

# Rising Above

The city of Cedar Rapids, Iowa was nearly devastated by a flood in 2008 that defied all expectations. Most city offices and facilities, and thousands of homes and businesses were affected by the water that cut a path through the center of the city. The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library (NCSML), and the surrounding historic neighborhood, were among the areas hit the hardest. Rising Above tells the story of the NCSML from its inception to the flood to its rebuild and reinvention.

NATIONAL  
CZECH &  
SLOVAK  
MUSEUM &  
LIBRARY



## First Panel

On June 13, 2008 the Cedar River at Cedar Rapids crested at 31 feet. The flood waters engulfed ten square blocks of the city, destroying homes and businesses. Among the areas hit hard by the disaster were the historic Czech neighborhoods, including New Bohemia and Czech Village. The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library was badly damaged, but even as staff began the daunting task of mucking out and salvaging, it was decided to begin collecting this history as it happened. This is a story about Rising Above.

## Second Panel

This panel tells of the Museum's humble beginnings in the 1970s, and then chronicles its growth and movement from a three-room house to the building dedicated in 1995. The story of the Museum's beloved Immigrant Home is also told here. The home was moved to the Museum property from across the Cedar River, and then restored and furnished as an example of a typical 19th century Czech immigrant home.

## Third Panel

The story of the flood begins. Data from previous floods in Cedar Rapids had established a 100 year flood plain. The 1995 building was built one foot above the 100 year level and thought to be safe from flooding. However, the winter of 2007-2008 was extraordinary in the amount of snowfall and ice storms. To make matters worse, spring brought heavy and nearly constant rainfall. By the week of June 8th, many cities to the north of Cedar Rapids were flooded and the river was expected to crest eight feet above flood stage in Cedar Rapids. The NCSML campus was not in any danger at these levels, but sandbagging and removal of many artifacts and library materials were carried out as a precaution. Later it was learned that most of the river gauges were broken, so accurate data was not being gathered and the actual danger to the NCSML was unknown.

## Fourth Panel

On June 13, 2008 the Cedar River crested at 31.29 feet, nearly twelve feet higher the 100 year flood plain. Flood waters covered ten square miles of the city, reaching beyond the 500 year flood plain in some areas. Nearly 5,500 homes and more than 300 City facilities were impacted. The NCSML and surrounding Czech Village area were hit hard. Entry doors to the Museum building were torn away and water destroyed the exhibits and offices. The 100 year old homes in Czech Village were filled with eight feet of water. At the time, it was the 4th largest Natural Disaster in the history of the United States.

## Fifth Panel

National Guard troops had been called to the city to secure the damaged areas and people were not immediately allowed to return to their properties. By the time museum staff gained access to the building, they had arranged for professional salvage crews and expert restorers from the Chicago Conservation Center to assist with the clean-out. Library books covered with thick layers of river mud were washed and freeze-dried for later restoration. Artifacts were assessed and washed in a series of baths, and dried on makeshift clothes lines and racks. All of these stations were set up in the NCSML parking lot. Artifacts were then packed and sent to Chicago to be treated and restored.

## Sixth Panel

This panel explains how the NCSML rebuilt and redefined itself after this disaster. Generous gifts came from parts of the city that were not affected, as well as from the Czech Republic and other sources. The Cedar Rapids Museum of Art offered the use of gallery space for an exhibit of NCSML artifacts, and a temporary museum store and exhibit were opened in a local shopping center. By 2010, the NCSML had purchased and renovated a building in Czech Village that housed a museum store and the Rising Above exhibition, from which this exhibit is based. In 2011, the 1995 museum building was moved 480 feet and lifted eleven feet to higher ground. From there, additions to the building were made that include an auditorium, three gallery spaces, classroom, library, expanded museum store, reception hall and catering kitchen.

# Rising Above



## Exhibit Rental Information

Rising Above is comprised of six retractable panels that tell the story of how the NCSML was established, how it was nearly destroyed in a catastrophic flood, and how it rebuilt. Three restored, and one partially restored, textiles help illustrate the toll to the artifacts.

### Exhibit Contains:

- 6 panels that retract into a metal base (opened like a roller shade), each housed in a black zippered bag. The opened panels are each 36 x 72 inches in size.
- 3 short poles for each panel (in bag with panel)
- Optional – four textiles (if chosen, a table to display the artifacts must be provided by the borrower)
- All panels and textiles fit into one box (16 inches long, 16 inches wide, 48 inches tall)
- Box weighs approximately 90 lbs.

### Space Requirements:

- 36-40 linear feet (allowing for six inches between each panel and an eight foot table). This figure is based upon all six panels and the table being set up in a long row, but they can be in any configuration within the space.

### Time:

- Duration of exhibit is negotiable

### Procedures for Booking:

Shipping costs to and from the venue must be paid for by the borrower. The NCSML Traveling Exhibit Coordinator will ship via FedEx and include return shipping labels. The borrower will be billed by the NCSML Finance Director after the exhibit's return to the NCSML.

### Setting up the exhibition:

- Remove panel (rolled up in metal case) and three poles from bag
- Place metal case on floor and turn small metal piece on bottom so it is perpendicular to metal case
- Put together three poles to create one long pole with a screw at one end and a tapered opposite end
- Screw bottom of pole into perpendicular metal piece on case bottom
- Pull up on panel to unroll it
- Attach the hole at the center top of panel beam to the top of the pole (tapered end)

## Questions about this exhibit?

### Contact:

Tricia Bender

Collections Manager / Traveling Exhibits

☎ 319-362-8500 ext. 201

✉ [tbender@ncsml.org](mailto:tbender@ncsml.org)

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