

another genius like Carl Akeley, another artist like Charles Corwin, or another scholar like Berthold Laufer.

War, "the most wasteful of human activities," is accelerating the normal emergent or growth values of American institutions. It not only destroys many irreplaceable objects, but disrupts organizations for the promotion of knowledge and narrows the field of activity.

Many museum treasures have been effectively safeguarded in Europe and it is to be hoped that losses may be small, but undoubtedly there have been losses and there may be more. There is also destruction of sources of museum material, especially in the Pacific islands where military exigencies may lead to the extermination of animals and plants or the transformation of native tribes.

In any event it is well that America has not neglected its opportunities. In whatever world there is to come, therefore, it will be evident that our first fifty years have been well spent.

—WILFRED H. OSGOOD
Curator Emeritus, Zoology

THE EVOLUTION OF MUSEUMS

Early museums were only an expression of man's instinct for hoarding—mere curiosity shops—and their collections included not only such things as two-headed calves and four-legged chickens, but bones of the prophets or pieces of rope with which notorious criminals had been hanged. Later, they became storehouses of natural objects, used only by spectacled and bearded wiseacres, whom the average man regarded as cranks or freaks of nature, themselves scarcely less peculiar than the collections they pored over. The next period was when the public character of museums began to be recognized. They were then supported by governments and municipalities, and attempts were begun to make exhibits that would be attractive to the people. This was followed by the fourth stage when the museum actually reached out to the public in various lines of service, becoming a dynamic force in general education. The fifth stage, now developing, promises to find museums everywhere recognized as definite necessary parts of educational and research activities throughout the world. That this is so is evident from the tremendous increase in the number of museums in small towns and cities.

HOW OLD ARE MUSEUMS?

By WILFRID D. HAMBLY
CURATOR, AFRICAN ETHNOLOGY

In the year 1623 the well-known philosopher Tommaso Campanella wrote a long discourse under the Latin title *Civitas solis* (The City of the Sun). The story is a dialogue between the Grandmaster of the Knights Hospitallers and a Genoese sea captain.

The good captain describes a voyage in which he visited a large (mythical) city built upon a high hill, where he made the acquaintance of people who had evolved an ideal form of government in which peace and good will were prominent virtues.

The educational system was liberally developed under a supervisor of education named Wisdom, who was master of the liberal arts, of mechanics, and of all sciences. The teachers, acting under the direction of Wisdom, are said to have written with conciseness and marvelous fluency of expression. These scientific writings were then read to the people, and to assist the study a large building, which was surely a model museum, was provided.

One part of the building appears to have been an imaginary forecast of the modern planetarium, for there were pictures of stars in their different magnitudes and diagrams "of the powers and motions of each."

On the interior wall of the first room, mathematical figures were conspicuously painted, and explanations were given in neatly written verses. The mathematical section also contained murals showing various alphabets.

LABELS IN VERSE

A second room was devoted to paintings of all kinds of precious stones, minerals, and metals, and opposite each painting was a little piece of the metal itself which was described in a "small verse." We seem to have here a conception of the art of museum labeling, and we trust the labels were, as we strive to make our own, brief so as not to be tedious. Indeed, the narrative suggests that boredom of the public was avoided by using only "small verses" for each metal or stone.

The geographical and economic section of this imaginary museum contained maps and pictures of seas, rivers, lakes, and streams over all the face of the earth, and in bottles were "the wines and the oils, and the different

liquids, with the sources from which the last are extracted and their qualities and strengths. There are also vessels built into the walls above the arches, and these are full of liquids, from one to three hundred years old, which cure all diseases." We seem to have in this paragraph a hint of a medical collection. In the geographical section there were pictorial representations of hail, snow storms, and thunder, "and whatever takes place in the air."

The interests of the botanists were not neglected in this bold seventeenth century conception of what a museum ought to be. All the different families of trees and herbs were depicted, and there was a live specimen of each plant in an earthenware vessel. Once more the labeling seems to have been a pretty good job, for the sea captain says that with each specimen there were explanations as to where it was found and "its power and nature." Medicinal uses of the plants, especially, were described.

ZOOLOGY A MAJOR DEPARTMENT

Zoological interests were by no means neglected, and on one of the walls were "races of fish found in rivers, lakes, and seas and their habits and values, and ways of breeding, the purposes for which they exist in the world, and their uses to man." It seems that our modern labeling could not do much better than this forecast of three hundred years ago. The captain says, "I was astonished when I saw a fish which was like a star." He continues, "There are sea urchins to be seen and the purple shell-fish and mussels; and whatever the watery world possesses worthy of being known."

In the fourth interior—the captain seems to use the word interior for room—all the different kinds of birds are painted with their natural size, customs, colors, manner of living, etc. Elsewhere the visitor could see "the races of creeping animals; lizards, dragons, and worms; the insects, the flies, gnats, beetles in their different states, and a great deal more than you or I could ever think of."

In the fifth interior "they have all the larger animals of the earth, as many in number as would astonish you. We, indeed, know not the thousandth part of them, for on the wall a great many of immense size are portrayed. To be sure, of horses alone how great a number of breeds there is and how beautiful are the forms that are cleverly displayed." In speaking of portraying domestic animals in a museum

the worthy sea captain seems to have anticipated our own efforts by about 300 years.

The compiler of this narrative of an imaginary city and a model museum seems reluctant to limit his conception in any way, for in addition to a liberal representation of natural history he says that the museum contained "paintings of all the mechanical arts with the several instruments for each and their manner of use among the different nations." The mechanical section included a synopsis of the science of warfare.

With a truly bold conception, and regardless of expense, the sea captain then equipped his museum with a room of statuary representing Jesus Christ and the Twelve Apostles as well as sculptures of Caesar, Alexander, Hannibal, and "other very renowned heroes in peace and war."

The modern use of guide-lecturers seems to have been anticipated, for in this mythical museum of three centuries ago there were "magistrates who announce the meaning of the pictures, and boys are accustomed to learn all the sciences without toil and as if a pleasure."

During half a century Field Museum has made remarkable progress in many branches of technique, field work, and educational enterprise. But we still have to salute the old sea captain who packed into his one museum our own collections, as well as those of the Art Institute, the Planetarium, the Shedd Aquarium, and the Museum of Science and Industry.

QUARTZ—BY THE TON, AND BY THE CARAT

If ordinary eggs were selling at 45 cents a dozen, and "the best" at \$450,000—

If milk sold for 11 cents a quart, but "grade A" milk cost \$110,000—

—the spread in price between the different qualities would be no greater than that actually existing in certain minerals, it is pointed out by Mr. Henry W. Nichols, Chief Curator of Geology. In the case of quartz, for example, the spread is so great that the question "What is quartz worth?" is nearly as difficult to answer as "How long is a piece of string?" The quartz shown in Hall 36, in the form of building sand, may sell for less than 50 cents a ton, while clear quartz in the form of the choicer qualities of amethyst, as exhibited in H. N. Higinbotham Hall of Gems and Jewels may bring \$20 per carat!—more than 180 million times as much.



Hambly, Wilfrid D. 1943. "How Old are Museums?" *Field Museum news* 14(9), 31–32.

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