

New Museums for

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RECENTLY, I chanced to read a news story concerning the future role of museums, and a magazine article discussing the "new look" of one specific museum. Together, they illustrate some of the problems that must be faced if museums are to be relevant as well as beautiful. As Field Museum is at the "where are we going?" stage, a critique of these articles is timely.

The news story reported a conference at which some very strong anti-establishment views were expressed. Some were disturbing to me, for example, the opinion that "... museums have to be changed or destroyed. ..." But there was sound sense, too, particularly in the concept of "... a museum of the people ... (which would) reach the inner city." To implement this, it was felt museums should provide "... space in central buildings or neighborhood facilities ... expertise ... branch museums in inner city ... (with) no strings attached."

The magazine article dealt with the features of a newly modernized museum: new colors, textures and lighting; specimens rearranged to provide excitement and flowing lines; humorous, cute or poetic labels; mechanical devices to enliven the exhibits. Hardware. Nuts and bolts. These things are necessary, of course, but the real story of the place was in the words "... the museum is a bridge between science and conceptual philosophy." Had I not just read the news story, I would have said "Ho-hum" or "So what?" But what I did say was: it is just this sort of "arty" attitude that is being attacked.

Of course, "museum" means different things to different people. My remarks here refer to the public exhibition areas. In them, our aim is to present the kinds of things there are—from precious stones to dinosaurs, rab-

bits to squid, mummies to Eskimo masks, dutchman's pipes to coconut palms. With such specimens we illustrate the contents of the continents and seas. We show the diversity of life and its processes; how things are different or similar due to origins, habitat or living conditions; and how these things coexist. Among ourselves, we may speak of evolution, systematics, ecology, biogeography and culture. But to introduce these concepts to the public we must use the words and approaches of the market place, the streets and the newspapers.

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Are we using our specimens, words and pictures to tell people what they want to know in ways they can understand? Should we tell them only what they want to know? Many don't realize what can be known. Surely, we can expand their horizons beyond city skylines, and their biological interests beyond humans, rats, roaches and plastic Christmas trees.

But we must start with our audience and their closest environment. Do we know how they want to begin? Should we ask them to help us decide what should be presented on an elemental level as an introduction to the riches beyond? Should we use some of our museum halls for basic statements about the nature of man and his environment? Should we offer help and support without strings for grass roots branch museums by the people, for the people? The ideal answers to these questions may be in conflict with our financial reality. But somehow we must reconcile the two.

Is there not a tide to be taken at its flood? Is not time running out?

MILWAUKEE MUSEUM GETS NEW DIRECTOR

Dr. Kenneth Starr, curator of Asiatic archaeology and ethnology in Field Museum's department of anthropology for the past 17 years, has been appointed Director of the Milwaukee Public Museum. He will take up his new post in the summer.



Dr. Kenneth Starr

Dr. Starr is the fourth curator from the Museum's department of anthropology to be appointed a museum director. The other three are: Alexander Spoehr, former curator of oceanic ethnology, who served as Director of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu from 1953 to 1961; Roland W. Force, former curator of oceanic archaeology and ethnology, who was named Director of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in 1961 upon Spoehr's appointment as Chancellor of the East-West Center, University of Hawaii; and George I. Quimby, Jr., former curator of North American archaeology and ethnology, who became Director of the Thomas Burke Memorial Washington State Museum in 1968.

E. Leland Webber, Field Museum director, praised Dr. Starr for his great and far-reaching contributions in the field of anthropology. "He has been responsible for large and significant additions to the Museum's Asian collections and for the totally new galleries

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