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Documents of democracy pay a visit to Kansas City

By MATT CAMPBELL

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Some of the most important literary contributions to the Western ideal of human rights will be displayed in Kansas City in conjunction with the premiere of a giant-screen film being funded largely by area companies and foundations.

The writings, which include a 1350 copy of the Magna Carta, a 1776 printing of the Declaration of Independence and a 1788 first edition of the Federalist papers, arrived quietly at Union Station this week so their pages could be filmed for the production of "We The People," which is scheduled to debut in September at the station, along with many of the documents.

They were on view Tuesday at a private reception.

"This is goose-bump material," said Aimee Larrabee, producer of the film for her Inland Sea Productions of Kansas City.

The project, which Larrabee said is costing just under \$3 million, is part of a broader educational effort in partnership with the National Archives, the Smithsonian Institution and Kansas State University.

The 40-minute film, the trailer for which was shown Tuesday in Union Station's new digital Extreme Screen Theater, tells the story of the birth of American democracy and is narrated by actor Morgan Freeman and singer Kenny Rogers.

The project has been a decade in the making. Larrabee, a Southwest High School graduate, at first had an idea to make a short film about Washington D.C., but the concept grew into a feature film for IMAX-sized theaters. Mark A. Ernst, former chairman and CEO of H&R Block, became interested.

"He was trying to get a core group together to help," said Mike Haverty of Kansas City Southern. "He got a hold of me and I went over and listened to a presentation and we made a contribution. I have to tell you I almost forgot about it. In fact, just the other day I was wondering whatever happened to that?"

Sponsors include the Anschutz Family Foundation, DST Systems, Ferrellgas, the Ford Motor Co. Fund, the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, the H&R Block Foundation, J.E. Dunn, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Kansas City Southern, the Enid & Crosby Kemper Foundation and the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation.

The educational goal of the film project fit neatly with that of The Remnant Trust, a private organization based in Indiana that collects rare manuscripts, first-edition books and other works relating to the topic of human rights and dignity. It makes them available to universities and other institutions.

"We are essentially the world's only rare book lending library," said Remnant Trust President Kristopher Bex, who accompanied the selection of titles to Union Station this week. "We're more like a glorified book mobile."

The trust and the film project have been working together for about a year and a half.

"We happen to be a group that has documents relating to the era they're talking about," Bex said. "We have the same kind of mission. We're trying to get people to talk about these ideas."

If people see the film, see the documents featured in the film and then have a chance to see the real things as part of a traveling exhibit, then the experience becomes more meaningful, Bex and Larrabee said.

Other literary works that were filmed at Union Station on Tuesday include a 1724 first edition of "Cato's Letters"; the 1766 Stamp Act; a first issue of the 1776 "Common Sense" by Thomas Paine; the first

Connecticut printing of the U.S. Constitution in 1788; and the journal of the first session of the U.S. Senate in New York on March 4, 1789.

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