

BOXING UP LOCAL HISTORY

BY STEPHANIE GERTSCH
PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE GERTSCH AND
COURTESY OF WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP
MUSEUM OF LOCAL HISTORY

Since 2014, creative box art has enlivened the city of Fremont. However, these murals on city-owned traffic control boxes add more than just color. Many also highlight Fremont's unique community and landmarks. None do it better than four new boxes installed in December 2020, a

and bring me ice cream the day after [I had] surgery. She said, 'I've got to tell you about this new project we're doing - boxART! I've got to find sponsors.' I said, 'I'm in!' So, I was the first person to sponsor a box. I picked one down the street from my house and I visited the guy every day for three weeks while he was painting."

When asked to design the layout for the history boxes, Stambaugh had similar enthusiasm, responding, "I wanna do the layout! I'll be really offended if you invite somebody else to do this."

The decision to include people in the photos was deliberate, says Patricia Schaffarzyk, longtime volunteer at the museum, and who curated photos for the boxes along with Museum President Kelsey Camello. "We decided to focus mostly on having people in the pictures. Because people are interesting for others to look at, even if we don't know the exact history, you can always make your own story when you see people. Focusing on people - from ranchers, to local celebrities, to Chinese laborers flying kites - shows how people have come to the Tri-Cities over the years and grown the community."

When viewed together, the boxes create a walking tour through Fremont history. Each has a QR code that when scanned takes viewers to the museum website to learn more of the story behind each photo. "The four big boxes are all black and white, very historical looking," explains Stambaugh. By contrast the towers showcase color photos from Fremont's 50th anniversary event Hands Around the Lake in 2006. "It's like the Wizard of Oz!" she laughs.

Images were printed on vinyl wraps by Signs Unlimited, which also did the application. It took about three hours to wrap each box once the vinyl was printed.



collaboration between the City of Fremont boxART! Program and the Washington Township Museum of Local History. With vintage photos laid on a background of Fremont maps, these boxes and two towers feel like a public scrapbook for the city.

Lisa Stambaugh, web designer for the museum, was a fan of Fremont's boxART! program from day one. She recalls how program manager Susan Longini shared the news back in 2014. "Susan came to visit me

Each box covers a different era of Fremont History, starting in the 1800s and ending at the year 2000. Susan Longini saw people respond to the boxes right away: "The last morning of the installation, someone stopped by the box and said, 'I grew up there!' Because the background of the pictures is era specific maps. And he could find his street on that map... Then somebody else came by and recognized one of the people who was featured on the box."

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"Patricia [Schaffarzyk] and Kelsey [Camello] are going through photos and we're all gonna meet together in a couple of months to go over them... obviously we were never able to meet. I think if we had not all known each other before it would have been a lot harder." A strong bond helped the women pull through and make the project a success.

When asked about which photos stand out, Schaffarzyk mentioned one of roller-skaters on a parade float with the skating rink in the background. "I went to school in Irvington and I remember that building. I don't remember when they did skating, this was before my time, but I really enjoy that picture." Stambaugh noticed pre-1920s photos of women riding bicycles and even a motor bike. Longini enjoys how all the photos are stitched together to create a sense of an era.

"Honestly they're even better than I thought they'd be," says Longini.



The process of translating 2D photos to a 3D box was complicated, and Stambaugh says her technical background in web design helped her communicate with the printers. For example, many photos had faded over the years, so it took some digital processing to convert them all to greyscale and color balance for a consistent brightness level.

Then the wraps have to be assembled. "It's not just one big piece that gets wrapped around the box. It's all these different pieces that are cut to go around the edges and overlap. A huge amount of work on their part to turn what we had created into something you could use in that physical format." Also: Traffic control boxes aren't flat- they have door handles, nobs, and vents. That affects photo placement, as you don't want someone's face obscured by a vent.

Of course, a collaboration on this scale became more complicated during COVID-19. For Schaffarzyk, it was actually easier to sort through photos with the museum closed to the public. Stambaugh remembers, "There was an email in February from Susan [Longini] that said

"You see the idea on your computer but to experience it at a large scale puts it in a very different perspective."

Learn more at: <https://museumoflocal-history.org/>

Guide to History boxes:
Box 1 Pre-1920 and Tower
Corner of Paseo Padre Parkway and
Walnut Avenue
(In front of Chase Bank)

Box 2 1920 - 1956
Paseo Padre Parkway and Princeton
Plaza (Gateway Plaza)
(In front of Wells Fargo Bank)

Box 3 1956 - 1980
Paseo Padre Parkway and Capitol Av-
enue
(In front of Philz Coffee)

Box 4 1980 - 2000 and Tower
Fremont Boulevard and Capitol Avenue
(In front of Fremont Hub)