

9/11/1
A55

Museum News

APRIL 1970

Challenges
Confronting
Museums

AAM PRESIDENT

William C. Steere,
Director,
New York Botanical Garden

VICE PRESIDENTS

Charles E. Buckley,
Director,
City Art Museum, St. Louis

Kenneth Donahue,
Director,
Los Angeles County
Museum of Art

Clement M. Silvestro,
Director,
Chicago Historical Society

E. Leland Webber,
Director,
Field Museum of Natural History

TREASURER

Ralph R. Miller,
Director,
Museum of the City of New York

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Robert M. Hume,
Asst. Director
Art Gallery of Ontario
George E. Lindsay,
Director,
California Academy of Sciences

Charles Parkhurst,
Director,
Baltimore Museum of Art

DIRECTOR

Kyran M. McGrath

COUNCIL MEMBERS

(1967-70)

James M. Brown III
Edward G. Budd, Jr.
Mrs. Mildred Compton
J. C. Dickinson, Jr.
Russell Fridley
Louis C. Jones
Paul Perrot
T. E. Pulley
Mrs. Winthrop Rockefeller
Ian M. White

(1968-71)

Wesley A. Adams
Joseph M. Chamberlain
William C. Everhart
Thomas P. F. Hoving
H. Radclyffe Roberts

(1969-72)

Ivan Sutherland Boggs
Thomas Buechner
James Fowler
G. Carroll Lindsay
Henry Allen Moe
James Oliver
Frank A. Taylor
Evan Turner
Mrs. Doris Whitmore
Otto Wittman

HONORARY MEMBERS

Clyde H. Burroughs
David E. Finley
Carl E. Guthe
Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson
William M. Milliken
Mrs. Aristotle Onassis

MUSEUM NEWS

Michael Robbins, *Editor*
Lynn Marble, Sabina Parks,
Assistant Editors

Andrew Bornstein, *Designer*
Jane Eyster, *Advertising Director*

Museum News is published by the American Association of Museums, 2233 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007. Published on the first of each month, September through June, copies are mailed to all members of the Association. The entire contents of Museum News is fully protected by copyright and may not be reproduced without written consent. © American Association of Museums, 1970. Title and symbol registered U.S. Patent Office. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Association. Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome. Additional copies of Museum News are available from the Association for \$1 per copy.

Museum News



The Journal of the American Association of Museums

Volume 48, No. 8/April 1970

Features

MUSEUM MANIFESTO/Joseph Veach Noble/16/
Vice Director of Metropolitan Museum of Art suggests five basic areas of responsibility for museums.

MUSEUMS IN COLLABORATION/Michael Spock/21/
New forms of regional cooperation among museums.

MUSEUMS AND THE BIOSPHERE/Arnold B. Grobman/25/
Responsibilities of natural history museums, zoos, aquaria and botanic gardens in the control of environmental degeneration.

AAM/NY/70—Host Museums/29/
New York Museums host 1970 AAM Annual Meeting.

Departments

AT THE AAM/2/

FROM THE DIRECTOR/5/

NEWS NOTES/7/

MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE/12/

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS/39/

PUBLICATIONS/46/

WITHIN THE PROFESSION/53/

Cover

This issue suggests ways to meet the "challenges confronting museums." Cover photo by Sabina Parks.

At the AAM.

Edward P. Lawson has joined the AAM as Assistant Director. A graduate of Bowdoin College and New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, Lawson has found room for interest in the Medieval and Baroque art of Western Europe, curatorial work, museum education and administration and a compressed career that has included positions at the Toledo Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Cloisters, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Tucson Art Center and, most recently, the International Exhibitions Foundation. Lawson has lectured on Medieval Art and Architecture and has written for catalogues such as: *Images of the Saints*, and *The Painter and the New World*, and has edited catalogues of *German Expressionist Watercolors*, *Old Master Drawings from Chatsworth*, as well as that of a currently touring exhibition of *African Sculpture*. At the AAM, Lawson, who is "... thoroughly devoted to the museum's increasingly important role in society" will be working closely with the Director in projects in which the Association is engaged.

Starting with this issue, MUSEUM NEWS will devote a regular department to the matter of museum architecture. Michael Webb, Film Programming Manager of the American Film Institute, author of *Architecture in Britain Today* and numerous articles on all facets of architecture, will write a regular column that will encompass not only the latest plans and construction of museums—as in this initial article—but also matters of restoration and reconstruction of existing buildings, architectural exhibitions in museums and all developments in the area where architecture and museum interests come together.



Edward P. Lawson

Michael Webb



Arnold B. Grobman

Michael Spock



Joseph Veach Noble Photo by Karsh, Ottawa

Webb, 33, graduated from the London School of Economics, was a feature writer on art and architecture for *The Times Review of Industry and Country Life* and set up a chain of quality film theatres for the British Film Institute.

Authors

Joseph Veach Noble joined the staff of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1956 and has been Vice-Director for Administration since April, 1967. He is also Vice-President of the New York State Association of Museums, Treasurer of the Archaeological Institute of America and past Chairman of the Museums Council of New York City. As a specialist in ceramic archaeology and the detection of art forgeries, he has published widely.

Michael Spock, Director of the Children's Museum of Boston since 1962, is a graduate of Antioch College and has done graduate work under the program for Research in Instruction at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Before coming to Boston, Mr. Spock prepared exhibits for the Dayton Museum of Natural History and the Ohio State Museum in Columbus. In 1965 Mr. Spock served as President of the American Association of Youth Museums.

Arnold B. Grobman, Dean of Rutgers College at the State University in New Jersey, received his B.S. from the University of Michigan in 1939 and his Ph.D. at the University of Rochester. After serving as Director of the Florida State Museum, Dr. Grobman directed the curriculum study in biological sciences at the University of Colorado until 1965.



Challenges:

An Introduction

Every 50 seconds during peak traffic periods, a jet airliner glides past the windows of the AAM's new headquarters. The planes are following the storied Potomac River down to Washington National Airport and are leaving twisted black trails of exhaust and unburned jet fuel. About half the days, the airport—four miles downriver—can be seen from the AAM offices; the rest of the time, Washington's air is so dense that a yellow horizon is only a mile or so distant.

Degradation of our environment is a vast problem. But it is only one of many challenges that are crowding close around us at the start of this new decade.

War, crime, racism, injustice, overcrowding, destruction of atmosphere and water, of land and life—surely no one expects America's museums to resolve the tangled issues that lie behind those words. Just as surely, no one expects America's museums to look solely to their past—and sometimes insular—concerns and to ignore the challenges which are now rising up to face every public institution.

Museums have assumed the responsibility of gathering important objects and specimens, of studying and preserving them, of presenting them to the public view in some meaningful fashion. "To what end?" we must ask. Others are asking: Congressmen, social commentators, art critics, city councilors, the Art Workers' Coalition, university scholars, environmentalists, taxpayers and every kind of museum patron.

By way of answer to the current general lamentations about the quality of life, and the specific questions of what museums are doing, why they are doing it and how well, we should keep before us the facts that much needs to be done and much can be done by museums.

There are crucial needs for scientific knowledge about our surroundings—and for widespread public appreciation of that knowledge; for a balanced and useful view of our past; for a general awareness of the value and importance of aesthetic achievements.

If an oil company executive cannot "see what the fuss is over a few dead birds"; if we do not know of earlier struggles over the same issues that baffle and divide us today; if our cities are excruciatingly ugly and our suburbs soporific, then there is a broad educational challenge which museums, among all public institutions, are uniquely well suited to meet.

Museum resources are not limitless. There must be debate and understanding of the priorities among the challenges, along with measurement and evaluation of the available museum resources. The articles in this issue are aimed at understanding the responsibilities of the museum in the community and the challenge of preparing a museum to meet those responsibilities. Joseph Noble's *Manifesto* is an effort to pare museum activities down to a core of essentials. Michael Spock urges greater effectiveness for museums through cooperative solutions to shared problems. Arnold Grobman's *Museums and the Biosphere* recommends actions that museums can take to promote understanding of our environmental crisis.

Museums in Collaboration

□ Museums are caught in the cross fire between the growing demands of the people they serve and the shrinking financial resources available to meet these demands. And the problem is getting worse: The more that money problems limit the ability to respond, the less relevant museums seem when compared with other important institutions the public is asked to support. Unless we find a solution, unless we develop new ways of fulfilling the needs of the public while keeping costs in check, it is unlikely that we will succeed in reversing this downward spiral and in deserving a higher place on the list of society's priorities.

What does this crisis demand of us? What is our response to be? I would like to skip over the causes of our crisis and focus immediately

Michael Spock is Director, The Children's Museum, Boston, Massachusetts.

MICHAEL SPOCK

on some possible solutions, emphasizing a proposal for some new forms of regional cooperation among museums.

The first step we must take is to admit to ourselves, to our colleagues and to our public that the crisis exists. We have an unfortunate way of convincing ourselves that our problems are unique to our own particular institutions, that our difficulties stem from an inability to manage our own affairs. In our embarrassment we try to cover up or minimize the seriousness of the problem. In reality, however, these pressures are common to us all. It is time to recognize that fact and speak out. For with the crisis confronted we may have some chance of marshalling the resources necessary to overcome it.

Next, it seems clear that most museums are spread too thin. From

a combination of past history and inertia, public pressures and a certain degree of opportunism we all find ourselves involved in many programs that are only marginally relevant to our central goals. Every museum should undertake an intensive study of the nature and needs of its particular audience, whether they be scholars, college students, teachers, bird watchers, history buffs or the "general public." Knowledge of the characteristics of each group—the services they desire and the support they can offer—is essential if we are to develop activities specifically suited to them. Then we can eliminate those functions better handled by other institutions or at least find some ways of coordinating overlapping efforts. By limiting the scope of our audience and the range of our activities, we can concentrate on those elements that are unique to our own museums that

set us apart from other cultural, educational and communications services offered in our communities.

We must be willing to speak frankly with the public and to withstand the initial blast of misunderstanding that could result from the attempt to explain precisely what we can and *cannot* do. No museum can minister to everyone, but we can develop exhibits and programs, rearrange hours, change location and alter our collections to match the needs of a more specifically defined audience and a more carefully designed role for each museum.

We should take a hard look at those items of our budget where considerable savings might be effected, notably, buildings, collections and administration: Do our present structures match our program requirements? Are we willing to make imaginative use of our existing facilities? Should we move to some other location or operate out of more economical, but less prestigious quarters?

In regard to collections, are we aggressive about securing those items that directly relate to our purpose and are we firm in refusing those that are not relevant? The parts of our collections not essential to our programs could be sold, traded or loaned to more appropriate institutions.

Modern business practices should also be introduced to improve the actual day-to-day operation of museums. Cost benefit analysis, for example, could be employed to measure program effectiveness against costs, to indicate ways of providing better service within the limits of present facilities and funds and to have a better sense of where the money is going and who might be asked to help support specific services.

Finally, museums must be more aggressive in their public fund raising; in charging fees and admissions that come close to meeting the actual cost of a service offered; in demanding city, state and Fed-

"Museums are caught in the crossfire between the growing demands of the people they serve and the shrinking financial resources available."

eral funds for such efforts as school and neighborhood programs that cannot be supported by user fees; in not standing by helplessly wringing our hands when money is no longer available from the old familiar foundation and private sources.

Sharing our problems and sharpening our services, facilities, administration and fund raising all may help, and certainly cannot hurt. But there is another intriguing solution to the problem of multiplying demands and rising costs that I would like to propose. The pooling of certain basic services and facilities by a number of museums within a workable area, be it a neighborhood, a metropolitan area or even an entire state, is worth examining closely. Regional collaboration could be achieved along several lines:

1) A regional business office to take advantage of machine bookkeeping and payroll, quantity purchasing, group insurance and retirement plans, low-cost reproduction services, centrally run housekeeping and security services, bulk mailing and pooled lists, as well as a peak load secretarial service.

2) A regional production shop to provide quality printing, photography, taxidermy, model-making, painting and cabinet-making services; equipment for special exhibits including lighting fixtures, temporary exhibit cases and panels and

other materials used only from time to time; and perhaps even a staff of artists, designers and technicians to assist small museums that lack such expertise on their own staffs.

3) A regional educational reference center to serve teachers and the general public by maintaining, publishing and distributing a catalogue (cross-indexed by topic and location) of all courses, school programs, exhibits, natural and historic sites, circulating materials (including books, pamphlets, films, kits and artifacts) and people with subject matter competence available in the area. Group visit and circulating reservations for all museums could be made by calling one number. Teacher training in the use of various museum resources could be one service of such a center.

4) A large exhibition and auditorium facility would be handy for those special events that draw large crowds, but are undertaken only once or twice a year by a single institution.

5) A regional development and public relations service to provide joint membership privileges in all participating institutions; to produce regular calendars of events and news releases; to coordinate annual giving, capital campaigns and special activities planned by member museums; and to help prepare more effective applications and follow-up for government and foundation operating subsidies and project grants.

6) A regional manpower service to advertise job openings and do the preliminary screening of applicants, coordinate a well organized volunteer corps matching skills to specific tasks in member institutions, recruit and train low-cost temporary student help and finally, sponsor a rotating internship program to develop badly needed museum professional help.

Cooperating in any or all of these areas could result in considerable savings for each member institution, but in my view the most radical and exciting opportunity for pooling museum resources lies in

the establishment of a regional collection facility.

7) Housed in an economical warehouse structure, a regional collection center could provide proper environmental controls, strong security, expert registration and conservation services, a good reference library, technical laboratories and study carrels, a school circulating service and a well managed packaging, shipping and receiving area.

But more important than these first rate facilities and services would be the uses to which a centrally organized collection could be put. Too often, incredibly valuable materials are tucked away—inadequately exploited for either their research or educational potential. With materials accessibly housed and referenced by a thoroughly documented and cross-indexed catalogue, promptly retrieved from a computer memory bank, the possibilities for a significant increase in the use of our collections by scholars, exhibits designers, curriculum developers, teachers and interested amateurs becomes immediately apparent.

This increased use would bring problems and raise touchy policy issues for participating museums. For example, maintenance, security and curatorial standards would have to be extremely high to satisfy everyone. Inventory controls would have to be airtight. Each object would have to be coded as to the permissible uses to which it could be put and under whose authority. All these problems, however, are presently faced by museums maintaining independent collections, and perhaps they would have a better chance of being solved under the watchful eye, mutual prodding and pooled funds of a collaborative effort.

No matter how extensive or limited the effort, the implementation of any of these regional collaborative programs will be a tough job. Fears of loss of identity will have to be confronted and allayed; old jealousies and hurts put to rest; standards debated and codified; the

"The pooling of certain basic services and facilities by a number of museums within a workable area...is worth examining closely."

scope of the region carefully defined; new corporate entities recognizing joint ownership, control and responsibilities will have to be established. But for all these problems the rewards would be great.

In a system of regional collaboratives, the distracting yet essential secondary concerns of a museum's operation could be handled in a less costly and more efficient manner. Expensive museum buildings could become truly *public* facilities, used almost entirely for exhibition and educational programs. Freed of their routine chores, museum staffs could put their energies to use in new ways. Instead of housekeeping collections, curators could return to research, teaching, publication and other interpretive work. In place of answering telephones and taking reservations, teachers could conduct more workshops and classes, lead tour groups and prepare new programs and materials. Designers could immerse themselves in the planning, rather than the execution, of exhibits. Directors might even devote their talents to guiding museums instead of fragmenting their attention with business management and fund raising tasks. The total result would be a more adventurous staff; a more useful facility; a more relevant and effective museum capable of tuning in to its audience and responding to their needs.

But are we ready for these strong

measures? Do we really want more effective museums? Are we willing to trade some old autonomy for some new freedoms?

There are some hopeful signs. Several regional museum programs and facilities have been tried or proposed. A national exhibits laboratory was suggested a few years ago. A computerized catalogue network is being formed in New York. Several successful community arts funds are in operation. The consulting, technical and circulating services of state museums and the Smithsonian are being used by many museums. Discussions have been held among several museums interested in sharing exhibits and programs, research and staff training to provide services at the neighborhood level. Even the amalgamation of several museums into a regional institution can be seen in the case of the new Oakland Museum.

But I sense no thoroughgoing trend towards regional collaboratives. Nothing parallels the example of the medical profession's interest in large clinics, group practice and the pooling of specialized diagnostic and treatment facilities among hospitals. Nor do I see exciting precedents like the regional associations of small colleges to share libraries, laboratories and field stations, fund raising and even students and faculty to enrich the total educational mix without adding greatly to operating costs.

Is it that we do not all share a common sense of urgency? Are we willing just to muddle through in feeble isolation rather than expose our deficiencies to colleagues in the profession? Is the maintenance of our own splendid empires more important to us than the quality of our service to the public? I'm not certain. But my conviction remains that unless we are able to help each other solve our problems and bear down hard on being effective in our communities, we will find ourselves left behind with the rest of society's irrelevant institutions.

□ □ □