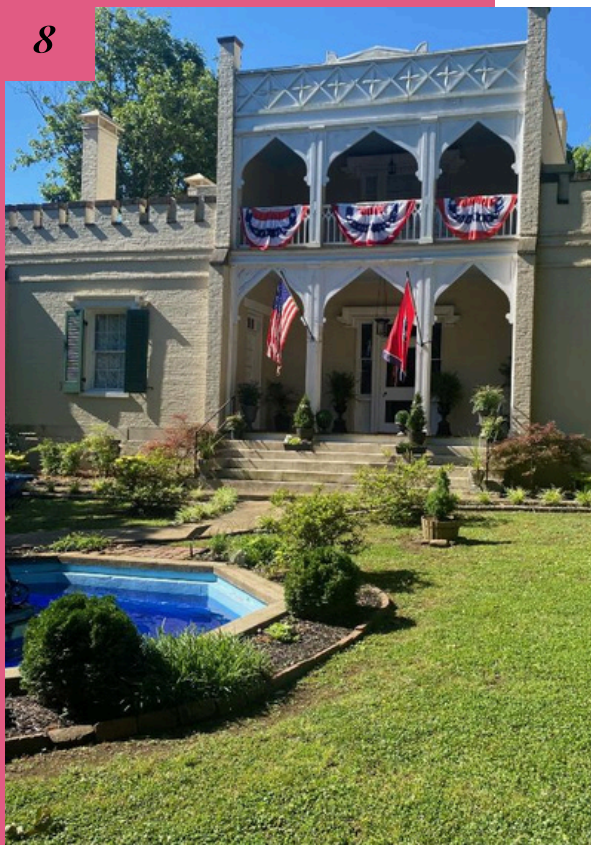


Map is provided for reference purposes only;  
locations as marked are approximate. *Please  
refer to addresses provided with the house  
descriptions for exact locations.*

# *Tour Sites*



8



## *The Athenaeum*

808 Athenaeum Street

This exceptional Gothic Revival building, attributed to Maury County master builder Nathan Vaught, is the sole architectural survivor of the two renowned schools that once educated girls in nineteenth-century Columbia. Built in 1837, the Rectory housed Reverend Franklin Gillette Smith and his family as Smith served as headmaster of the Columbia Female Institute.

Today the site is preserved and operated by the Maury County Chapter of the Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities. The Athenaeum underwent extensive renovations in 2020 to return the exterior to its original color and brought new life to the beautifully-landscaped grounds, which are included with your Gardens of Columbia admission.

The Maury County APTA offers tours of the Athenaeum by appointment only.  
*Please visit [historicathenaeum.com](http://historicathenaeum.com) to learn more.*

  
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## President James K. Polk Home & Gardens

301-305 West 7th Street

Built in 1816 for Samuel Polk and his growing family, this Federal-style brick structure in downtown Columbia is the only surviving residence of the nation's eleventh President, James K. Polk. Today it serves as Polk's premier presidential museum, operated by the nonprofit James K. Polk Memorial Association, which provides tours daily.

The landscape surrounding the Polk Home has been one of the most beloved garden spaces in Columbia for generations. With the original iron fountain from James and Sarah Polk's Nashville home at its center, a bricked courtyard immediately behind the home is surrounded by stunning specimens.



9

*Parking is available along South High Street. Garden tour admission includes the Polk Home grounds, Visitor's Center, Museum Shop, and demonstrations in the detached kitchen and the garden.*

Behind the c. 1820 Sister's House, today the Museum's Visitor Center, guests will find a formal, colonial-revival style boxwood garden created in the mid-20th century.

Once you've walked through the detached kitchen, be sure to see the ca. 1820 kitchen garden, opened to the public in 2021, thanks to funding from the Tennessee Historical Commission. This garden features vegetables, herbs, fruit, flowers, and mock beeskeps. It allows the Museum to interpret life and labor at the site around 1818-1824.

**It's time to Spring it on.**

**Tripp's**  
**ACE**

112 East James Campbell, Columbia, TN

A collage of four images related to home improvement. The first image shows a large grill with food cooking on it. The second image shows a man and a woman painting a wall. The third image shows a man working on a project with a power tool. The fourth image shows bags of mulch and a wheelbarrow.



# History Feature: First National Botanic Garden

## Molly Bentzel Curator at the James K. Polk Home and Museum

The United States has long recognized the value of gardens, not just for beauty, but for science, education, and public good. That recognition became official on May 8, 1820, when President James Madison signed a bill establishing land for a national botanic garden in Washington, D.C. The idea was first planted by George Washington himself. In 1796, he told visitors at Mount Vernon that “a Botanical Garden would be a good appendage to the Institution of a University in the Federal City.”

Madison’s action gave life to Washington’s vision, and the garden took root under the Columbian Institute; a society dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences. Their mission was to collect and grow plants from across the country and around the world that could benefit the American people.

But, like many ambitious ideas, the early effort struggled. By 1837, enthusiasm had faded, funding disappeared, and the project was put on hold. In 1842, the dream was revived when the Wilkes Expedition returned from the South Seas with a vast trove of plants, specimens, and artwork. With nowhere to put them, the government scrambled to create a temporary home at the U.S. Patent Office (now the location of the National Portrait Gallery), even building a small Gothic style greenhouse. Under the care of horticulturist William Brackenridge, the plants flourished and four of them are still alive today, the Vessel Fern, the Ferocious Blue Cycad, and two Queen Sagos *Cycas circinalis*.



Captain Wilkes – Oil on canvas by Thomas Sully, Copyright U.S. Naval Academy Museum



### *Ferocious Blue Cycad, Encephalartos horridus*

The ferocious blue cycad is a hardy, slow-growing plant with traits commonly found in desert species. Its spiky leaves deter herbivores, while a bluish, waxy coating helps reduce water loss. Unlike most plants, its trunk grows underground, anchoring it beneath the surface rather than reaching upward.

*Ferocious Blue Cycad (Encephalartos horridus)*  
Copyright U.S. Botanic Garden

## *Queen Sagos Cycas circinalis*

The Queen Sago, *Cycas circinalis*, may resemble a palm tree with its graceful, feathery fronds, but it actually belongs to the cycad family—a group of ancient, cone-bearing plants known as gymnosperms. Unlike palms, cycads are part of a lineage that dates back over 280 million years, thriving during the age of the dinosaurs. With its rugged trunk, symmetrical crown, and striking foliage, the Queen Sago stands as a true living fossil.

*Queen Sagos Cycas circinalis copyright  
Becca Mathias, National Botanic Garden*

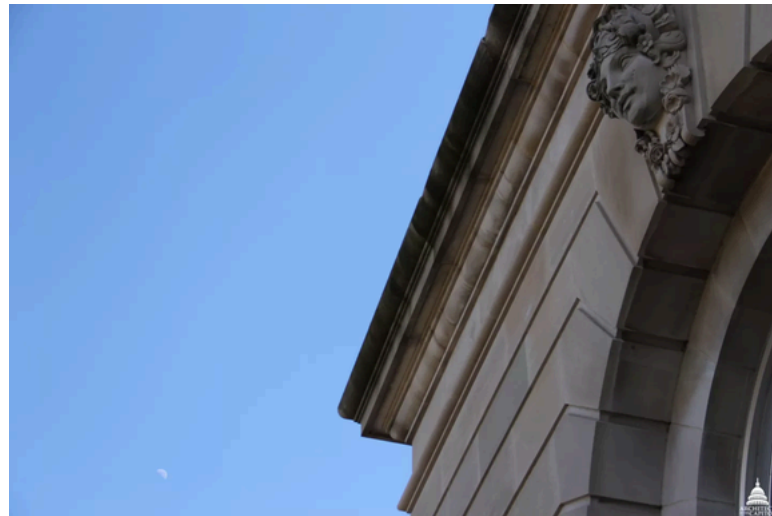


## *Vessel Fern Angiopteris evecta*

The Vessel Fern, *Angiopteris evecta*, is one of the largest and most striking ferns in the world. Native to tropical and subtropical regions of Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands. This ancient plant belongs to a primitive group of ferns known as the Marattiaceae family, with roots dating back 300 million years.

*Vessel Fern Angiopteris evecta copy right U.S.  
National Botanic Garden*

The National Botanic Garden officially opened to the public in 1850. In 1933, it was relocated to its current site near the U.S. Capitol. The new National Botanic Garden was designed by Bennett, Parsons, & Frost, and composed of two distinct sections. The front features 11 soaring arches inspired by the 17th-century orangery at Versailles. The facade is adorned with four alternating keystones of classical figures associated with nature: Pan (wild), Pomona (agricultural), Triton (water), and Flora (flower). . .



*Flora (flower) keystone on National Botanic Garden building.  
Copyright Architect of the Capitol*





*Glass Greenhouse. Copyright Architect of the Capitol*

At the rear of the U.S. Botanic Garden stands a striking glass and aluminum greenhouse, inspired by the grand tradition of glasshouse architecture that began with the iconic Crystal Palace in London in the 1850s. Designed to both awe and educate, this modern structure echoes the innovation and elegance of its 19th-century predecessors while serving a vital, contemporary purpose. Inside, the greenhouse nurtures a living collection of more than 44,000 plants from around the world.

Visitors can explore a diverse array of species, including delicate orchids, resilient cacti, fascinating carnivorous plants, lush ferns, and historically significant medicinal plants. Each carefully curated environment offers a glimpse into the unique ecosystems and botanical wonders of our planet.

Today, the U.S. Botanic Garden continues to fulfill its founding mission: to share the beauty, diversity, and importance of plants with the American public. It remains a space for learning, inspiration, and connection to nature in the heart of the nation's capital.



## ELEGANT EVENTS

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## Book Release

The President James K. Polk Home and Museum is proud to present a new book, written by the staff of the Polk Home, with all proceeds going to the Polk Home. This book discusses the life, death, legacy of President Polk, the long widowhood of Sarah Polk and the complicated business of preserving the legacy and memory of a president. Purchase your copy at our gift shop today!



## Event Rentals



The historic Polk Home gardens are now available for private weddings and events! Design your own unique garden wedding, baby shower, picnic, or cocktail party at our affordable outdoor event venue in Middle Tennessee. The site features secluded, intimate spaces conveniently located in the heart of historic downtown Columbia, Tennessee. The Polk Home gardens are an ideal outdoor event venue for events ranging from micro-weddings and elopements to a brunch or dinner event for your company's employees or customers.



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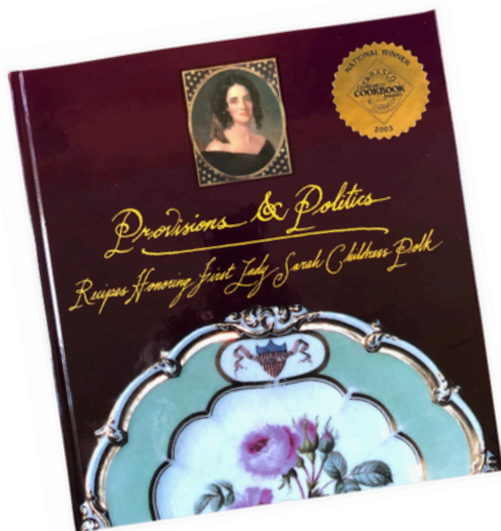
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## Provisions & Politics

At 11:30 on Friday and Saturday, garden tour guests will be able to sample recipes from the James K. Polk Memorial Association's *Provisions & Politics: Recipes Honoring First Lady Sarah Childress Polk*. Polk Home Staff member Phyllis Moore will be serving in the Polk Home's historic detached kitchen. At 11:30AM each day, Phyllis will discuss the life and accomplishments of First Lady Sarah Childress Polk while she demonstrates a historic recipe.

The James K. Polk Home and Museum's gift shop offers visitors a delightful opportunity to take home a piece of history. Thoughtfully curated to reflect the legacy of America's 11th president, the shop features a wide selection of unique and meaningful items. Browse our exclusive collection of Polk-themed memorabilia, period-inspired gifts, locally made crafts, and educational toys.



## Driven by Mules: Columbia's Journey to the Mule Capital

Visit the James K. Polk Museum and Home's newest exhibit, "Driven by Mules: Columbia's Journey to the Mule Capital." This exhibit tells the story of Columbia's rich history intertwined with the role mules played in shaping the region's economy and culture. The exhibit will feature art by Bernice Davidson, and a wide range of artifacts, photographs, and more! The exhibit will be open till June 28th, 2025.

