

*Housekeeping for a Museum . . .***GETTING BEHIND THE ELEPHANTS' EARS
CALLS FOR A MOTHER'S TOUCH**

BY H. B. HARTE
MANAGING EDITOR

THERE'S A LOT MORE to running a museum than preparing exhibits, going on expeditions, conducting research, and the other activities of the scholarly men on the scientific staff. Take the matter of housekeeping, for example—

The housewife who frets over the problems of keeping her house or apartment tidy should find it easy to sympathize with "Jim" Shouba, Superintendent of Maintenance, and "Bill" Lake, Chief Engineer of Chicago Natural History Museum. They and their corps of some 55 men and women helpers are responsible not only for the normal maintenance tasks required in any building comparable in size to the Museum but all of the special problems presented by thousands of exhibits whose cases must be kept clean and in which proper lighting must be provided at all times.

This huge job is complicated further by several hundred thousand sticky fingers of children that simply cannot be prevented from leaving their imprints on the glass. As a matter of fact, since sticky fingers are a normal attribute of childhood and the Museum administration wants all of the children of Chicago and elsewhere to benefit from its educational offerings, the marks on the glass and the labor entailed in removing them are accepted as inevitable—we would much rather have these problems than not have the children. The marks also indicate what exhibits are most popular. And no doubt a good portion of the fingerprints are left by grownups, too, among the more than a million and quarter visitors who come in an average year.

SEVENTEEN ACRES TO CLEAN

What kind of a job is it that Shouba and Lake face in keeping the Museum clean, properly heated, and properly lighted? Well, there are some 17 acres of floor space, including the three exhibition floors, the James Simpson Theatre and lecture halls, and the offices, laboratories, and workshops of the scientific and administrative staffs. Of this area, approximately 12 acres comprise exhibition halls, and in these the vertical problem—the glass in the cases totaling approximately 200,000 square feet of surface—constitutes more of a giant's chore than is usually encountered in the total maintenance of any type of structure. Also, there are about 1,700 windows to be kept clean. In addition, the roof, an expanse of some four and one-half acres with enormous skylights over Stanley Field Hall, requires considerable vigilance. To heat the vast area encompassed in the Museum,

about 4,300 tons of coal are required between late fall and spring. On the coldest winter days as much as 40 tons are burned in a single day.

One of the more spectacular maintenance jobs that always draws the interest of visitors who happen to be present when it is done is that of vacuum-cleaning the elephants. These animals form so conspicuous and familiar a central attraction in Stanley Field Hall that they have come to be a kind of symbol of the Museum. The task of pachyderm beauty treatment requires the time of two men for about four and one-half hours and calls for tall ladders and special vacuum-cleaning equipment.

"This job is the same as with kids—it's getting them clean behind the ears that's hardest," said James Higgins, one of the workers who helped in the most recent of the semiannual primpings of the elephants. "Of course, the fellow with his trunk lifted away up in the air gives us a time, too—reaching the tip."

The work on the trunk is done with a "wand," but it's *work*, not magic. The wand is a long extension pipe with a special type of suction-nozzle, and manipulation of this overgrown bit of housecleaning equipment is difficult. As for the ears, they are hard to reach and to get under. Sometimes when weather and other conditions make the skin brittle, treatment by the taxidermists is necessary to make it flexible, repair breaks, and touch up the color.

Another major task in Stanley Field Hall is the periodic cleaning of the six huge and heavy chandeliers that hang high over this great central exhibition area that reaches from the first to the fourth floor and into which the principal (north and south) entrances of the building open. Along with the cleaning of these large, elaborate, and delicate light sources, all dead or weakening electric bulbs are replaced. But it is the task of lowering and re-raising them that poses complications. This is done with cables from windlasses at each end of the roof. Two men are required to crank the windlasses, while two others are stationed at strategic points in the clerestory to signal the precise second for starting or stopping descent or ascent so as to avoid damage. On the floor of Stanley Field Hall a group receives each chandelier as it is lowered and goes carefully to work upon it.

CATWALK CRAWLING

Speaking of maintenance of lighting facilities, no housewife in her home would go through what is necessary to provide proper illumination for Museum exhibits. Most of

the exhibition cases for habitat groups and dioramas are lighted from ground-glass light boxes above the exhibits, out of sight of those viewing the groups. To reach these to clean the ground glass or replace burned-out light tubes the men have to crawl on their hands and knees on narrow catwalks with less headroom than a midget would require.

Most of the floors in the Museum are plain cement surfaces—a few special exhibition halls, corridors, and other areas are covered with heavy linoleum, and a few areas, like Stanley Field Hall, have marble floors. The cement floors total approximately nine acres. Most people find it surprising to learn that the cleaning of these is done by vacuum cleaner rather than by mops or scrubbing. The reason: it has been discovered that washing gradually breaks down the surface of cement floors until they begin to powder and become uneven, whereas vacuum-cleaning removes the dirt more effectively and imparts a smooth and saving finish to the cement. Among floor problems is that of chewing-gum. The fact that frequent scraping of floors is necessary to remove deposits of this sticky substance is a reproach to the habits of the public.

EVER-BUSY WORKSHOPS

In addition to the huge and never-ending tasks mentioned, the Division of Maintenance has adequate carpentry and machine shops in which many kinds of exhibition cases are built to special design as required. Here also are made many special items of equipment required in laboratories and workshops for the use of workers in taxidermy, plant reproduction, fossil articulation, and the restorative processes used on archaeological and ethnological material.

Countless other chores and details confront the maintenance and engineering crews and place heavy responsibilities on Superintendent Jim Shouba and Chief Engineer Bill Lake. And like the rest of us, I'll bet when they go home from work, Mrs. Shouba and Mrs. Lake greet them with: "Dear, there's something I'd like you to fix in the living room."

Albino Tribesmen in Africa

White Negroes (albinos) sometimes occur among African tribes. The albinism may be complete or piebald. The skin, however, is pinkish, not white. The Bakongo tribe required an albino or some hair from one before they would open a new branch of a secret society. Some tribes are reported to regard albinos as reincarnations of deceased chiefs; among others, albinos experience difficulty in attaining marriage because the women hold them in disfavor; among some, the usual tribal marks—incisions in the skin—are denied to albinos.



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