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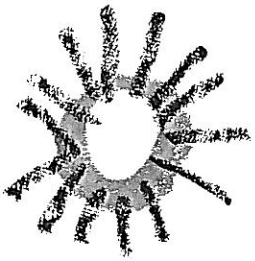

WIGWAM REPORT

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PART I

HOW THE WIGWAM CAME TO BE

PREFACE

In Fall 1968, an Algonquin Indian exhibit opened at Children's Museum. It presented a full-size reconstruction of a wigwam, furnished with Indian belongings, set in a clearing. This is the history of how that wigwam came to be and what we have learned from the exhibit experience.

THE HISTORY

HOW THE WIGWAM CAME TO BE

Before there was a wigwam at the Museum, Indian objects were displayed in glass cases in an "Indian room." There were five Indian culture areas on exhibit - each had its own display - Plains, Woodlands, Southwest, Northwest Coast and Iroquois. Even then, despite this traditional approach to objects, staff was concerned with how to explain these objects to museum visitors. They knew that labels alone - simple verbal descriptions - did not always do the job. At that time, paper and pencil games were used as a way to get the casual visitor to really look at and think about the objects displayed before him in glass cases. The game asked a question of the visitor that could not be answered unless the exhibit were carefully examined.

A significant portion of staff time was devoted to the school classes that visited the Museum. A staff member was assigned to each class that came and if an Indian talk were requested, she led them to the Indian room and talked about the objects in the cases, asking questions and trying to paint a picture of Indian life. Because staff time was primarily committed to these talks and because within their established format there was the most chance for learning and experimentation, it was through these talks - and their progression from talks to programs - that the learning and thinking for the wigwam occurred. And so, the wigwam history must begin here.

INDIAN SCHOOL TALKS - pre-1963

Prior to 1963-64, when an Indian talk was requested, two classes of 60 children were divided into three groups of 20 children each. The groups then moved to three different locations - to the classroom, where a film or slide on Indian life were shown, to the library where a collection of Indian objects from all over North America were available for "handling" and to the Indian room where all or some of the exhibit cases were discussed. As in the library, handling material from a variety of cultures was occasionally held up and passed around for the children to see and touch. The last was an important departure from most museum's strategies. Real Indian objects were made available to the children - to be touched, examined and wondered about. Although these objects were presented entirely out of context, and experience with them was extremely limited, the innovation was a significant one. Physical encounters with real Indian objects had begun at the Children's Museum.

REVISED INDIAN SCHOOL TALK - 1963-64

At this time, an attempt was made to structure and pare down the amount of information to be covered in an hour. The physical format of the talks could not yet be changed - there were still three stations - but only three culture areas were described - one at each station - and no culture was discussed without presentation of the objects it had created. For the lecturer this still meant endless talking - as she held up objects, and demonstrated their use. But another change had occurred. Rather than the casual presentation of objects from all over Indian American, the objects selected for handling and discussion belonged together - they were either part of an activity or they expressed the same theme, and they were always from the same culture.

WOODLANDS SCHOOL TALK etal 1964-65

Now an attempt was made to discuss only one group in an hour, still moving from the classroom where a film or slides were shown to an exhibit case. And now, for the first time, rather than having a lecturer talk about and demonstrate how an object was used, a real effort was made to integrate activities using the objects in the talk. Objects that were used together in special ways were chosen for presentation. A False Face curing ceremony - with mask, rattles, knife and myths were used for Woodlands; a Mudhead kachina dance - with gourds and Mudhead chant were introduced for Pueblo; a walrus hunt with harpoon, parka, walrus mask and walrus dance were the Eskimo objects. Once children overcame their initial embarrassment, these activities generated enormous interest and excitement. Even though, these were still thought of as "Indian talks" that took place in front of an exhibit case, these activities were, perhaps, the first structured encounters with cultural objects at the Museum.

THE ALGONQUIN MATCH BOX 1964-65

The seeds for the Algonquin wigwam exhibit were irrevocably sown when the Algonquins were selected as a MATCH Box topic for one of the first generation MATCH Boxes. Algonquins were selected because (1) they were Massachusetts Indians - the ones who first contacted the Pilgrims and helped make settlement possible; (2) a literature and curriculum survey indicated that the general public and the schools knew painfully little about them. The objectives of the unit were to present an overview of the Algonquin's world - their material culture, social structure and world view.

It was assumed that by learning how the Indians did things and then doing things the way the Indians did, the children would gain a better understanding of Indians in general and of Algonquins in particular. Structured groups of objects were again presented for use in Indian activities. Because there was time for reading basic sources (explorer's journals, settler's diaries, anthropologist's reports) it was possible to move from the generalized "Woodlands" presentation to a more specific, more accurate Algonquin one. It was hoped that by simulating activities done by real people, a sense of that people would emerge. Corn grinding, skin scraping, dressing in Indian clothes, face painting, setting traps were all included (supported by appropriate Indian objects) to try to create a human link between the Algonquins and children.

The MATCH Box attempted too much -- it had too many concepts and too many objects to be digested in a two week period. Also, for the kit developers, it illustrated the difficulty of trying to "revive" a dead culture - there were so many questions that could never be answered - so much about the people themselves that was forever lost. Nevertheless, the box did demonstrate the effectiveness and power of using real objects, accurately, in an Indian way. Teachers marveled at how quickly children became involved in Indian activities and at how good retention was. Some teachers even commented about the ability of certain children to empathize with the Indians - to describe what Indian life was like and what it must have felt like to be an Indian.

VACATION WEEKS

Vacation weeks at the Museum even more than the school talks provided a chance for experimentation. Although conceived of as extended school talks, they allowed an intensive, short term effort to be put into an idea that wanted trying out.

THE JAPANESE TEA CEREMONY - WINTER 1964

Japan was the theme for winter vacation week, 1964. One of the programs sought to involve visitors in a Japanese tea ceremony. Although it was but a rough mock-up of the actual ceremony, the results were fascinating. A loud giggly group could actually be changed by entering the "mock" tea house and participating in the ceremony. Most important, even though the ceremony was nearly wordless, the objects needed very little explanation to be understood. The ceremony "made sense" because it took place in a context; the objects made sense because they were an integral part of this context.

THE PYGMY TALK -SPRING 1964

The second vacation week experience to influence wigwam thinking was the Pygmy program, another quickie vacation week presentation, prepared for "Africa Week." In two ends of a large room, two "homes" were set up - one belonging to the villagers, was a nest of wattle and daub houses (painted cardboard boxes) - the other, belonging to the Pygmies, the forest people was a mongongo leaf hut (an umbrella covered with leaves). Pygmy and villager objects were strategically placed in each area. Access to a detailed account of the life of the Ituri Pygmies (Forest People, by Colin Turnbull) allowed us to authentically structure a series of Pygmy event which the children in the program would experience - including trading with the villagers, a net hunt and a ceremony to wake up the "spirit of the forest." In addition, with the aid of Forest People, we were able to write a script that alternately described the feeling of the villagers for the Pygmies and the Pygmies for the villagers.

The program was an enormous success! The houses set the mood and provided the suggested structure or context necessary for the beginnings of role playing; the script brought the people to life and the rest was pure magic - the kids really acted as if they were Pygmies or villagers - they really traded and they really cared about what they traded. They believed in the net hunt and they were relieved when the forest spirit woke up. In short, they were "there" - using objects from another culture to role play their way closer to the people that created those objects.

THE FIRST ALGONQUIN SCHOOL TALK - 1965-66

This year marks a radical departure from the established school talk format. In the rotunda of the then auditorium (now the Visitor Center lobby) skins were placed in a circle on the floor to suggest a wigwam interior, (an idea that grew from the small wigwam interior diagram in the MATCH Box Teacher's Guide). Within the circle there was a pot on a "fire"; on the skins were carefully selected objects - some left over from the MATCH Box, some from collections - for use in Indian activities. The wigwam seating plan, created for the MATCH Box, was introduced and children were encouraged to sit on the skins in their "proper" places - fathers facing the door, mothers to the right - as they would in a real wigwam. Indian activities - the same as those included in the MATCH Box - were presented. Following this the class divided into "settlers" and "Indians" and read a script (based on the Pygmy vs. villager format) describing settler and Indian feelings about each other. Then the "settlers" and "Indians were encouraged to trade with each other, using real artifacts for trade goods.

Although the program was not as successful as Pygmy - it tried to cover too many concepts in an hour, the script did not ring entirely true (the "dead culture" problem) and a great deal of talking was necessary to set the scene and establishthe context. There were some exciting innovations. The film had been eliminated because it was not uniquely a museum experience and took up valuable museum experience time. Most important, the school talk was no longer a talk but had become a "program." It no longer revolved around a museum exhibit case but existed in its own space and had made the first attempt at creating a physical context of its own for Indian objects - the wigwam interior.

THE ALGONQUINS MOVE TO THE ANNEX 1966-67

The following year the Algonquin school program moved to what is now the Annex Design and Production shop. Black curtains were hung around the room, to enclose the space and increase the sense of an interior space. Objects could be hung on these curtains as they would hang in a wigwam. Dried fish, ears of corn, and a nokake sack were prominently displayed. Because the Algonquin script had not "worked," the teaching approach was changed again. Structured role playing was replaced by casual interaction with the artifacts. A variety of Algonquin activities were available for the children to try out -skin scraping, trying on clothing, face painting, playing a game and making "nokake." It was hoped that this casual, relatively unstructured approach would allow the children to make their own discoveries and come to their own conclusions about the Indian way. This type of program did not work as well as anticipated. In many classes, especially those unused to this kind of freedom, the kids just wandered around, not really ever settling down. They seemed to ask questions because they thought they "had" to ask questions, and they seemed also to be doing things because they thought they were supposed to be doing "things."

The material itself did not mesh into a coherent whole. The use of the objects was clear but they were not seen as real Indian objects. The activities were clear but they were not yet unified into an Indian experience.

THE FIRST WIGWAM - 1967-68

It seemed that the way to create a more Indian experience was to create a more complete Indian context and then structure an Indian encounter with it. Don Viera of Plimouth Plantation agreed to build a wigwam framework for us to use at the Museum. Negotiations with Don began in the summer of 1967 and by the late fall, a completed wigwam framework stood in the Annex.

There were, of course, many unforeseen problems. Don had originally thought that he could build the wigwam completely at Plimouth, let it "set" and then untie it, mark the pieces and move it, in two parts to the Children's Museum. When Don untied it, the entire structure "sprung" so that he was left with two completely flat walls! He had to begin from the beginning again at the Museum.

When the framework was ready, Indian objects could, for the first time, be placed in a reconstruction of an Indian home. The sterile display cases with labels for context had been replaced by a new display medium - the context itself! Skins were placed on the seating platforms, artifacts like the nokake sack, bow and arrow, war club, doll, and strainer were hung on the wigwam framework and a variety of other objects were stored in baskets beneath the platforms. To enable the children and the program leader to deal with this wide range of objects - to help them sort them into meaningful units - the artifacts were arranged in use groupings. There was one basket for sewing materials - awl, sinew, leather; one for fishing gear - fish hook, sinkers; one for stone tools - arrowheads, axe heads; one for everyday clothing - loincloth, leggings, moccasins and one for dress clothing - feather robe, roach, and necklace.

The next problem was to find a unifying theme - a way to "encounter" Algonquin culture. It seemed from the success of ceremonies like the Mudhead Kachina dance, the Walrus Hunt, the Molimo (Pygmy) that objects used together in specific and special ways made the most sense to children and that a series of activities unified into a thematic whole led most readily to role playing and a recreation of a sense of the people. Also in Pygmy and Tea, the selection of a central theme had made explanation of the culture much easier - a wide range of cultural artifacts could be explained in relationship to it.

The theme of the First Fruits ceremony was selected for the Algonquins - a ceremony in which the Algonquins offer thanks for the first deer of the season. The class was greeted by a staff member in Indian dress who invited them into "her home". The wigwam seating plan was briefly explained and then the children entered, sitting in their "proper" places. After a brief introduction to the wigwam, the program leader set the scene, indicating that there was no dried meat left from last year, the corn was harvested and it was time for the hunt. Nokake was made for the hunters and the hunters, properly equipped with artifacts (bows, arrows, knife, war club, nokake) left for the forest. Those remaining cleaned the wigwam and prepared a stew for the feast and ceremony that would (and did) occur if the first deer of the season were killed.

The results of this program were mixed. It was obvious to all that the objects within the wigwam did make a great deal more sense to the children and needed much less explanation to be understood. Also, a great many children were able to enter into the role playing activities and really participate in the First Fruits ceremony. The hunters, fully equipped and prepared from their expedition were usually the most successful. But, although the objects did have life and were seen as Indian objects, the "resurrection" of the Algonquin people was less successful. Unlike Pygmy and Tea, no anthropologist had recorded how the First Fruits ceremony was to be performed; what songs were sung or what prayers were said. The ceremony thus had a false ring to it and we did not really succeed in bringing these people back to life. The children knew that the wigwam was an Indian home but they did not really seem to know who the Indians were!

Nevertheless, in four short years, significant changes had taken place in the Indian school talks. They had, in fact, changed from school talks that presented objects for casual handling in front of an exhibit case (1963-64) to talks that integrated Indian activities (using Indian objects) into their basic format to thematic programs (using Indian objects) that took place in a reconstruction of a true cultural context. Further, the power of using objects, instead of simply talking about them or even handling them, had been demonstrated and the all but overwhelming impact that a good cultural context could have on the meaningfulness of objects and even on the behavior of the participants had been revealed. Given a good story line or convincing theme (which seemed to be a function of accurate and detailed information about a culture) role playing occurred almost naturally and children were able to make the jump from their world to that of another people.

THE NEW WIGWAM 1968 -

To provide a context for the museum's large collection of Pueblo artifacts and to present a living culture to the public, it had been assumed that a Hopi home and possibly even a Hopi Indian kiva would be reconstructed in the new Visitor Center. After much anguish, however, it was agreed that the Museum could not, in good conscience, use the Hopi culture as it had used the Algonquins; that we could not put living people and their homes into a cultural context type of exhibit; that we could not use the Kachinas, a sacred cult as our central theme, and we certainly could not allow the children to participate in the Kachina dance and ceremonies as part of that central theme. But if there were no Hopi exhibit, there would be no cultural exhibit in the new museum.

It was suggested that the Algonquin wigwam be moved to the Visitor Center and prepared as an exhibit area. Since the Algonquin culture was "dead" there was no chance of exposing and insulting a living people.

Also, since the wigwam had thus far been used only in programs led by staff members, it would give us the chance to find out (1) if such a context also made sense as an exhibit and (2) if the expertise with object/activity encounters that we were developing in these programs could be transformed into meaningful exhibit experiences. It also provided an opportunity to situate the wigwam in a more appropriate setting and clear up some of the misconceptions about it.

The decision was made to go ahead with the wigwam installation and in October 1968, a full-size reconstruction of an Algonquin Indian home opened at the Children's Museum.

PART II

THE EXHIBIT EXPERIENCE

Part II - THE EXHIBIT EXPERIENCE

Introduction

Prior to the opening of the new Visitor Center, some exhibits in the old Museum had been changed. They experimented with the question of visitor involvement through the real usage of the objects. There were, however, no new Indian exhibits. The exhibit cases in the Indian room were silent and unchanged. And yet, school programs and MATCH Boxes had shown that these Indian objects could be brought back to life (see Part I). Was there some way to also do this for exhibits? Could we provide a cultural setting for casual visitors, as we had for school classes? Would it be a place where these visitors could really become involved in Indian things? Could we really allow people to walk into a non-supervised exhibit and just begin using Indian artifacts? Would they use them in an Indian way? Would the objects survive?

A space was allotted for a wigwam exhibit in the new Visitor Center so that these exhibit ideas could be tried out. The wigwam was moved from the Annex to the Visitor Center; it was "refurbished"; it was set in a clearing in the forest, and its door was opened to the general public.

REFURBISHING THE WIGWAM

As a project is finished, you begin to see all the revisions you'd like to make. This was the case with the Annex wigwam. Intensive school program use, further reading about the Algonquins and evaluations by consultants Fred Johnson, Fred Dockstader and Sherman Holbert, all contributed to these revisions. Structural and contextual changes were necessary.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

The Wigwam Framework

The frame of the Annex wigwam curved upwards too soon making it impossible to sit up straight in the wigwam. In the Visitor Center the poles were set into holes in the floor so that the curve of the poles could be adjusted to make the structure more dome shaped.

The Sleeping Platform

The wigwam platforms were too narrow to sit on comfortably and their positioning along the entire inner wall left no open storage space. When the new platforms were built, their width was increased and open space was left to either side of the door.

The Matting

The absence of covering on the Annex wigwam led to the misconception that the Indians lived in an "open" house and got wet when it rained and cold when it snowed. It was decided to cover at least a portion of the wigwam with either bark or rush matting.

Bark was eliminated when it proved to be a fire hazard, too expensive and subject to mildew! The early records mentioned both interior and exterior matting and spoke, almost interchangeably, about bullrush and cat-tail. Cat-tail mats, their leaves stitched together at top and bottom, were used for exterior covering, while bullrush mats, dyed leaves woven together, were used for interior matting. Copies of such mats were ordered from the Chippewa Indians in Minnesota. When they arrived, six months later, we found we were faced with two unexpected exhibit problems! First, although the records indicated that the wigwams were covered with mats, there was no description anywhere of <u>how</u> they were hung - horizontally or vertically on the frame, should they be sewn on, tied on, or simply looped over? We tried to think "Indian" and went ahead with the hanging. This experience did point out, once again,

the difficulty of working with a "dead culture." If you try to reconstruct it, much must be guesswork. When the mats arrived we were also amazed to find that both the interior and exterior mats, made in 1968, were completely authentic versions of the mats we had seen at Peabody collected in the 1880's. Thus what we thought would be reconstructions of a now lost craft were, in fact, authentic, soon to be irreplaceable artifacts.

The Wigwam Flooring

Planked wooden floorboards detracted from the sense of an Indian place. Wigwam floors were hard packed dirt, often covered with pine needles. Since pine was clearly a fire hazard, wood chips were used. They looked "great." Their color picked up the other rich natural colors of the objects within the wigwam and worked to unify the whole interior environment. And, they did not, as feared, conflict with the flooring in the rest of the Museum. The wigwam interior was its own space - a world apart; it was unnecessary to coordinate it with other exhibits. But, despite its visual appeal, the flooring was impractical. Children got splinters from playing with the chips and cleanup was all but impossible. Everything from gum wrappers to precious lost artifacts could be found, buried in the mounds of chips. They were finally replaced with green carpeting, similar to that in all the other Museum exhibits.

Storage Pits

In the Annex wigwam, extra equipment and baskets of artifacts could be safely stored beneath the platforms. In the exhibit, true storage space was necessary. Two pits were built beneath the wigwam platforms. Cache pits of this type were actually used by the Algonquins to store unfinished tools, food, etc; the real pits were much larger.

The Fireplace

In the Annex, the fireplace was suggested by a ring of stones with wood inside it and a pot "set" on the fire. Tryouts of this setup in the exhibit resulted in near chaos. Rocks were dispersed, sticks from everywhere were added to create bonfires, the pot fell over, the pestles, pounders and sanders were all used to build the outer circle of rocks. A true fireplace had to be built. A shallow circular pit was made and filled with wood chips. Four rocks were set in the center as rests for the pot

(all other rocks were removed) and the pot was again set on the fire.

The need for true storage pits and a constructed fireplace points out the difference between the Annex programs and the Visitor Center. In the school program, the structure and the controls are in large part supplied by the program leader, the teacher and a group of children used to working together. In an exhibit, the controls must be built into its design if the exhibit is to survive.

CONTEXTUAL CHANGES

Certain artifacts did not yet make sense to wigwam visitors because they were, in some way, incomplete. Further work was done so that they could be used properly.

A Baby for the Cradleboard

In the Annex, an empty cradleboard could be tried on. Since it had little weight, its strap was worn around one shoulder, around the waist and even around the neck. A baby, made of styrofoam, rocks and burlap (12 lbs. worth) was placed in the cradleboard so that the wearer could have a better sense of what it really felt like to wear a cradleboard and what positions were feasible.

Handles for Tools

In the Annex, stone tools were always shown. Each time, the program leader had to explain that these heads once had handles but that the handles, made of wood, had been lost of disintegrated. Wooden handles were made so that the tools would be complete, and most important, available for use. An axe, a hoe, a knife, a pipe and several stone scrapers were hafted to their proper handle types by Don Viera. After one brief tryout it was clear that the axe had to be anchored to the ground. Although it can no longer be used, it can be seen and touched and the wigwam is a safer place to be in!

A Quiver for the Bows and Arrows

In the s chool talk, the hunter left for the woods carrying his bow and arrows in his hand. It was clear that a quiver was needed. A fox skin quiver was retrieved from collections, a bow and several arrows (with blunt wood, stone and antler arrowheads) were placed in it, and it was hung in the wigwam.

A Case for the Knife

The above hunter also left for the woods with his hunting knife held in his hand. A knife case, inspired by the one in the Peabody Museum collections, was created for it. The hafted knife was placed in it and hung in the wigwam.

Clay Pots for Cooking

The metal pot in the Annex wigwam raised questions about the Indian's use of a manufactured object and necessitated an explanation of white contact, trade goods, etc. To avoid this need for verbal explanations, a clay cooking pot was made and placed on the "fire."

Winter Clothing

Although there was everyday clothing in the wigwam - loincloth, leggings, moccasins and wrap-around skirt, children often asked how the Indians kept warm in winter. To suggest an answer to this, a man's arm muff (to cover his exposed arm when hunting) was reconstructed from a complete fox skin and hung in the wigwam.

Women's Clothing

There was only a wrap-around skirt in the annex program. A woman's poncho was reconstructed and added to the exhibit.

A Wampum Headband

Questions were often asked about the strange hat on Ninigret's head (Ninigret being a large photograph of an early painting of a Narragansett Indian chief). A reconstruction of Ninigret's headband was therefore made and placed with men's clothing.

A Tanned Skin

Although they participated in scraping, children never had a chance to see what an entire cleaned deerskin looked like. An Indian tanned white buckskin was placed near the skin scraping frame. It has no label. It is just there for those people who happen to discover that the scraped area of the dried skin on the frame looks like this white skin.

The Wigwam as a Storage Place

The wigwam was a place to store personal and household goods, not only a place to live. To emphasize this aspect of wigwam life, a wide variety of collecting and storage containers were hung in the wigwam. They included a horseshoe crab basket, a fibre bag, a water bucket, a variety of birch bark dishes, a grey squirrel tool bag and a tumpline with back pack. Large ash splint baskets were placed on the floor in the open storage areas and filled with foods and an assortment of other natural materials. Bundles of bullrushes and a supply of firewood were stored beneath the platforms.

The Wigwam as a Place for Family Life

In the school program, children were assigned roles (mothers, fathers, children, guests), and their respective seating positions inside the wigwam. Each person had his own place. To transfer this kind of information to the exhibit, an effort was made to clearly establish a place for each person's things.

A pipe, nokake sack, snowshoes, war club, drinking cup, quiver with bow and arrows, knife and knife case were all placed above the area where the head of the household - the man of the family - would sit. To his right, where she would sit, were woman's things - especially those implements needed for food preparation, including a mortar and pestle, a nut cracker, a strainer, bowls, baskets, spoons, ladles, stirring paddles and some dried foods. A cornhusk doll in a reconstructed toy cradleboard and a ring and pin game were hung above the area where children would "live." It was hoped that this kind of visual sorting would not only communicate a sense of family, but also the many objects in the wigwam interior would be easier to "read."

CREATING AN ENCAMPMENT

When the wigwam framework was built in the Annex, an unexpected problem arose. The wigwam itself became an object that needed further explanation to make sense. It was an Indian home in a room with windows, pink wall, bookcases and lightbulbs. To eliminate this paradox, it was always necessary for the program leader to describe the physical world surrounding the wigwam.

Now, in the new Museum, there was a chance to reconstruct that world. We would situate the wigwam in an encampment or clearing. The woods and stream and ocean beyond it would, in part, be described by the Natural History exhibit. We would create an Indian environment, permeated with a sense of "Indianess," set apart was the Tea House and the Pygmy's forest, from the 20th century world. Naturally this goal raised some difficult questions. Was it possible, as we hoped, to integrate two different exhibits - Wigwam and Natural History - into an organic whole? How would we integrate the factual information about the Indians into the exhibit without breaking the mood of the setting. Wouldn't exhibit modules, telephone tapes or even labels speak of the 20th century and destroy the sense of the context that we were seeking to create? Was it even possible to think that an Indian encampment could exist and make sense in a busy, noisy Children's Museum?

The Reconstruction of the Indian Camp

It was to be Fall in the Indian encampment. Fall (the time of year for the harvest as well as hunting, gathering, and the preparing of foods for storage) provided the richest possibilities for exhibit displays. There were to be signs of life going on in the clearing - a skin stretched on a frame for scraping; cod, oysters and eels placed on a rack to dry; a canoe, for river travel; a deer and a duck (signs of a successful hunt) hung up, ready to be skinned; a baby snug in its cradleboard; a mortar and pestle ready for use; a bundle of firewood still bound in its tumpline; a hoe, in a distant cornfield. There were only two changes in this scheme. The cornfield was eliminated (due to design problems) and the tumpline was re-designed.

The Integration of Wigwam and Natural History Exhibits

Beyond the encampment, there was to be the forest, the stream, the pond, the natural clearings - all part of the Indian's world. Plants and animals used by the Indians were to be integrated into these areas. Somewhere beyond even this setting, there might be ocean. For multiple reasons, this Natural History exhibit was never realized. A Forest try-out suggested, however, what might have been. Tall cardboard tubes were set up in the space adjacent to the wigwam, and spaced to create the feeling of trees in a forest. Visitors then moved through this forest, suddenly coming to the wigwam. For that moment, the wigwam was integrated into the forest world.

Presenting Factual Information

This developer believed that the success of the wigwam exhibit would, in large part, be determined by the impact of the setting on the casual visitor. Thus it was decided that the presentation of detailed information about Indians and Indian objects (traditionally communicated by labels) would have to be eliminated in order to preserve the mood and sense of an Indian place. It was assumed that the objects inside the wigwam and in the encampment would make sense by their placement in a cultural setting. This, in fact, happened. The wigwam read as a total, complete unit. Objects within were not seen as isolates - they worked together to create a new image - an Indian home.

The Labels. Nevertheless, there was certain information that could not be transmitted by the non-verbal context of an Indian home. Totally unfamiliar objects needed explanation and so, picture labels were created for them. Three types of picture labels were used. The first identified a natural material that had been modified and was no longer recognizable. A drawing of a large orange pumpkin was attached to a string of withered dried pumpkin rings. A photograph of a swimming eel was attached to a stiff, flat, salty, dried eel. A second type of label usually described how to use an object in an Indian way. A drawing of an Indian woman wearing a cradleboard was attached to the cradleboard. A drawing of a man in full Indian dress, fox muff included, was attached to the fox muff. The third type presented pictures of western equivalents. A metal nutcracker label was placed near the stone base and pounder that served as an Indian nutcracker. A picture of a whisk broom was attached to the bird's wing that served as broom. Children really looked at these labels and did use them to understand the object's function.

The Introductory Sign. We also wanted visitors to know whose home was being reconstructed. We needed to say that this was an exhibit about the life of the Algonquin people who inhabited what is now Massachusetts over 300 years ago and who then lived in dome shaped houses called wigwams. It was difficult to get even this small amount of verbal information smoothly and successfully incorporated into the exhibit. As a trial solution, the "message" was painted on a large photograph of an Algonquin village and hung at the entrance to the encampment area. As was evidenced by the questions asked and assumptions made (the wigwam was called everything from a cage to an igloo) this sign was not read! Perhaps it is because the sign was a flat, black, two-dimensional surface in competition with real objects. In any case, the message, as presented, was not received.

An Indian Encampment in a Museum

The hustle and bustle of the other museum exhibits did, indeed, detract from the sense of an Indian place. Thus, a series of major and minor design changes in the exhibit were introduced to isolate the encampment, both visually and physically. The first minor change was the addition of a palisade behind the wigwam. For people inside, this blocked the distracting, mood-breaking view of the rest of the Museum. There was also the problem of large numbers of people moving through the exhibit to get to other exhibit areas. This traffic pattern was not considered by the developer when exhibit space was assigned. The pattern was changed so that people entering the wigwam exhibit did so only to get to the wigwam. Finally the blank white walls of the encampment area were painted a rich dark gray, making the space seem more unified and enclosed. These changes did improve the sense of the wigwam as a place apart, although a sense of complete isolation could probably never be achieved within the walls of an active museum.

The Exhibit Questions

One of the most cogent reasons for moving the wigwam to the Visitor Center was the chance to find out if a cultural context created for and successfully used by school programs could be equally successful as a casual walk-in exhibit. Would such a context have the same impact on a casual visitor? Could that visitor become involved in Indian activities and perform them to his satisfaction? Could the artifacts survive intensive use by vast numbers, in a casual exhibit situation?

THE IMPACT OF THE CONTEXT

The wigwam was set up so that people would feel free to enter the exhibit, walk around inside, sit on the platforms, see the artifacts in their proper setting, get a better sense of the use of the objects, poke about, and in general, absorb the sense of the context.

There is no question but that these aspects of the wigwam exhibit were successful. People did experience the space and feel and look of an Indian home. There was a unity about the objects and their surroundings that allowed them to be read as a whole, as a total entity. They all belonged together and they meshed into a statement about everyday life and those material things that a man needed to survive.

It was also clear that the mood of a home had been communicated. A concentrated effort at questioning children about the exhibit indicated that, without prompting, they clearly saw the wigwam as an Indian home and knew that Indians had once lived there.

It is also clear that, within this context, people felt comfortable using the objects and that the meaning of the objects was increased not only by placement within a context, but by use within that context.

Role Playing

Children seemed very much at ease playing in the wigwam. The pot on the fire was often stirred, the platforms were tried out and occasionally really rested on, the fox sleeve was always tried on, the bow was eagerly examined and tested - in short, children were content to handle and use whatever was made available to them. The children's ease in using the objects seems to indicate that they did make a great deal more sense to them in this Indian context. If someone were around they did ask more questions about the objects and they would listen when additional information was given, but basically, the objects were "real and alive" for them without this added verbalization. Even more esoteric objects benefited from placement in the exhibit and most especially from use within the context. A limp fox skin hung in the man's section of the wigwam, suggesting some connection with man, hunting and man's clothing. It suddenly made sense when it was tried on as an arm muff. If the wearer kept it on for a few minutes he even became aware of how effective an insulator it was! Platforms, covered with skins, that could really be sat on and even slept on, could be accepted as a reasonable solution to the need for chairs and beds. The bow and arrows neatly hung in their quiver needed no further explanation - only the chance to be handled and if permitted, to be tried out!

A cradleboard, complete with baby, spoke not only of the children who once lived here, but also, when worn, revealed that the Indians had come upon a good solution for carrying babies - arms are free for other tasks.

In short, the context unified the objects into a theme and suggested their uses or at least their associations. Using and role playing with the objects was the final step in bringing the objects back to life.

Sequential Activities

Although visitors easily became involved in simple actions - lying on beds, wearing the cradleboard, scraping the skin - they were less able to participate in the sequential kinds of activities originally developed for school programs. In the Annex, certain objects that were associated by use with the same process were grouped together as a set. The set was explained by the program leader and participation in the process was then encouraged. It was assumed that in the exhibit these sets of objects would continue to make sense by their placement in a cultural setting. Factual details about the process (labels) were not included in order to maintain the feeling of an Indian home. It was thought that the casual visitor could poke through, experiment with and if they were able, perform the activity associated with each set. It was further assumed that if the visitor could not perform the activity without guidance, a staff member, when available, could offer the casual guidance needed to proceed. These assumptions were erroneous! They were based on experience with school programs, rather than with exhibits and they did not take the modes of the casual visitor or the endurance of a staff member into consideration. First the casual visitor who did enter and spend some time in the wigwam was confronted by a vast array of objects that he was not familiar with even if they did all belong together in a wigwam. Therefore, even if he did poke through and experiment with the objects, it was difficult, if not impossible for him, to know where to put them back! Since the "spots" for objects were not visually established, one place seemed as good as the next. Naturally, the cleanup and simple maintenance problems soon became overwhelming. Even when a staff member was present (as it turned out he needed to be) it was not possible for him to direct more than one activity at a time. Each required a certain skill and had implicit in it certain concepts that needed to be explained if the activity were to be successful.

The activities included in the wigwam were Sewing, Making a Tool, Face Painting, and Making Nokake.

The Sewing Sequence. An awl, an awl sharpener, pieces of leather, and sinew were placed in a birchbark container. It was hoped that this group would "read" as a sewing kit and that people would either by themselves or with staff guidance discover how to make holes in the leather using the awl, how to sharpen the awl on the awl sharpener and how to use the sinew for thread. None of this was possible without close supervision and instruction. It was not even feasible to let people poke through this particular set of objects. All the objects were small and so easily scattered and lost that it was all but impossible to maintain them as a unit.

Making a Tool Sequence. It was also impossible to maintain the tool sequence as a unit. A large basket of tool blanks and a basket of tool blanks were placed near each other. It was hoped that people would poke through the basket of blanks and then use the sanders to shape the tool selected. This sequence too was impossible without intense supervision. However, when a staff member could devote his attention to getting this activity started, it was a great success! Children would really work intently on shaping an axe head or a pendant for as much as an hour, and many returned the next time to make something else or to complete the artifact they had started! It was very satisfying to the child and he did, of course, gain respect for an Indian skill. But, without supervision, there was chaos. The blanks, carefully and lovingly collected for us by Don Viera, were hopelessly scattered. Some could be retrieved from the wood chips, the fireplace and under the platforms - but others were permanently lost. And the sanders (one an authentic 300 year old tool, the others made for us by Don) were frequently mistaken for pestles and ended up pounding corn - a use not particularly suited to a soft stone.

Face Painting Sequence. The Face Painting sequence pointed out still another problem. A lump of hematite, a lump of limonite, shells, water and a paint grinder were all placed together. It was assumed that the children would grind the paint, mix the paint with water and then be able to paint face designs with the mixture. Not only was there the problem of supervision and dispersal of objects (pounder and nut hammerstone were constantly mixed up, paint was mixed with corn, corn was ground in the paint grinder, the ores were lost) there was the more serious question of the meaning of face paint and the almost inevitable misconceptions about it.

When staff had time and could supervise this activity, there were long lines of children waiting for "war paint!" Children went to the wigwam exhibit, got their face painted and left. There was no explanation of the meaning of face paint to the Algonquins. Staff, caught in the crush of cuildren waiting to be painted, felt they had not time for that - and so the paint often served as the children's only exposure to Indians for that day. They felt they had "been" to the wigwam, even though they had not really participated in it. Like all the other activity sequences, the Face Painting was finally removed.

The Nokake Sequence. The Nokake Sequence was also a disappointment. It was hoped that visitors would really grind the corn into meal, sift the meal and finally, with staff supervision, mix the meal into "nokake." The original sequence consisted of two mortars and pestles, a sifter, a basket of corn kernels, a bowl of ground corn, and a label which used words and pictures to explain why and how the Indians ground corn. The bowl of sifted corn quickly disappeared, the label disappeared, the sifter was often lost, and without extremely close supervision, each user happily dumped the entire basket of fresh kernels into the mortar, making it impossible to grind the kernels.

Clearly, none of the sequential activities were successful. None could function without a great deal of supervision. The expectations for these activities were unrealistic. The developer assumed that by placing objects in their proper context, with other related objects, their specific purposes would be clear. This did not happen.

The Role of the Design Department

When the developer realized that the sequential activities were not effective, appeals were made to the Design Department for help. Due to other pressures they were unable to offer much needed support and suggestions. It must be said here that a developer is not always a designer and that although he may know what he wants to say, without the guidance and experience of the designer, there may be no way to achieve it. Due to lack of this kind of assistance there is still the unanswered question of whether or not the sequential activities could have been restructured by the Design Department to fit into the scheme of the wigwam exhibit. Would the mood of the encampment have been broken or were there, in fact, design ways to satisfy both the need for information and the need for continuity of the context?

Redesigning the Clothing Sequence. That such a restructuring of the sequential activities may indeed have been possible is indicated by the successful redesigning of the Clothing Sequence by a different design team.

Since clothing try-ons were very popular in the school program, it was assumed that they would have equal appeal in the exhibit. We knew from experience that the method of putting on the loincloth and tying the leggings to it needed to be demonstrated. Thus we prepared a label that would with pictures and a few words explain this method. We then hung the loincloth, a pair of leggings and moccasins on a palisade, placed a mirror nearby, and waited. Almost no one tried them on. It seems that the clothing looked like a typical museum display and that no one felt comfortable using it.

To counteract this, we casually placed the clothing on a tree stump - just draped it across - and waited. But the tree stump was inadvertently placed in the middle of an exhibit traffic pattern and people who did attempt to try the clothing on were constantly being bumped into and of course, stared at by other people. A cardboard model of an Indian was then constructed and the clothes were placed, in the appropriate positions on his body. But this time the kids were embarrassed when they removed the clothes - they seemed to feel that they were taking the Indian's clothes. At this point, as the cardboard Indian was beginning to bend badly in the middle, together with the developer's spirits, a new team took over in the Design Department. Having followed the painful

non-success of this particular sequence, they were able to move in and design a successful one. The clothing was moved to a private place - an enclosure created by cardboard trees - with just enough space to try the clothes on. The clothes were hung on two plain railings and moccasins were placed on the floor, on top of two footprints. It was clear from this design that the railings were only there as holders for the clothing and that this was a private place, almost closet-like, where clothing was to be tried on, and then put back. It was a place to see yourself, by yourself - a place even to imagine about Indians. Children were so comfortable with this particular setup that they would emerge from their tree enclosure, completely dressed, and add to their attire, either the cradleboard or the tumpline and then walk around the encampment! The possibility of succeeding with this type of activity sequence without destroying the sense of the exhibit suggests that it should be possible with other sequences as well. Probably such sequences would take up a lot of space - and they would probably have to be in other special places, with trees or stumps to define their area but they could, I think, enhance rather than detract, from the sense of an encampment. They could even add to the feeling of different activities going on in an Indian place.

Developing Discoveries

Once it became clear that the sequential activities needed restructuring and that design help for this was not available, they were removed from the exhibit context and redeveloped as "Discoveries," a mode of presentation with which this developer was already familiar. Each sequence became a discovery - a self-contained portable set of objects to be used in a single specific process. These "Discoveries" were created specifically for the wigwam exhibit, to be used when visitors were ready to do more than the single action activities already in the exhibit. It was felt that these Discoveries should be completely accessible to the wigwam staffer at the moment that he needed them. Therefore, rather than place the Discoveries in the Circulating Department and have them loaned from there, it was decided to build storage pits beneath the wigwam platforms, and keep the Discoveries there.

Once again, expectations were too high. Although the Discoveries were enthusiastically received by the staff, the demands upon them were too great and it was not possible for the staff to maintain the Discoveries and the wigwam as well. The contents of the Discoveries were not only hopelessly mixed up in the pits, they were also scattered in the exhibits and beyond. The Discoveries were finally turned over to the Circulating Department, to loan from and be checked in again there, like all the other kits.

Staff Endurance

When it was discovered that the wigwam exhibit, as designed, was not (as had been hoped) self-maintaining, staff members were assigned to the exhibit on a rotating basis. Ideally they were to guide the visitor through the wigwam and help them do their own exploring, but realistically they were also to supervise and maintain it. Staff thus resented being placed as "guards" and also became bored by having to always do and say the same things. Attempts to involve the staff in details of Algonquin life met with some success. Orientation programs and a detailed training folder served to get some staff members more interested in the Algonquins. Other staff members assigned to the wigwam were helped by having a costume - a poncho and a necklace - to put on that made them feel more like part of the exhibit and less like a "guard." But othere felt foolish dressed up as an Indian when they obviously were not of Indian descent. A few people began Indian crafts that could actually be worked on during their supervision of the wigwam (weaving a fibre bag, sewing moccasins). Those who did seemed to feel that this was a successful way of becoming involved in the exhibit. But many people who did not feel a real interest in learning about Algonquin culture continued to be indifferent to their wigwam assignment and often, as a result, were ineffective in their role of interpreting this culture to the casual visitor.

ARTIFACT SURVIVAL

Although there is no question of the visitor benefit from direct use of objects, the toll on the objects was significant. Neither the developer nor the staff was prepared for the full impact of use by large numbers of casual visitors on museum objects. All objects did not survive. The reasons for this are varied. Misplacement, wear and tear, misuse and abuse all seem to have contributed to the problem.

Misplacement.

The tasks of keeping track of all the objects in the wigwam proved to be monumental. Even a diagram of the wigwam and its contents for staff use did not slow the process of object disappearance. A pipe, a knife and knife case, all the arrows, the wampum headband, several copper pendants, innumerable scrapers, awls, tool blanks, spoons, turkey feathers, oysters, pumpkins, waterlily roots and three grey squirrel root bags all disappeared!

In part, the misplacement and displacement of objects seems to come from the lack of internal structure in the exhibit. People were confronted by a vast array of unfamiliar objects. Since each object did not necessarily have

its own particular place, once it was handled it could simply be returned to what seemed to be an "equally good spot." This situation was especially true of the interior of the wigwam. Here many people were often crowded into one space, trying to see and use the same objects at the same time. It is interesting to note that maintenance of objects in the encampment posed fewer problems. This seems to be because there was more space with fewer objects and especially because there was a specific place for all the objects -- the cradleboard on a hook, the clothing inside the trees, the mortar and pestle on a small green carpet, the fish on the drying rack, etc.

In the future perhaps a spot for each object should be clearly established. Then, if an object were not replaced, its absence would be immediately detected by a staff member, if not by the visitor himself.

Wear and Tear

There is also the problem of the objects that disintegrated through usage. The fox muff was tried on so many times that it literally ripped to shreds. The cradleboard, one of the most used objects in the exhibit, became cracked, wobbly - in short, worn out. The stuffed duck and the deer were patted and handled so much that they both became quite scruffy.

These objects were literally being used up through good solid use; they were being consumed in the learning process. Perhaps if we agree that this will happen and are sure the objects slated for this kind of use are replaceable, we can accept them as "expendables" and agree to allow it to happen. In any home an object that is constantly used - whether it be an article of clothing or a household utensil - does not last. It wears out through use, as did museum objects in the wigwam home.

Misuse

Many objects were incorrectly used by Museum visitors. Many instances of misuse seem to be due to a misreading of the object's function. This was particularly true of objects that to the uneducated eye looked alike. Pounders were used for sanders; sanders were used for pounders; pounders and tool blanks were used for fireplace rocks, etc. It seems evident that the use and associations of such objects must henceforth be firmly established for the visitor.

Intrinsic Object Design

There are also some objects that because of their intrinsic design should not be selected for display in a walk-in exhibit. A reconstructed horseshoe crab basket was hung in the wigwam to show the variety of containers that the Indians used, and to indicate that the horseshoe crab was used for food and for its shell. But even a reconstruction of this object was so fragile that ordinary handling caused it to crack and eventually fall apart. It was finally removed from the exhibit.

Role Playing

Unexpectedly, the freedom to role play in the exhibit also set limits on what could be included. When the wigwam first opened, a foods display was set up to reveal the variety and amounts of food that would be stored in the wigwam for winter use. Baskets of corn on the cob, hulled kernels, popcorn, beans, dried blueberries and many kinds of nuts were exhibited. They were great as "feelies." Everyone who entered clearly enjoyed running their hands through the different textures and shapes. But children felt so comfortable in the wigwam and so able to "play house" that they were soon mixing up contents of the baskets, making a "stew" in the pot, ladling foods from one basket to another, hulling the corn kernels (leaving only empty cobs) and carrying off great handfuls of food (the worst being the blueberries) as they left for other exhibits. Clean up became such a problem, at other exhibits as well as at the wigwam, that the baskets of food had to be, reluctantly, withdrawn.

Abuse

Finally, there was some loss of objects through outright abuse. A bowl that was cracked from being jumped on, a corn husk doll in shreds, eels with heads removed, a mat with a hole worked carefully through it -- these seem to be examples of objects that were deliberately misused. Perhaps, like "expendables" this kind of attrition needs to be accepted as part of the inevitable cost of maintaining a cultural context.

Back to Glass Cases?

In an effort to restore context and life to objects, the developer had almost categorically rejected the traditional glass case museum exhibit. There may now be a reason to re-introduce it. As the wigwam exhibit has shown there are rare, authentic, fragile objects that cannot be placed in the wigwam itself, even though they are very much a part of Algonquin material culture.

Although the design problem might be significant, this developer wonders whether or not there is a way to include such irreplaceable items in the exhibit by protecting them in glass cases and then somehow incorporating the case into the Algonquin context. Otherwise, certain objects that make a statement about Algonquin material culture will nevertheless be permanently relegated to museum storage.

Conclusion

This then is the history of the development of the Algonquin Wigwam exhibit up to December 1970. Basic even to its beginnings was the assumption that cultural objects lined up in rows in glass cases were "dead objects" removed from the culture that created them, removed from the context that made them "make sense" and have meaning. Traditionally museums have attempted to restore this context, this meaning, through descriptive labels. It was the belief of the developers at the Museum that to have a meaningful museum experience, the object had to be removed from its case and restored to its context by other than simple verbal descriptions and explanations. The entire history of the presentation of Algonquins at the Museum is the attempt to bring objects created by these people back to life -- an attempt to convince children that these objects were real -- and that they were created by real people to solve real needs.

The wigwam exhibit experience has indicated that an object is best understood if both its specific context and its cultural context are restored and if it is then used as it was used by the people who created it. For example, a stone scraper by itself on a shelf, label or not, is difficult to understand. If you reconstruct its handle and add that, it begins to at least read as a tool. If you take the scraper out of the case and scrape a skin with it, its specific context begins to be more fully restored. If you put skin and scraper in an Indian encampment and then scrape the skin, you begin to recreate the cultural context in which it once existed, and revive not only the scraper but ideally, a sense of the people who once used it.

Other museum exhibits have restored an object's specific context even within the confines of a glass case. A few museums have created full size "cultural dioramas" that can be looked at, or walked through. The attempt to restore life to that cultural context, however, seems to be a newer departure. It means that a context may not only be entered, but physically experienced and that objects may not only be looked at but used as they were used by the culture that originally created them.

This living cultural context does result in a special museum experience. The objects exist together in a new totality. They read as a unit, belong together, tell a story, and most important, suggest a people.

The benefit to the visitor is without question. But exhibit questions remain and so development must continue. We have begun to understand what is and is not feasible in a living cultural context. Now we must find out how to make such an exhibit still more effective. Perhaps we could design the exhibit so that objects are more likely to be preserved. Perhaps we could experiment with structuring

sequential activities so that visitor participation is possible without intense supervision. Perhaps we could find ways to present factual information without destroying the "mood" of the cultural context. Finally we could evaluate the role of staff as mediator in the wigwam.

If we continue to develop living cultural reconstructions, we may achieve a new and more human museum experience - one that projects a better understanding of so called alien peoples.

Joan Lester
January 1971

POSTSCRIPT

Since this report was written, the wigwam has been enlarged and moved outside to a more natural setting, and a new developer has assumed responsibility for the exhibit. Some of the issues discussed in this report have begun to be solved - a convincing emcampment is being created, commitment to staffing the wigwam has improved, and artifact survival is being given serious consideration. However, since writing this report, this developer has become aware of an issue that goes beyond the technical success or failure of the wigwam - that of museum responsibility for the image of Indian people generated by museum exhibits.

This developer, like many other educators made certain assumptions about the teaching of Indian cultures. First, she assumed that allowing non-Indian children to learn about and participate in aspects of traditional Indian cultures was a viable way of developing respect and ideally, empathy for the people of those cultures. Further, she believed that if the ways of these people were accurately and sympathetically presented, stereotypes about Indian people would not arise. This developer also assumed that Algonquin culture, as presented in the exhibit was "dead" and that Algonquin peoples had either been annihilated or assimilated into the "mainstream" of American life. Finally, she assumed that any staff member with information about Algonquin culture could effectively describe this culture to non-Indian children.

On the basis of what this developer has since been exposed to (specifically the ideas of some sophisticated, eloquent American Indian people) she personally feels that each of these hypotheses could be subjected to further scrutiny.

Stereotypes vs. People

This developer assumed that teaching about traditional Indian cultures would bring children closer to an understanding of the people in those cultures and prevent stereotypes about those people from being formed. In retrospect, it seems that teaching only about the culture itself can be misleading. This type of description tends to treat the culture as if it existed in a historical vacuum, apart from the flow of history. A static, unreal world results, and the people who participate in such a world also become abstractions. They live in and react only to their natural world.

The wigwam exhibit as conceived by this developer presented a limited view of Algonquin people by presenting only "traditional" Algonquin culture. Because of this the wigwam existed in a historical vacuum. The exhibit stated that it represented Indian life 300 years ago (1670) and yet made no mention of the impact that the Massachusetts Bay and Plimouth colonies had on these people and their mode of life. In fact, the entire question of contact and overwhelming conflict with European immigrants was avoided. The exhibit also did not explain whether or not the wigwam and the life that it symbolized was still in existence today, and if not, what had happened to it. This is not to say that the wigwam exhibit did not have validity and even some reality as a statement of Algonquin material culture. It did allow children to become deeply involved in some of the ways in which Algonquin people did things. But the wigwam and the artifacts associated with it made an incomplete statement about a particular people. In so doing, it implied, because there was no other, that it was a total statement. It even tended (unintentionally) to generate stereotypes of its own. It suggested that the Algonquins were a pleasant, perhaps "picturesque," probably now extinct people, living at peace in their environment. Instead, 300 and 400 years ago, Algonquin people were really involved in reacting to, changing with, and surviving contact with powerful external forces.

This developer was also not aware that children would bring their own previously formed stereotypes about Indian peoples to the wigwam experience. Perhaps ways could be devised to deal directly with these misconceptions at the exhibit. Otherwise children seem simply to add their new information about Algonquin people to their "mixed bag" of already formed "Indian" concepts.

The So-Called "Dead" Culture

This developer also assumed that Algonquin culture was "dead" - that the people had either been annihilated or assimilated, and that their culture had vanished. The vanishing Indian is a myth. Algonqiun peoples, like many other Indian peoples have survived. There are many people who speak an Algonquin language, identify themselves as members of a particular Algonquin tribe and participate (socially, technologically and spiritually) in much of what non-Indians have referred to as the vanished traditional culture. The general lack of knowledge about this Indian survival also reinforces the stereotype of Indians as peoples of the distant past, and works against the understanding of Indian people as people, today. Here too, this developer's assumptions "colored" the exhibit. The wording of the introductory sign and the absence of any further elaboration in the exhibit itself suggested to many people that Algonquin people were extinct. A "contemporary statement" about Algonquin peoples is envisioned by the current developer. Hopefully it will counteract the past tense statement of the wigwam itself by presenting Indian people and Algonquin life as it is now.

Indian Spokesmen

Finally there is the question of who should and who can most effectively describe this continuum of Algonquin culture. This developer, like other educators, assumed that non-Indians could effectively talk about the "static" traditional cultures. But she was not aware of the reactions of some American Indian people to such presentations nor of the limitations of understanding for a non-Indian. There are Indians who feel strongly that they alone should be the mediators and spokesmen for their own culture. Such people are deeply disturbed by the non-Indian "Indian experts" who have misrepresented them and in many cases revealed information about them that was not intended to be shared with non-Indian peoples. A non-Indian must paraphrase and describe how he thinks an Indian thinks or thought about a particular issue (in a sense, he is but a secondary source). An Indian spokesman is the primary source. He lives it and he alone can decide if he wishes to share aspects of his "Indianess" with non-Indian people. At the moment this presents a problem. There are, currently, not that many Indian educators committed to or involved in the education of non-Indians. Until there are, perhaps non-Indians and Indians can work together, with well informed non-Indians serving as links or bridges to "primary source" people. It is possible (now under consideration) that an Algonquin Indian will staff or even become responsible for the wigwam exhibit. If that does happen and perhaps especially if it does, we may again ask ourselves if keying into an abstract static moment in the distant past (via a cultural reconstruction) is the most effective way of bringing children to an understanding of another people. There are Algonquin people who have already indicated that a wigwam is not the vehicle that they would have chosen to explain themselves. If Algonquin people continue to feel that it is not, then perhaps, together (non-Indian and Indian) we must search for still more effective and mutually satisfying ways to bring children from one culture to understand and accept people from another culture.

Joan Lester
February 1972

PUBLIC PROGRAMS DIVISION COVER SHEET CONTINUATION 10.h

6. Institution/Organization Name
Boston Children's Museum

NEA Use ONLY Application Number

7. Title of Project
A Catalogue of the Boston Children's Museum's Northeast Native American Collections

8. Category of Grant
Special Deadline, Museum Program

9. Additional Background Information

The Boston Children's Museum proposes to write and publish a 48-page, 7-section, well-illustrated catalogue describing its 19th and 20th century Northeast Native American collection. Under a 1976 NEA/Folk Arts grant, the work of 43 contemporary Northeast Native American artists was collected and documented. These objects, along with their 19th century counterparts, have been installed in a specially designed Study Storage area adjacent to the Museum's Northeast Native American "We're Still Here" exhibit. This collection and our approach to it has not been fully accessible. Although work is being done on 19th century New England ash splint basketry and on traditional Micmac and Malecite works, no one else appears to be focusing on the work still being produced in New England today nor on the connections between the contemporary and 19th century forms. Seven types of objects will be described: (1) Root Clubs; (2) Work Baskets; (3) Fancy Baskets; (4) Birchbark Containers; (5) Gay Head Pottery; (6) Clothing and Regalia; and (7) Jewelry and Personal Ornamentation. Each of the essays will describe the basic tradition and compare and contrast that to the contemporary forms of specific artists. Photographs will be used to illustrate the essays, to compare and contrast a selected 19th century object with a related 20th century one, and to identify other related collections objects. The catalogue will look specifically at (1) traditions that have continued; (2) those that have been revived; and/or (3) those that have been imported and are now taking root in New England.

Although the Museum has collected and cared for Native American objects for the past 70 years, it has not been a publishing institution and therefore the American Indian collection is not well known. Because the contemporary Northeast collection documents a specific moment in time, relates so clearly to 19th century objects, and is critical to an understanding of Native Americans in New England today, we are seeking funds to publish this catalogue. This catalogue would allow the Museum to publish original research and materials that will document this information. The audience will include scholars, museum professionals and especially interested visitors who use the Study Storage collection and then wish for additional information about the collection that they can take away with them. It will also be useful for Native Americans interested in their cultural heirlooms, to casual visitors who would like more in-depth information about the items without having to use such solely at the Museum, and for those who are beyond the reach of a museum visit.

The catalogue will have a four-color cover and approximately 140 black and white photos of collections objects, artists at work and objects in their cultural context. We will print 2,500 copies and the catalogue will retail in the Museum's shop for approximately $5 per copy. It will also be disseminated free to colleagues and other professionals interested in Native American studies.

20. Key Personnel

Project Director - Elaine Heumann Gurian, Director, Children's Museum Exhibit Center
Curator/Author - Joan Lester, Native American Curator, Curator of Collections.
Designer - Signe Hanson, Chief, Museum's Graphics Department.
Consultants: Ralph T. Coe (pending letter of acceptance), who will write an introductory essay placing this material in the context of pan-Indian studies; Gladys Widdiss, Leslie Ranco and John Francis for specific consultations on Wampanoag, Penobscot and Passamaquoddy materials to be depicted in the catalogue.