

## A CHEAP CASE FOR SMALL MUSEUMS.

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For many years we have heard complaints from museum curators and others interested in museums, that there was not sufficient money available for the purchase of specimens, the erection of a desired building, and the making of cases. It is true this complaint was not always, though often, made as a sort of apology for the lack of arrangement and labelling, the presence of dirt, and the failure of the museum to be useful to the community, or even interesting to the average visitor. Some museums spend for specimens thousands of dollars annually, for many years in succession, while their exhibition halls lack sufficient labels of all kinds, and especially the general divisional labels and case labels which are among the first needed to make a museum useful to the public. It is like paying \$5.00 for a volume and not reading it when it were better to buy a five cent book to read. It is known by actual experience that a few hundred dollars invested in lumber, stain and the services of a painter, will remove this main stigma of faulty labelling from a fairly large museum. After all, a museum had better be without many specimens than to be lacking in essential labels. One specimen, such as a diamond or an elephant, may cost more than thousands of equally instructive specimens, such as a piece of coal or a kernel of corn, and will actually use up funds needed to completely label a large part of a great museum or an entire small one. Many institutions waste years in discussing what color, and weight of cardboard, or other material is to be used for labels, and many years pass before any exhibit is adequately labelled; it would be better to attach labels—either written in longhand, or by typewriter, so that the present generation may get useful service from the exhibit. Such tentative labels may be replaced whenever a better kind is decided upon.

Waiting for a fire-proof, or permanent, or larger building is certainly a waste of time. I once knew of a professor who complained that he could not teach a number of interested students because he had no class room, but I believe I can recall hearing of certain great teachers of antiquity, who taught their disciples by the road side, without either class room or place to lay their heads, and this idea also applies to museums, for after all, the whole out-of-doors is the best museum. A corner in every school-house may be a museum; a nook in every Board of Trade building may serve the same purpose; even the Sunday



School room may have its ~~museum~~. A cheap inflammable building may be a more useful ~~museum~~ building than a fire-proof structure costing millions. In an inflammable building it would not be wise to store valuable material, but in it could be displayed labels, pictures, maps and books illustrated by such cheap and common specimens as elm leaves, squash seeds, broken pebbles, English sparrows, mice, or the skull of a dog. A museum of such specimens, accompanied by appropriate labels, books, maps, pictures and models, might easily be of more service to a community than some existing museums costing say ten times as much.

Case problems may delay curators not months but years. First there is the discussion as to what kind of a case and how to make it dust proof; what it should be made of, the color the back-ground is to be painted, or whether burlap will be used instead of paint. In this way, while waiting for cases, years go by. People who would use the museum grow old and die. Children who have time in their receptive condition of mind to profit most in the museum grow up and have their time occupied by necessary labor. Their minds become blunted to the useful impressions which they might gain in the museum, and still the museum curator has not secured the case he needs for the exhibit in time to benefit all the classes of people, from the old people to the school children. As a matter of fact, all these people could have gotten the maximum amount of benefit from the museum, had the specimens been exhibited without any case at all, on the wall, on tables, on the floor, or even out in the big out-door world, had there been sufficient and appropriate labelling. Thus the kind of material and color of case seems to have little to do with the usefulness of a museum. I have seen museums with black cases, white cases, reddish cases, yellowish cases and portions of museums with no cases at all, and every one of these had some exhibits that were superior in graphic usefulness to some class of the public than were any other exhibits known to me. No doubt the back-grounds should be carefully considered, certain colors being better than others. Perhaps the relationship of colors or general harmony and the relationship of light and a subdued quietness of color are of extreme importance, but visitors have been in a museum where the cases were entirely white, been interested and obtained useful information some little time before noticing whether the cases were white or black. While black cases may not be advisable, several of our best museums have them, and in some instances one sees the exhibit before it is realized that the case is black. No doubt either a white or a black case may



be very bad in a wrong setting, wrong relations, or if it is not harmonious, and not used wisely.

The museum of the Natural History Society of New Brunswick, located at St. John, has a comparatively small amount of money to spend each year. In this the museum is perhaps fortunate, for in so far as the curator's funds permit, some of the most up-to-date museum methods are actually being put in force. The curator has insufficient help, a comparatively poor building and miserable cases, yet he carries on field research, conducts a lecture course for adults and one for school children, so that two lectures are given each week during the school season. Large parties of young people are taken out to investigate and study in the field; some publications are issued, material collected by school children and sent to him by their teachers is identified, and the teachers of the schools are provided with nature study leaflets suggested by the object sent within twenty-four hours of its receipt. Every school child is interested in what Willie Jones of School No. 2 found yesterday.

In autumn when the Canadian Pacific Railway supplies two cars to be drawn over its lines and side tracked for a few hours, more or less, at each station, where an audience may be had, and when these cars are filled with exhibits under the auspices of the Provincial Government of New Brunswick, the curator accompanies the train. One of the cars usually contains exhibits of pigs, chickens and other live stock; other exhibits relating to agriculture consist of bees, nursery trees, cream separators, or whatever the Government experts consider may uplift the agriculture of the Province. Our curator friend installs material from his museum, supplemented by specimens collected for the purpose. Specimens of birds which benefit the farmer's crops, insects which damage them, are shown, as well as drawings hastily made with cheap materials, but which may be fastened to the walls of the car or held up while lectures are delivered to the rural audiences on subjects which will make their work more successful and pleasant. But more interesting to us in the present connection is the cheapness of the cases which the curator of the above museum has had built as a beginning towards those which he intends to have throughout the museum for the housing of instructive and useful exhibits, his idea being that while these cases are not all he would like to have them, still they will serve the purpose so that the public, old and young, scientist and layman, may derive benefit from the museum until such time as he has secured funds for ideal cases, and has decided what an ideal case is and what color to paint it. But now, he has found that if the school children of to-day derive benefit



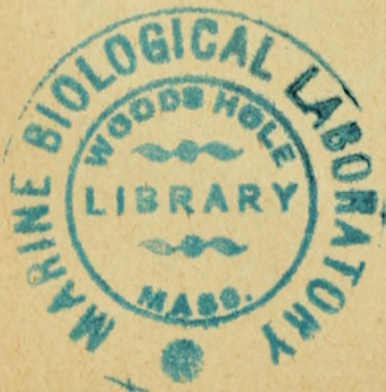
from the exhibits in these cheap cases, when they are women and men of to-morrow, his museum, though he may then be dead, will not want for ideal cases, an ideal fire-proof building, its own railroad train, or even the most valuable though perhaps not very instructive specimens.

With this inspiration, and having in the Rocky Mountains Museum a need to build at least one case as a sample and install it within three weeks, I designed a cheap case for a small museum or a museum having small funds. A contractor in Ottawa will make such a case for \$10.00 or less, casing a museum for less than one-fiftieth the cost of our finest cases. Any ordinary house carpenter can make such a case. The materials may be obtained wherever window sashes are to be had. All the woodwork may be cut to sizes at the local mill, and this is especially desirable where a large number of cases are to be made, as it will save much of the expense of the carpenter work.

The kind of wood and moulding may be varied according to what is cheapest and most easily obtainable where the cases are being made, care being taken, however, if any moulding is used, to choose that which is simple, dignified, and will not gather dust. It may be desirable to let the size of the glass panels and even of the case depend somewhat on the size of glass that can be obtained.

The advocating of a cheap case, its manufacture, installation and use, in no way militates against advocating the best and most expensive cases on the market, their manufacture, installation and use, but on the contrary paves the way for them. The museum that waits to be useful until it can have cases costing many hundreds of dollars each will probably wait a long time for financial support. The museum that teaches and otherwise becomes useful to the public with clean, neat, though cheap cases, will gain the sound financial support which it deserves, at least as soon as the children of the present generation grow to positions of authority, and then the cheap cases may be discarded, or, better still, sold or given to a branch museum or a small struggling museum, and replaced by the very best cases to be obtained on the market or to be manufactured.

(To be continued).







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