

WHERE SCIENCE HISTORY AND ART CONNECT

To: Raven Hill friends

From: Cheri

Date: March 29, 2025

Re: *Common Denominators*

Just as a **common denominator** in math allows different fractions to be compared and combined, Raven Hill serves as a **common denominator** for learning—a place where diverse experiences in science, history, and art come together. The **Common Denominator Signage Project** will invite visitors to make connections across disciplines, encouraging them to think critically, ask questions, and see the bigger picture in every exhibit and interaction.

Effective signage is essential to enhancing the overall visitor experience and Raven Hill is working hard to make the **Common Denominators Signage Project** happen soon. The Center has a good start on funding with a \$10,000 grant award from the VonVoigtlander Family Foundation and now Raven Hill is looking for an additional \$52,000 in funding needed to complete the project. With full funding, four new types of signage will be installed at Raven Hill, each engaging visitors in different ways. Identification, informational, interpretive and way-finding signs will all have their place and purpose—enhancing the visitor self-guided experience.

Identification signs

Pyramid



Pirámide
(Spanish)

Mashkode-kikiiwan-
agaakoziwinan
(Anishinaabemowin)



LEARN MORE!



First, **Identification signs** will be located near a specific Raven Hill exhibit and include a picture or realistic drawing of the actual object; the object's name in three languages—English, Spanish and Anishinaabemowin (language of the Anishinaabe people, including the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi, among others). The signs will help visitors quickly recognize and name the Raven Hill exhibit they're seeing; and a QR code will enable visitors to access additional information if they are interested. For example, the ID sign at our **Pyramid** will picture ancient Egyptian & Mesoamerican pyramids; show the word "Pyramid" in English, Spanish & Anishinaabemowin (sacred earth mound); and have a QR code that will provide information on both Egyptian & Mesoamerican pyramids, as well as explain how Raven Hill's pyramid compares to the ancient pyramids.

Second, **Informational signs** will focus on facts and context with a picture or pictures. These signs will share clear, concise details about historical artifacts or scientific concepts. As an example, the **Jurassic Park Walkway** will feature informational signs for each of the historical geologic time periods with maps of North America, the time period covered and descriptions of the landforms, as well as the plant & animal life of the times.

Informational signs

Carboniferous Period

A time of giant bugs, swampy forests, and early reptiles. About 359 to 299 million years ago



Pennsylvanian
323 to 299 MYA



Mississippian
359 to 323 MYA



The air was warm and damp. During the Mississippian, Michigan was under a shallow ocean, then during the Pennsylvanian, the land was covered in HUGE plants – like ferns and giant trees called lycopsids. Hollow horsetails grew 100 feet in 10 years and fell over in the swamps forming the coal we use today. There was lots of oxygen in the air—great for BIG bugs! Dragonflies (Meganeura) had 30” wing spans! Millipede-like crawlers (Arthropleura) were longer than your arm! Early reptiles were tiny and the first amphibians appeared. Fish with armor and strange shapes swam in rivers and seas.

Interpretive signs

CONNECTIONS



OBELISK

Find tip of shadow & read closest date & time.

Find June & December arcs.

Look for the equinoxes—
March & September.

Science of sundials
History of Egyptian obelisks
Art of architecture

Grant from

Third, **Interpretive signs** will **connect** learning. Interpretation is the point where experience transforms passive observation into active discovery. The Interpretive signs will make visitors think as they encourage hands-on learning and connect science, history, and art in engaging ways. Each sign will suggest three visitor actions, plus a connection to science, history and art. For instance, at the Obelisk, visitors will be encouraged to find the tip of the obelisk’s shadow, read the date and time and notice the overall shape of the arcs. Visitors will also see that the Obelisk illustrates the science of sun & shadows, the history of Egyptian obelisks from over 4000 years ago and the art of architecture.

Finally, **Way-Finding signs** or directional signs will guide visitors through Raven Hill’s outdoor spaces, making it easy to navigate and explore with confidence. With a multi-faceted campus spread across over 170 acres, including trails, exhibits, facilities, and specialized areas, visitors will benefit greatly from clear and intuitive signage. Each way-finding sign will name the destination in English, Spanish & Anishinaabemowin; show a photo or two of that destination and an arrow pointing the way.

Improved signage is not just about direction—it’s about **connections** being the “**common denominator.**” The **Common Denominators Signage Project** will guide visitors; help them make sense of their surroundings; allow them to discover new knowledge; and encourage them to fully immerse themselves in the connections that abound here.

After 33 years of growing exhibits and deepening our mission, Raven Hill is entering a new phase of reflection and refinement. In the early years, our focus was on building bold, iconic outdoor structures—like the pyramid, sphinx, Roman arch, and Easter Island head in the Ancient World—which naturally drew attention and received small identification signage. Over time, we’ve realized that every exhibit—large and small—contributes to the Raven Hill experience and deserves to be clearly identified **and** interpreted. Visitors are increasingly curious about the lesser-known features: the Sweet Track, Zen Garden, Skara Brae, and the Ancient Factory Site to name a few in the Ancient World. These exhibits, while subtle in scale, hold rich interdisciplinary stories that align beautifully with our “**common denominator**” philosophy.

As a destination that blends science, history, and art through hands-on learning, Raven Hill serves a diverse audience—from young children and families to educators, students, and lifelong learners. The **Common Denominators Signage Project** will support the Center’s mission to provide a place that enhances hands-on and lifelong learning for all ages by connecting science, history and the arts. It will also give Raven Hill the opportunity to make learning better—to bring clarity and connection to every part of our outdoor environment. By identifying and interpreting even the quieter spaces, we honor their educational value and ensure that all visitors, regardless of age or background, can engage fully. This project is not just about signs—it’s about growth, reflection, a renewed commitment to provide access to knowledge and about helping each visitor see the connections that link every part and parcel of Raven Hill. It’s about creating a shared journey of discovery and learning.

Raven Hill Discovery Center is currently open on weekends - noon to 4pm on Saturdays and 2pm to 4pm on Sundays. To make an appointment for weekdays or other times, call 231.536.3369 or email info@miravenhill.org. Be sure to schedule field trips, birthday parties or scout groups soon. A lot of spring field trip days are already booked. We are also registering youth & adult participants for classes and workshops. Whatever the reason, we look forward to seeing you here soon!



Cheri