

Three papers presented
in a panel discussion
entitled

"PLANNING A MUSEUM"

at the 13th annual
PACIFIC NORTHWEST HISTORY CONFERENCE
Seattle, Washington
April 15, 1960

"THE PURPOSES OF A HISTORICAL MUSEUM"

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"ACCESSIONS"

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"EXHIBITS"

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Prepared and distributed
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610 Parkway Drive
Boise, Idaho

"THE PURPOSES OF A HISTORICAL MUSEUM"

by

H. J. SWINNEY

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This morning, as I understand the assignment, we three are expected to plan a museum: build the building, develop the program, select and engage the staff, install the exhibits, and open the whole show for business, all in the space of a one-hour panel. This may seem like quite an undertaking to you, but I assure you that we are up to it. We are all members of the American Association of Museums, which certifies that our hearts are professionally pure. Thus our strengths are as the strengths of 30!

Seriously, museum problems do seem to be on the minds of a lot of people today. Thus it may be worthwhile to examine some of the ideas which seem important to those of us who earn a living in the museum business. I am asked to talk about the purpose of a museum and the museum staff; Mrs. Corley will have something to say about accessions; and Dick Conn will tell you what he thinks about exhibits.

My desk copy of the dictionary says that a museum is "a building, or part of one, in which are preserved and exhibited objects of permanent interest in one or more of the arts and sciences." I cannot possibly agree with this. It has a fundamental flaw: a museum is not a building but an organization. You can't very well run a museum without a building to run it in, but no building is a museum until it has a program and a staff to carry it out.

Let us put it on familiar terms by comparing a museum with a school -- a comparison which may come easily to many of us because so many people in the museum field are fugitives of one sort or another from education. If a community, wishing to provide education for its young people, commences by constructing a handsome class-room building on Main Street, does it have a school? Why, no. It only has housing for a school. The real school consists of the educational organization -- the teachers, the principal, the superintendent, the school board, the librarian, the janitor who takes care of things, and (I have noticed recently) the coach, and the ticket takers for the football games. If you are going to build a museum, the first thing to start with is a museum director.

His first job will be to figure out with his trustees what this institution is going to do. Why is it here? If he is an initiated priest of the current professional mysteries, he will probably believe that a museum should be an educational institution in its own right. This ought to carry him inevitably through an additional train of thought.

Education, you see, requires certain basic minimum factors. There must be both a teacher and a student. Below this minimum there is no education. Of course the teacher does not have to be a person; a student can learn from a book in the library, from a tree in the forest, or (hopefully) from an object in the museum, but a student and a teacher there must be. Furthermore, in the usual classroom situation, the students are a captive audience: they can't leave the lecture until the bell rings. But in a museum situation, where the object on display is the teacher, the student -- the visitor, that is -- is free to leave at any time. If he doesn't like what the object says, he goes out the front door -- and the educational situation has failed, through the lack of one of the two indispensable components.

Thus our new museum director must either resolve that his museum will teach some lesson which is meaningful and desirable to that community which he serves, and will teach it in a sufficiently entertaining way to hold his student body -- or else he must reconcile himself to the permanent sense of peace which comes from empty galleries. If his trustees are on their job, he'd better use that calm interlude to write letters of application for some other position.

His next problem will be to determine what his institution should teach. Somewhere, somehow, it must have a purpose, and that purpose should be worked out and stated in writing. This, I think, is important. No matter what that reason for being is, the director and the trustees ought to understand it and agree on it, and they ought to stick to it. The institution needs to know what story it is to tell, so that the institution's resources -- staff skills, collections, budget, and building -- can be most effectively used to tell that story to the public.

Of course it ought to be a story worth telling. Dr. Albert Corey, who wrote the preface to Carl Guthe's new bulletin, The Management of Small History Museums, used a wonderfully fortunate phrase to explain the reasons for the display of objects: "... because they illumine the human processes of the past." A museum of history, having first made up its mind what chronological and geographical segment of the past it is going to interpret to its public, ought to display objects not simply because they are old, and not simply because they belonged to an individual person, but because they illumine for the largest number of people the most significant human processes of the past.

I believe this sort of generalized thinking is essential. Once criteria of this sort have been worked out to the satisfaction of the director and the trustees, they can be applied as a yardstick to all the existing or projected operations with which museums get involved. Before money and time are spent on any new project, large or small, new case or new building or new TV program, someone ought to ask, "Will this proposal help us do a better job of meeting our stated objectives?"

Of course, the director and trustees will face certain practical and

more-or-less physical problems. Where will the institution be housed? How will its space best be allocated? Once the exhibit area has been determined, how should it be arranged? I don't know. All of these things have to be determined on the spot, but of course there are a few principles which may seem almost too simple to need statement. If the museum is to serve the public, the public has to be able to get to it. This means reasonably convenient access, and probably convenient parking. The building and its presumably priceless contents should be safe from forcible entry, and as safe as possible from fire, though this requirement is pretty hard to meet because of the viciously inflammable quality of so much history museum material. The physical parts of the building should resist wear and tear as well as possible -- wooden stairways, for example, will wear out pretty rapidly if museum visitation is high. Decent public restrooms are an absolute requirement, and there can be no compromise with the quality of their care. A lot of other things will occur to the director and his trustees as they examine their own immediate problem.

There isn't a great deal of up-to-date professional literature to which they can turn. Guthe's The Management of Small History Museums, which I just mentioned, is a peach of a job, as is his earlier So You Want A Good Museum. Arminia Neal of the Denver Museum of Natural History has written a fine mimeographed pamphlet on exhibits design, and the exhibits technique manual of the Detroit Historical Society is also excellent. There are lots of individual ideas in the professional journals: "Museum News," "History News," "Curator," "The Clearing House for Western Museums," and a few others. But the professional bookshelf isn't a long one, and the design of a new building or the adaptation of an old one is a job which requires experience or experienced advice.

There is one great failing in initial arrangement which makes many small museums unworkable from the professional point of view: overemphasis on display. Pretty nearly as much floor space usually needs to be devoted to administrative and work areas as is devoted to exhibitions. No museum which knows its business makes any effort to display all of its material, and this means that the material not on display has to be stored somewhere. In addition, there has to be work space for the exhibits people and room for reference books, administrative and secretarial offices (if the institution is big enough to own a secretary) and so forth and so on. These are to a museum what the engine room and fuel tanks are to a ship; nothing can move without them.

Perhaps you noticed that I spoke just now of the museum "owning" a secretary. This was no slip of the tongue, because in a really active museum secretaries as well as other staff members are more nearly slaves than anything else. At least I have never been involved with any museum in which the staff was not both overworked and underpaid, and I think it is an unusual institution indeed in which the 40-hour week is anything better than a bad joke. Most such outfits seem to be kept going by equal quantities of dedicated inspiration and black coffee.

I have often tried to decide what qualities good museum people possess in common -- the qualities to be sought by a board of trustees. I think perhaps the primary one is imagination, though poverty is also nearly universal. Perhaps this imagination is particularly necessary because there is no real training school for museum people other than experience. A few such courses are beginning to develop in various parts of the country, but, by and large, museum people drift into the profession from other fields and come up through the ranks. Training in archaeology and anthropology is a notable exception to this, and this may be so because both of these academic disciplines deal so extensively with physical objects. Certainly museum people must like objects -- must be "object-minded", so to speak.

In a small museum, of course, the director will have to do just about everything himself, and so it is very helpful if the trustees arrange to hire a genius for the job. In a larger institution there will be at least a few specialist staff members to undertake certain areas of the work. Under those circumstances, it becomes the director's job to provide the climate in which the rest of the staff can carry out their special functions in order to achieve the established purpose of the institution. It will be the director's responsibility to translate the broad policies of the trustees into specific projects, to administer and supervise those projects from day to day, and to wonder where the money is coming from. There are a lot of thoroughly trained historians running museums, but in view of the director's duties, I think it is a mistake for a governing body to insist that the museum director have earned the Ph.D. in history. A trained historian probably ought to be among the very early staff members hired, but the talents and training of a man with a Ph.D. in history ought not to be used on many of the functions which the director must carry out. Here there is an analogy from industry: the director of a museum is, in a sense, the factory manager and not the engineer of history. The historian is the chief engineer of a historical society, and is a member of the museum engineering team which researches and designs the product; the factory manager runs the works, including not only the engineering, but also the administration, the plant itself, the public relations, the finances, and a lot of other things.

The composition of the staff will depend to a considerable extent on whether the museum is a function of a historical society or is an organization whose sole object is to run a museum. If it is a function of a historical society, only a certain proportion of the organizational time, money, and effort can properly be devoted to the museum and its displays. Other kinds of services -- reference, publication, liason with local agencies, and so on -- need their fair share of the institutional pie if a balanced program is to be produced. I hasten to add that all this will also be modified by various other circumstances. For example, it must be immediately obvious that at the Idaho Historical Society, which serves the historical interests of an area of over 80,000 square miles, we must inevitably choose an approach quite different from

that elected by an organization like the Seattle Historical Society, which operates the Museum of History and Industry. With their neighborly cooperation with a great university and a great library, they can leave certain features of our sort of program to other agencies, and concentrate -- as they have so successfully done -- on their beautiful museum. But there is a real difference between a pure museum and a historical agency, and the governing body of a county historical society ought to consider very carefully the other possible and profitable projects which they can undertake before they put all of their community's historical eggs into a museum basket.

Finally, let me mention the word "responsibility." There are a lot of responsibilities in this business. There is the responsibility to do a good job of entertaining and information instruction for the museum visitor, and the equal responsibility to care adequately for the materials which have been given to the museum so that it can do that sort of a job. There is the responsibility to be a living part of the community, growing and moving forward as the community does, and the responsibility to serve the largest possible segment of the community. Perhaps the most important of all is the responsibility to be right -- to tell the historical fact even though the fiction may be easier or more entertaining, and to have a research staff competent to distinguish between fact and fiction. Not the least of the long list, though, is the responsibility to be reasonable. It is the responsibility of the planners of a museum or the trustees of a historical society to select a purpose which they can reasonably hope to achieve with the resources at their command and to stick reasonably close to that main line of effort. If a museum fails to achieve a grandiose purpose, the responsibility for failure lies with the people who made the original mistake of dreaming beyond the bounds of practicality.

So it is time to leave our newly-appointed director. Harmoniously in accord about museum philosophy with his intelligent, enthusiastic, and (I hope) wealthy trustees, he has just moved into his beautiful new building and made certain that the janitor has swept out the ladies room. Donations have been solicited, and he and his imaginative, object-minded, and underpaid staff of museum galley slaves are about to be inundated by a flood of donations of ostrich eggs, vinegar cruets, Korean carpenter's saws, stone arrowheads of unknown origin, and 1921 Arkansas license plates. All they have to do now is to listen to Peggy Copeland Corley while she tells them how to keep track of all this material with which they are about to illumine the human processes of the past.

"ACCESSIONS"

by

MARGARET A. CORLEY

CURATOR, SEATTLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OPERATING
THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND INDUSTRY.

The job of accessioning is one that need not be complex; but it cannot help but be detailed. If one is of an inquiring mind, if one likes to sleuth, if one will suffer with picky-pecky details, if one will be a glorified housefrau, he or she is suited for the accessions field.

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

Before we can consider the actual accessioning, we will have to consider the items to be dealt with. The items will naturally vary with each museum. Or perhaps I should say that they may vary with each museum. I am of the strong opinion that we should specialize to the point that we stay within our capabilities and museum purposes. If it is felt by the museum board, or with pressure by the community, that the museum should include items from all parts of the world, the history, natural history, and the sciences, then such should be the purpose of the museum and all acquisitions should supplement these subjects. If the Board feels that the museum should deal with the history and industry of its locale, then the acquisitions should be collected on this standard. If a zoo is lacking in the community, and material is available in that field, and the museum board so decides, such natural history items should be acquired.

Whatever the purpose of the museum the warning should be made -- don't spread it too thin. It is much easier to start with a few fields and later expand to others, than to start with many and have all of them half-baked collections. The public can be trained easily to think along the collection lines you desire. This might be a somewhat greater problem in a small community where personal relations are closer, but if the museum board has set a basic policy, the members of the staff under that board can refuse to vary from the plan. People seem to go away happily if I explain that an African spear is out of the field of the Seattle and King County history, and that if I took it IT WOULD NEVER BE ON EXHIBIT. People give things to a museum to be seen, and so this one underlined phrase seems to clinch the discussion. However, I do try to give the person another suggestion of a place for the item, as many times the artifact definitely should not be lost.

Acquisitions must also consider overabundance as well as gaps in the material already at hand. For the past three years I have refused to accept any more christening dresses or short baby dresses. I always

carefully admire the item offered and listen to the whole story of which child wore it, but then sigh and regretfully decline. People often don't realize until they have returned home that they still have the dress, because they were happy in the thought that someone besides themselves appreciated such an historic item.

Gaps are more easy to note in one's collections. Word of mouth advertising, personal sleuthing, or hoping and praying all help to bring in items to fill gaps in such fields as early merchandizing, placer mining, boy's clothing, etc. Acquisitions must also consider the space in the museum -- one could use maybe one stage coach but probably not two or three! Again, the growth of the museum and its development of new or slightly changed policies will affect the acquisitions and the gaps they are to fill.

MUSEUM ARTIFACTS

With policies established, the next problem to consider is the article itself. There are dresses and there are dresses! People treasure things in the most appalling condition! I am getting very hard hearted about stained dresses, musty corsets, and ripped blouses. I once felt that I should take an item because another such beauty might never come along. But now, some 350 dresses later, I realize that the sentimental housewives of America will not let me down. Dresses are but one of the items which should be received in good condition. Of course personal judgment will decide how much wear is attractive to an historic piece and how much is just discouraging. Only a certain amount of repair can be done without destroying the original quality of the item. And it also takes special skill -- and time, of which we are all short.

One must also distinguish between an historic object and a relic -- or in my file a "souvenir". An excellent handbook put out by the American Association for State and Local History, "The Management of Small History Museums" by Carl E. Guthe, defines these terms much better than I could. (In fact, it discusses these problems of accessioning better than I can.) An historical object "contributes to a clearer understanding or interpretation of some former custom, activity, episode, or personality. The extent of this contribution depends upon 1. its documented individual history, 2. its physical character and condition, 3. the nature of the historic period or episode with which it is associated." A relic is "some remaining portion or fragment of that which has vanished or is destroyed". Further, a relic is "so fragmentary or mutilated that it can only be identified by labels or accompanying documents". I once was expounding to a group of women on the small worth of relics. I described several at some length and then realized to my horror that the donor of those items was in the audience. Somehow I won her back, and she is now giving us really worthwhile items -- very early medical instruments. We all have items to which we attach great sentiment, and many of them are relics. But sentimentality is not the goal of the public museum -- the goal is education. In that

field the relic finds small or no usefulness.

In the modern educational-type museum (vs. the curiosity-type storage hall) the item is more important than the donor. We have been able to make an almost firm rule of not mentioning the donor's name in any displays. Our usual exception is on loaned items. Here is an instance of the public becoming used to one's policy, although the policy is never printed anywhere and seldom mentioned. Once in a while a donor asks me if his name will be in the exhibit case. My answer I feel is an honest one -- to us the item is the important thing; we do not wish to detract from the item with other labels and also do not want to distinguish an item from a known donor from an item from an unknown donor. Donors seem to like this answer and policy, for after all, it was the donor who thought enough of the item to save it in the first place. But donor records have their place, as will be mentioned later.

ACCESSIONING

With the item in the building the jobs of accessioning begin. Here we must note the difference between registering and cataloging -- the two parts of accessioning or adding an item to one's collection. Again I quote from Mr. Guthe. "To register an object is to assign to it an individual place in a list or register of the materials in the collections in such a manner that it cannot be confused with any other object listed." "To catalog an object is to assign it to one or more categories of an organized classification system so that it and its record may be associated with other objects similar or related to it." Cataloging can not be done immediately, only after study and correlation with other items. But the process of registering can and should take place immediately upon contact with the donated item.

Whatever system one uses in accessioning, it should be simple enough so that the staff or volunteers can keep it current, but it should be complete enough that it gives all desired breakdowns needed to locate the item, keep track of it, and identify it. Our system includes a donor file. I feel that this is an essential in the small museum and in most public museums. The public museum, though an aggregate institution, still is founded and fostered by the person -- the donor. A small file, rather than even the label on the artifact, will suffice to keep the donors happy -- and bringing further donations.

My bete-noir is messy catalog or register cards. They can become messy very easily if notes are added in ink after the original typing, or if remarks are crossed out rather than erased. Retyping cards is wasteful of time and cards. I strive to make notes in pencil, if away from the typewriter, and then later type them in and erase the pencil marks. Ink notes could be neat, but often one later crosses them out, or is unable to read someone else's best printing. Further, a great mistake is made in ever typing in a permanent location for any item. This was misguidedly done in our library, and again on many early catalog cards.

The cards now look a mess. So all locations should be put in pencil -- storage situations change all too often. A further quick identification system for location of items on display is to use small index tabs, a different color for each area of display. They are quickly attached to the card, in place in its file, and as quickly removed. They readily give warning that the item is not in the regular storage position marked in pencil on the card.

LOANS

A word or two might be said about loans. Our museum takes loans only for a specific exhibit and then returns the items at the close of the show. This gives us a firm line for refusing any other loaned material. We will keep a person's name in what I call the "Loan File", stating the lender's name and what he has to lend, and so could then call him if such a piece were needed. Seldom have I used that file, but it keeps the people who call happy. The usual loan is one which I solicit to fill a gap in an exhibit. But in the case of any loans, the most vital concern is to keep the records straight. It may be necessary to make a loan sheet very detailed in order to distinguish one person's loans for another's. The important thing is to be sure to credit the right piece to the right lender. Secondly, the pieces borrowed should be returned promptly; and thirdly, and also important, they should be acknowledged -- the owner promptly thanked for their use. The main instances of becoming a storage depot occur when the lender picks up his own items. I am struggling now to return paintings from a show last September before the next similar show this September. On our new loan receipts, signed by the lender at the beginning of the loan, it is stated that "the Society will retain the item or items if they remain at the Museum of History and Industry more than six months after notice by mail to the owner of the close of the exhibit." We have yet to use this threat, but our attorney feels that in most cases it will hasten the closing of the loan, to our benefit either in keeping the item, or in returning the item to its owner.

STORAGE

The final consideration with accessions is their storage and preservation. Storage can be on a catalog system with like objects stored together, or it can be on the archival system: each item put away in order of its receipt. The catalog system makes it easier to get items out for display but may create the problem of having to move sections as they get overcrowded. However, to my way of thinking, all items should be moved often anyway in order to check their state of preservation. The archival system avoids the problem of moving to get needed space, yet the items may take up much more space initially. For example the items might be a toy canoe, an Indian basket, an umbrella, and a dress. These will not pack well together, so much space will be wasted in the corners of that shelf. I favor the catalog system, and just put up with having to move whole sections every three years or so. However, I might remind you that initial planning of storage space and judicious

selection of gifts to the collection will prevent much storage agony through the years.

Preservation is not the same as storage. Items may be well stored but when removed to be exhibited be found to be "unpreserved" -- rotted by moisture, discolored by rust or mildew, eaten by wood borers, disintegrated by moths or silverfish, buckled by heat and dryness, faded by light, or rotted by plain house dust. This is where the dedicated-housewife instincts are needed. I have found many volunteers who enjoy dusting at the Museum more than they do at home, so the task is not one that the staff need do all alone. The job also need not be complicated. Few of the smaller museums can build complex fumigating rooms, but all can check each item at least twice a year for moths and silverfish and spray every item which comes into the building with a good, non-oily spray. Few museums can seal their buildings for fumigation for all types of wood borers, and many have no need to. But all can douse each wooden item in a small bucket of turpentine, which according to our local exterminator will take care of at least Seattle bugs. Few museums can afford to have all maps and documents linen backed, but all can mend small tears, when they start, with PERMANENT MENDING TAPE -- never Scotch tape. No museum should try to repair any paintings. That is for the experts. But all museums can keep photographs mounted and properly labeled for continuous use. Few museums can do elaborate restoration, and as has been said, often do not wish to, but all can scrub the baskets, canoes, farm wagons, carriages, plows, baby carriages, etc. in their collections.

So the discussion has made the full circle -- from deciding what you want in your glorified "house", to the bookwork of the business, to the need-not-be-dull household tasks. There is work for everyone, young or old, standing or sitting, skilled or unskilled. The work never ends but it is never the same; such a paradox keeps us all in the museum field.

"EXHIBITS"

by

RICHARD CONN

CURATOR OF HISTORY, EASTERN
WASHINGTON STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

What are exhibits anyway? What are they supposed to prove? How do you make one? The word "exhibit" means "something that is shown", and this sums up what an exhibit really is: the things you show, or the visible part of your museum. This visible part may be your museum's whole reason for existence, or it may just be eye-wash. In other words, some museums exist just to exhibit their collections to the world, and their entire programs are oriented around this fact. But there are also museums where research, publication, or something else is the main interest and objective of the staff, and the exhibits take on a minor role. Whatever the place of the exhibits in the mind of the museum staff, they are still the thing the public comes to see and the thing by which the museum will be judged. So, fellow museum-goers, if this same public supports you, look to your exhibits: they may be your bread and butter.

And, speaking of looking at exhibits, have you done so lately? If you do, I think you will notice that something new has been happening in the exhibit field. That something is direction. Time was when a case filled with objects made an exhibit. Today, it just makes a mess. With direction, all the objects in a case have some relation to one another and all go to illustrate something. At this point, let us meet Mr. Sturdley Alphonse Q. Sturdley, that is. Mr. Sturdley, a former pillar of the community, whose children still live in town, once gave his personal collection to the museum. It includes such irreplaceable items as a fake necklace from King Tutankhamen's tomb, a stuffed albino squirrel, a large framed photograph of Mr. Sturdley's parents, some mis-labeled Indian beadwork, and a piece of metal from the battleship Maine. This fine collection was given to the museum on condition that it would always be kept together and that Mr. Sturdley's name would be prominently displayed nearby. About the only common denominator in the Sturdley collection is the fact that it all represents one person's bad taste and thirst for undeserved fame. Is your museum blessed with a Mr. Sturdley? The Mr. Sturdleys of this world have done their best to turn museums into community attics, and to make the word "museum" a bogey with which to threaten children and visiting relatives.

A minute ago, I mentioned "direction" in exhibits. Now let's take some direction to Mr. Sturdley. First, if Mr. Sturdley is really and honestly

an important man in our community -- so much so that any record of local history has to include him -- let's set aside anything that pertains to him personally. If his collection includes his shaving brush, or top hat, or prayer book, let's combine them with anything else we have of his, regardless of who gave it or how we got it, and plan one or more cases on Mr. Sturdley. Then, let's take everything else collected by him and put it where it belongs: the albino squirrel we'll put in our Natural History section, the Indian beadwork will go with other Indian things, the fragment from the battleship Maine will go into American History, and the fake Egyptian necklace will go into the garbage can. Following this line of direction to its conclusion, we'll soon have all our collections rearranged according to subject matter. We shall have done violence to the memories of Mr. Sturdley and others like him, who sought only to perpetuate themselves, but we shall have brought our museum to the brink of importance and effectiveness in the life of our community.

Just as every museum is organized for definite reasons, so each case in a museum should be organized for a definite reason. Cases in a museum are like paragraphs in a book: each contains one idea. Every museum case or wall panel should be organized around one topic. This topic can be whatever is needed at that place: the history of lumbering in Pierce County, birds of the Palouse region, or bronzes by Frederick Remington. The choice of subject is up to you. But remember this, everything in that case or on that panel should be there because it is related to the topic -- in order to help explain it and to illustrate it. If it does nothing to help present the topic you have chosen, set it aside and use it where it does belong. In planning an exhibit, this ability to cull out unrelated material is just as important as the ability to locate pertinent material.

Every museum has its own choices as to what ought to be exhibited and why. These choices are determined by the needs of the community for information, and by the collections the museum has. Thus, although a local museum may wish to install exhibits telling the history and geology of its immediate area, the museum may also own a fine collection of Chinese porcelain it wishes to display. The choice of what is to be exhibited is entirely up to the museum staff and board members. However, every exhibit should be there for some purpose, and the nature of the exhibit will be determined by this purpose. Let's look at the reasons behind exhibits, and see how they affect the outcome of the exhibit itself.

The commonest kind of exhibit is designed to explain or tell something. This can be a period in history, an explanation of how birds fly, or the life of people in some other part of the world. Here the aim is simply to tell as much as possible about this subject. Good labels are designed that outline the material you wish to tell in a simple, direct way. Technical or unusual words are avoided. Photos and specimens appear to illustrate the main points made in the label. You know, you

may think that labels are there to explain the specimens, but ideally it's the other way around. The idea is presented in the label and everything in the case serves to illustrate this idea.

Other exhibits are designed to educate people. For example, I have seen some very good museum exhibits telling about conservation, what to do in case of atomic attack, and so forth. These exhibits were designed to get across several facts, and everything in the exhibit played up these facts. Thus, if one case were devoted to the bad effects of erosion, everything in the case -- photos, labels, and objects -- all helped dramatize the message being presented.

Finally there are exhibits planned just to entertain or please the viewer. Most exhibits in art museums fall in this category. Their sole purpose is to give the visitor pleasure by presenting beautiful things for him to see. This purpose is furthered by arranging the paintings, sculpture, etc. as attractively as possible, and by lighting and labeling carefully so as to call attention to the particular beauty and rarity of the things presented.

Summing up the why of exhibits, remember these rules: Objects in a case do not make an exhibit, just as a collection of stuffed cases does not make a museum. All exhibits have a purpose and all exhibits are planned to deal with some particular subject. Each and every object in an exhibit is there to contribute its part to the subject and purpose of the exhibit. Anything in an exhibit that does not add something to the subject or purpose is unnecessary and should be removed at once.

Now, let's get down to planning an exhibit. First, decide the what and why: what the subject of your exhibit is going to be, and what your aim is in doing this exhibit. These two things will have a great effect on how your exhibit is to look; in fact, they should be the main reasons for everything you do in further planning. For this reason, it's not possible for me to say specifically "an exhibit is planned in this way." I would like to give you several suggestions that have been proved wise and helpful throughout the nation's museums. But, remember these are only guides. Your own good judgement and experience will show you, right now or in future time, how these basic suggestions may best be applied to achieve your own best results.

First, lay out a general plan for your exhibit. Think to yourself that a museum exhibit is really a three-dimensional picture book. The best way to make your general plan is to write out a story telling the things you want to tell. This story is best done in outline form. Let's say you are going to do the Indian War period. Your story might run chronologically, or you might do it by sections of the country. Your outline would include the various divisions of your subject and the way they relate to one another. I cannot urge you enough to follow this outline method. It may sound unnecessary to you now, but I have seen time and

time again how much it improves the clarity, teaching ability, and general attractiveness of any museum exhibit.

With your outline in hand, decide how many cases, wall panels, screens, etc. you wish to use, and begin to break your story up into the units in which it will be displayed. Any section that will call for lots of specimen illustrative matter should go into cases. Another section that can best be shown on a map and some labels will do better as a screen or wall panel. If you are limited in available cases, you may find it necessary to condense portions of your outline or even cut some of the less important ones in order to fit your outline to the display facilities you have.

Now, on paper, let's start arranging cases. Assuming that you have planned the subject for each case and panel, you should next arrange them as closely to their order in your outlines as you can. All of us have had experience with old buildings, hand-me-down cases, and more obstacles than helps. At times, it just isn't possible to arrange your cases in a nice, neat pattern that will carry the visitor along from start to finish. When these times come, you just have to do the best you can.

Ideally, cases should be arranged so as to create a path for a visitor. They should carry him right along through each room in such a way that he can see everything in his immediate area readily, and is not forced to retrace his steps repeatedly to avoid missing anything. I sincerely feel that poorly-organized traffic patterns in galleries lead as much as any other single thing to the museum fatigue we all get in large museums.

Undoubtedly, you will find that your building presents some handicaps in laying out your exhibits. We are all too familiar with columns, Victorian woodwork, and other distractions that never seem to have any close relation to the things we want to show. Since it is also rarely possible to remove these obstacles without tearing the whole building down, the best way to handle these problem bits of architecture is to work them into your plan and capitalize on their presence. This, I know, is far easier for me to say than for any of us to rush home and do. As examples of what I mean, let me suggest that columns often make good places to put main labels or large blocks of label copy. Problem woodwork areas can sometimes be cleverly converted into banks of small display areas. Last summer, for example, I saw some golden oak checker-board wainscoting converted into a background for a series of flat cases with large photos of regional wildflowers.

With the cases properly arranged, and the specimens chosen to fill them, let's turn our attention to some aspects of decoration. Today most museums are very justly concerned with making their exhibits look as nice as possible. This is certainly a revolt against the turn-of-the-century museum with its monotonous ivory or ecru cases and specimens

crammed in with no apparent arrangement. In some quarters the revolt against the old "no-color" museum approach has gone too far, and we find gaudy, distracting colors and too few things to arouse our attention or satisfy our search for information. It isn't possible for me to say a few magic words that will solve every display problem. Each individual situation has to be figured out on its own conditions. But let me pass on a few general hints that I have always found successful and which I think may stimulate your imaginations.

First, color. There are many thoughts about color in museum cases. Some have said that the colors should suggest the backgrounds under which the specimens were originally seen. Others feel colors should always be bright, or subdued, or in a medium color range. My feeling is this: the case colors should always be selected with reference to the specimens that will fill them. Thus, if you are planning to show Sioux Indian beadwork, which has a lot of white, a medium-dark color is a good choice. If you are going to be showing some somber Victorian clothing, a pastel or a soft light color is perhaps best.

The amount of light available to you in your building will limit the colors you can use, too. Many old buildings have very poor light. If the cases have no inside lights, it would be best to stick to clear, rather cheerful pastels for all your colors. They may not show off every specimen to its best advantage, but your visitors will be able to see the things in the cases.

As a rule, American museums tend toward bright colors far more than European museums do. It is not always practical to use bright colors in exhibits, but let me encourage you to use them where they will work out. A touch of clear, fresh color here and there will do a lot to liven up the old place, and will lift the morale of both your staff and visitors. However, remember bright colors are like garlic -- they should be used just enough to be interesting, but never enough to dominate the taste of the whole stew.

It is a good plan to keep to the same color scheme in each section of a museum. For instance, several cases devoted to the Fur Trade Period will hold together better if the same color or group of colors is used in each of them. Then, at the place where Fur Trade gives way to the History of Agriculture or whatever comes next, the colors should also change. In this way, your colors will help create unity without becoming monotonous.

There are many other decorative devices that museum people use to add interest to exhibits. Some of these are expensive and call for experienced workmen, but lots of them use materials available to all of us. I have seen window screening, dried leaves, parts of old barns, corn flakes, rocks, and such everyday materials used to create very handsome exhibits. The really clever designers experiment constantly with every thing they see in their search for new decorative effects. I think it

is best for staff members in small museums who may have neither much confidence in their personal artistic abilities nor the time for such experiments to visit as many other museums as possible and examine new display "gimmicks". I may perhaps shock some of you by further suggesting that all museum designers should go window shopping at their best local department stores several times a year. Window designers keep abreast of all new trends, materials, and ideas in display, and there is much to be learned by a critical examination of their work. Finally, let me assure you that display technique is nothing more than organized good sense. Your own taste will tell you what will and will not work out.

Before closing, let me remind you that all exhibits need not be permanent. A short exhibition of three or four weeks has many possibilities for the museum worker. It gives you a chance to show part of your collection that would have no sustained local interest, and to take advantage of travelling exhibits that will. It gives you an opportunity to try out some of the more radical display ideas you may not want to put into a permanent exhibit. And temporary shows do seem to draw people. So, don't overlook this type of exhibit completely.

It has been necessary for me to be brief in outlining some of the major problems of exhibits. Personally, I feel that all the words I might say will not help you as much as the exercise of your own good sense and judgement. As I started, I pointed out that we are all judged by the exhibits we set up. Put yourself in your visitor's place as you work and plan, and I think the judgement will always be light.