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The Historic Origins of Rochester's Museums

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That the Director of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, Mr. W. Stephen Thomas, should have been named by UNESCO as chairman of the American Committee to plan and promote the celebration of Museum Week this October 8-14, 1956, is of course a tribute to his widely recognized talents in the museum field and his capacity for enthusiastic leadership. It is also an honor to Rochester and directs attention to the several fine museums in this city and to the local forces and interests that have brought them into being and support them today.

As many residents know, the Museum of Arts and Sciences, the Memorial Art Gallery, and the George Eastman House of Photography — our three major institutions in this field — sprang from old and sturdy developments in the city's life — the scientific societies and hobby groups in one case, the art clubs and patrons in another, and of course the photographic industry and camera enthusiasts in the third. And most citizens recognize the Historical Society's Woodside headquarters, the Susan B. Anthony House, and the Campbell-Whittlesey House as architectural relics and preservatories of special aspects of the city's past. It may be instructive, however, to follow their roots back to their beginnings and to identify if possible some of the local predecessors each institution had in an earlier day, for only thus can we learn how basic and persistent the museum tradition has been in our history.

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But before plunging into our own city's past, it is worth noting that the history of museums in Rochester recapitulates in several respects their history in many other cities and their development over the centuries as well. An able student of this broader subject, Miss Alma S. Wittlin, writing in London eight years ago,¹ traced the origins of museums back to the dawn of historic times. She found their earliest antecedents in the collection of peculiar stones and other items that gratified man's curiosity, his sense of art or magic, and his desire for prestige. Most of the early museums were known as cabinets or galleries, and those which became large and significant enough to leave records were fostered by royalty, priests, professors or aspiring noblemen. Some of the ancient collections became, in time, virtually public museums, housed in temples or palaces where at last all worthy citizens could see and admire them and perhaps wonder over their contents. Although changing fortunes destroyed or scattered all of the earliest hoards, some portions found their way into the palaces of conquering emperors; others were later recovered from ancient ruins to embellish the galleries and museums of the medieval and modern world. Only within the last century have techniques of classification and display developed in step (it is important to note) with the broader evolution of art and science. Thus, from the beginning, museums have housed the treasure trove of man's wonderment, and their character has displayed, not only in the three spatial dimensions, but also in the fourth or historic dimension, the nature of contemporary civilization.

Pioneer Museum Effort

With this thumbnail sketch of museum history in mind, we need not be surprised to discover that the earliest local museum had some rather primitive features. Yet the founders and early settlers of Rochester were by no means primitives in their day; as citizens of the early 1800's, they shared the interests that animated their contemporaries in eastern cities. The village of 1500 inhabitants in 1820 could scarcely be expected to support an institution such as Rembrandt Peale had established at Baltimore five years before,² but when Stowell and Bishop arrived at the Genesee falls settlement late that December and made arrangements for a two-weeks exhibit in the Ensworth tavern at the Four Corners, they were prepared to show, as the feature of their display, thirty-four wax figures, life-size copies of those brought from Italy for Peale's collection when, under his father's care, it was the

pride of Philadelphia two decades earlier. Moreover, they had with them "twenty fine pictures" and "two elegant organs," one equipped with a chime of bells, the other with a drum and triangle. If any villagers lacked artistic or musical interests, they could not, the press announcement declared, afford to miss the "grand mechanical Panorama" with its thirty-six moving figures each working at a separate trade.³

Apparently enough residents and travelers paid the admission price of 25 cents (half price for children) to hold the show over for a third week in January. And after several weary years on the road, with varied fortunes in other growing towns, Stowell and Bishop returned to Rochester for a second (or perhaps it was a third) visit in 1824 and decided to make the now booming canal town their permanent abode. They found rooms for their collection on the third floor of a building on the west side of Exchange Street, a stone's throw from the Four Corners. They placed the larger of the two hand organs on a window ledge overlooking the street where its musical notes could drift down to alert passers-by concerning the opportunities awaiting them above. William Stowell, the leading proprietor, advertised his readiness to buy rare curiosities which travelers or residents had brought from distant lands as well as native gems of interest. Soon, numerous arrow heads, Indian tomahawks, whaling clubs, fish skeletons, sea shells, and curious stones had joined the collection, as well as stuffed birds and a pair of live parrots whose chatter from their cage, hung over the street on fair days, added a bizarre note to the growing town. When Stowell died in 1829, his partner, J. R. Bishop, carried on and, in an effort to entice former visitors back again, announced a series of traveling exhibits — a tattooed giant, the modern Robinson Crusoe who had been shipwrecked on a Pacific isle and had grown up among the natives; a dwarf from South Africa; a glass blower; an Indian Chief, and other celebrities or curiosities that often attracted throngs for a few days before they moved on to Buffalo or some other town.⁴

Bishop's museum increased in size with the city's growth. When in the forties the two judges, Moses Chapin and Frederick Whittlesey, who had formerly occupied chambers on the floor below the museum, moved into the arcade Silas O. Smith erected next door, Bishop appropriated the vacated rooms and persuaded Tom Mercer to locate his daguerreotype studio in one of them as an auxiliary to the museum. But

the expanding city attracted rival showmen too. One brought a canal boat loaded with an assortment of "natural and artificial curiosities"—wax figures of European and American notables, stuffed birds and animals from many lands, rare plants, pictures, and a "grand Cosmorama Exhibition" accompanied by appropriate music. Citizens were invited, at a price of 25 cents, to visit the museum boat moored at the dock in Child's basin for a week in July, 1824. On another occasion, readers of the *Daily Advertiser* learned of an opportunity to examine an Egyptian mummy on view, at the modest charge of 12½ cents, in the Canal Collector's office on Exchange Street.⁵

Despite the hospitality Bishop's museum showed to visiting exhibitors of dioramas, most of them chose to set their moving pictorial views up in the Reynolds Arcade or the Court House, and most visiting artists, as we have seen in an earlier issue, preferred these and other places for the display of their paintings. Rival daguerreotypists attracted a better patronage than Mercer, who moved out or, as one version has it, was put out because of his bad habits.⁶ Bishop's fortunes waned, as those of Peale in Baltimore and other pioneer museum promoters did, too, in these years. Chancellor Whittlesey, who now resided in the gracious classical mansion built by Benjamin Campbell at the corner of Troup and Fitzhugh Streets, was not the only citizen who objected to the blatant organ music, and other features of the old museum. Silas O. Smith, driving in from his charming Woodside mansion, erected on the eastern outskirts of the city in 1838, acquired an interest in the museum building and began to look with disfavor at its principal tenant.⁷

Even the *Democrat* turned against Bishop, as its announcement of a "New Museum," in September 1846, indicated. A group of gentlemen were back of the project, the editor announced, and in the preparation of their displays had already assembled an extensive collection of curiosities, including "Cinderella's glass slipper," "a feather from Poe's Raven," "one of the oars used in rowing Caesar across the Rubicon," and "one of the pearls which were cast before swine." The list was a long one and must have given some readers many chuckles and the aging Bishop indigestion. Perhaps it hastened his decision two years later to remodel the old establishment as a "museum saloon" in order better to accommodate living shows of freaks and other novelties. The "asthmatic barrel-organ, the screeching parrots and most of the mouldy

curiosities," as the *Democrat* characterized the museum's contents, passed into limbo, and, despite the efforts of Bishop and two new partners, the remodeled amusement center closed its doors, too, after a few seasons as Rochester entered a somewhat more sophisticated period.⁸

Museum Specialization

Sophistication is a relative term, however, and not all citizens were impressed by Bishop's first successor, John Kelsey's Museum and Daguerrean Palace, or Emporium of Art, which opened on the top floor of the Gaffney Block at Main and St. Paul streets in 1852.⁹ Colby Kimble's numerous portraits of the pioneers, which hung in an adjoining gallery, would later find a welcome place in the Rochester Historical Society, and Kelsey's Emporium also contained much that would be treasured today, particularly by the George Eastman House of Photography, but its value a century ago was less evident. Not only did the cheap photographic likenesses of one's friends and neighbors, displayed in profusion there, offend some citizens who had engaged a local or visiting artist to paint oil portraits or miniatures of their loved ones, but a taste for landscapes and other works of art was also developing among those who had visited the Dusseldorf Gallery in New York or had attended one of the annual art shows there or in Boston. A few Rochesterians had also seen some of the galleries recently opened in Europe, and several gentlemen met in 1854 to formulate a more respectable Gallery of Fine Arts for Rochester. While that effort failed, the successful opening in 1862 of the Rochester Academy of Music and Art on the spacious second floor of the Rochester Savings Bank Building provided the city with its first, if short-lived, art gallery.¹⁰ Moreover, by this date Rochester had witnessed the failure of another distinctive museum project and had given birth to still a fourth and most significant venture in this field, one that stressed neither photography, nor art, nor curiosities as such, but specialized in scientific artifacts.

Professor Henry A. Ward, the dynamic promoter of the new venture, was destined to win fame for himself and a good name for Rochester among museum men throughout America and in other countries as well, but before we review his accomplishments it will be well to turn back and discover the origins of his inspiration. His story has been told in full detail by his grandson, Roswell Ward, in the last

volume published by the Rochester Historical Society nearly a decade ago.¹¹ There we learn that young Henry's fascination with a curious stone picked up on east Main Street as a child, and by a fossil he found in the Genesee gorge a few years later, developed into a passion when at the age of 13 he was sent to live and study on the farm of Jerediah Horsford up the valley. That self-taught naturalist encouraged the young lad's quest for geologic specimens until he set out to assemble a cabinet for the local academy. A year at Middlebury College was seemingly "wasted" as he again spent his time collecting, but his early defects were turned into a rare triumph in 1854 when, at the age of 20, he hiked back to Rochester to attend a course of lectures given by the great Professor Louis Agassiz before the Athenaeum and Mechanics Association in Corinthian Hall. During his four weeks stay, Agassiz was interested in exploring the fascinating geologic setting in which the city stands, and Henry Ward became his guide through the gorge, along the ridge road, over the pinnacle hills, and around the deep and curious pools in Mount Hope Cemetery, whose glacial origins had never before been comprehended.¹²

Of course the elder scientist took the youthful zealot back to Harvard with him to help classify the growing collection destined to become the nucleus of the museum of the Lawrence Scientific School of Harvard University. But again, wider opportunity for exploration beckoned, and Henry Ward left for Europe to study at the famous School of Mines in Paris, from which convenient base he made his early excursions over the continent, into the Near East and Africa, and after six years returned to Rochester laden with numerous crates and boxes of geological and other specimens and heavy debts to his uncle, Levi A. Ward, president of the Rochester Savings Bank on whose second story the boxes had gradually been accumulating. Henry accepted an appointment as Professor of Natural Science at the University of Rochester, but his chief interest was in sorting and classifying his collections. He had visited most of the recently established scientific museums in England and on the Continent and was determined to make the Ward cabinet equal to the best of them in organization and extent.

Unfortunately (or perhaps it was a disguised stroke of luck) two crises presented themselves. It was at this point that the newly organized Academy of Music and Art applied for use of the Savings Bank's spacious second story for the display of "seventy fine paintings" brought to Rochester by Joseph Humphrey, and Ward's collections had to be

removed. At the same time, Henry's uncle, Levi A. Ward, the banker, was impatient for reimbursement of the funds advanced during the preceding six years. The collection would have to be sold, and Professor Ward set out to raise a fund of \$20,000 to enable the University of Rochester to buy a complete geological cabinet. His solicitation was well timed, for Western Union had just paid a handsome dividend in Rochester and some of its stockholders were members of the Academy of Music and Art and hoped to see the rooms cleared for their show. With the subscriptions in hand, Professor Ward acted quickly, moving his collection onto the top floor of the newly opened Anderson Hall of the university almost before the reluctant president gave his consent to the deal.¹³

Although the university thus acquired perhaps the most extensive geological cabinet in the country, the struggling college appeared a bit top heavy with science to President Anderson, who made no objection when the youthful professor shortly removed some of his relics to a shed back of the college where he prepared plaster replicas to trade with museums elsewhere. Soon the first shed had grown into Cosmos Hall, the nucleus of Ward's Natural Science Establishment, from which the professor, now retired, made his incessant expeditions to all parts of the world in search of new items for current orders or for orders he hoped to attract from new museums still to be founded under his zealous promotion in old and new colleges and in the rising metropolitan cities of the West.¹⁴

Henry A. Ward's dramatic career has carried us several decades ahead of our story, but for half a century after its start in the late sixties Ward's Natural Science Establishment sprang to mind whenever the term "museum" was mentioned in Rochester. A workshop rather than a museum in the strict sense, Ward's nevertheless became a mecca for scientific visitors and a stimulant to curious youths in the community, several of whom, after furtive peeks through its portals, where two giant whale jawbones guarded the entrance, finally mustered enough courage to ask Ward for a job and eventually found themselves in charge of important museums scattered throughout the country.¹⁵

Perhaps the fame of Ward's Establishment served to dim the prospects of several other local ventures. After Bishop's decline and that of similar museums in other cities, most uses of the term applied to troupes of freakish entertainers, frequently of a shady character. Several of

these traveling groups visited Rochester, such as Bunnell's Museum of Living Curiosities, which stopped at Washington Hall for two weeks in 1881, and Jacob's Royal Museum which attracted crowds to Corinthian Hall for a brief period two years later. A museum of a different sort opened at 98 Main Street [East] in 1868, and its display of mounted insects, birds and fishes "deserves the patronage of the public," the *Democrat* declared. William C. Coup added an "aquarium and museum" to the Falls Field pavilion in 1883, but this was obviously a desperate attempt to offer still another novelty that might forestall the impending closure of that once-popular circus and picnic area now destined for industrial use.¹⁶

Rochester would acquire a new museum of curiosities within another decade, as we shall see, but here we must turn back to note two other efforts to establish specialized museums. The Rochester Historical Society, organized in May 1860, and incorporated by an act of the state legislature the following April, made the first attempt. Its incentive came partly from Henry O'Reilly, author of the first history of Rochester in 1837, who now wrote from New York offering to deposit his collection of western New York documents at Rochester if a society able to preserve them was founded. Lewis H. Morgan, the city's most distinguished scholar, accepted the presidency, and among other officers, Jesse M. Hatch, an historical minded shoe manufacturer, assumed the task of collecting documents and other relics of the city's past. Several animated meetings followed, but the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 diverted attention, and when all hopes for a quick victory were shattered that fall, the society determined at its December meeting to suspend activities.¹⁷

The art gallery also closed during the war when Humphrey, discouraged by a limited response, took his seventy paintings to Buffalo where they became the nucleus of the collection that grew in time into the Albright Art Gallery. The collapse of the Rochester gallery occurred late in 1862, after a long series of military defeats, but when the tide turned, the next summer, the community's spirit began to revive, and great interest was displayed in an art show arranged as a benefit by the Ladies Hospital Relief Association that fall. Reports of the founding of galleries in other cities and of the growth of Buffalo's collection prompted the reorganization of the Rochester Academy of Art in 1874. A first exhibit was held in an old theater on State Street that fall, and plans for a second show were under preparation when

the announcement appeared that Daniel W. Powers had decided to set aside for an art gallery the entire fifth floor of his cast-iron Powers Block — the most imposing structure in Rochester.¹⁸

We have described the Powers Gallery at considerable length in an earlier issue and have noted the organization of the Rochester Art Club in 1877, but it is interesting to observe here that the art classes scheduled by that club raised an issue that was troubling Rochester in many fields in these years — the eligibility of women to full membership. Indeed, some of the most significant events of the seventies in Rochester were related in one way or another to the woman's rights movement. Thus the efforts of Miss Susan B. Anthony and thirteen other ladies to vote on November 5, 1872, led to a nationally famous trial a year later in which their hopes of establishing their right to vote on a favorable interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment were summarily rejected. But the ladies who began to rally to Miss Anthony's support, gathering at the home of her sister Mary on Madison Street, made it a vital center of Rochester's life. The organization of the Women's Political Club there in 1885 provided an instrument for the promotion of their cause and made that modest Victorian home, where most of its meetings were held during the next two decades, an historic house in a very real sense.¹⁹

* * * *

These were tradition-building decades, laying the social and economic rather than the masonry foundations for the community's museums. Except for the Powers Gallery, and another display center to be noted shortly, most of the city's accomplishments in this field came later, but meanwhile several energetic organizations were earnestly developing an interest in and use for the specialized museums Rochester would provide after 1910. The late seventies and eighties were also the years when George Eastman laid the foundations for Rochester's great photographic industry from which our most recent museum has sprung.

The most active promoters of science museums were the academies of science organized in many large cities after the mid century. Rochester's first effort in this field was the Microscopical Society formed in January 1879, which reflected the interest of several expert workmen at the Bausch and Lomb Optical Company. Within a year it had become the largest society of its kind in the county. Every member had his own microscope and the annual receptions at the Free Academy

were not only gala affairs but also occasions for the display of slides prepared by each member. The formation of a separate Ornithological Society, in February 1881, prompted an effort a month later to bring the two societies and other interested men together into a more inclusive Academy of Science. The promise of a valuable insect collection for its permanent exhibit was one of many reasons for the establishment of the academy, and William A. Reynolds donated the use of two rooms in his Arcade for that purpose. The academy held its regular monthly meetings at the High School building, assigning space on each occasion for the exhibits of twenty members. As the number of enthusiastic participants in these programs increased, separate Microscopical, Ornithological, Botanic, Photographic and Astronomical sections were formed to conduct field trips among other projects and hold more specialized monthly meetings. Over a thousand members and friends crowded in to see the exhibits of microscope slides, mounted insects and plants, and other displays prepared by the amateur and professional scientists for the third annual reception in June, 1883.²⁰

Unfortunately, the catholicity of the academy's interests and the profusion of its displays left the average citizen somewhat bewildered. Only the most zealous amateurs could maintain the pace set by the five original sections and by four new ones soon organized in Ethnology, Anatomy, Hygiene and Literature. Some of the sections disbanded after a few years, while the others relied on scientists at the university and varied professionals from Ward's Natural Science Establishment, Bausch and Lomb, and the Eastman Kodak Company. The exhibit rooms in the Arcade were abandoned, and the annual meetings and displays were moved to the university after 1888 as the novelty interest, which had drawn the public, declined and the academy became more strictly a club of scientists.²¹

If the emphasis on scientific displays, which Professor Ward among others had fostered in Rochester, was sacrificing some of the popular appeal the early museums had enjoyed — a trend evident in other American and European cities as well — the opening of a new museum of curiosities at Rochester in 1893 revealed that the public still possessed a capacity for wonderment if properly aroused. When Peter Gruber came to Rochester to open a saloon on Mill Street, his suit of rattlesnake skins, collected over a period of twelve years, commanded attention on the streets and in the daily press. He brought twenty-five

live snakes with him, as well as a stuffed alligator and a "miniature petroleum farm." These and other oddities quickly attracted a stream of curious residents and visitors to his saloon-museum. The newspapers, which had looked with disdain at Bishop's collection half a century before, now described "Rattlesnake Pete's" activities with keen delight. Reporters vied for the opportunity to accompany the big burly saloonkeeper on his annual expeditions in quest of a new supply of reptiles; and, whenever news appeared dull elsewhere, a visit to Pete's Museum was sure to turn up an interesting story concerning a request from some distant scientist for a vial of snake venom or an account of a recent call for his skill in curing snake bite, goiter, or some other malady. Meanwhile, among the curiosities added to the expanding saloon exhibits was "the stony corpse of a petrified female dug out of a cemetery near the place where the Cardiff giant was discovered" some decades before. Sophisticated reporters as well as the public were now amused rather than bored by such fakes, and Rattlesnake Pete's success in holding their favor until his death in 1932 proved that he had mastered the art of relating his exhibits to strongly felt human interests.²

Meanwhile the reorganization of the Rochester Historical Society in 1887 and its incorporation in 1888 brought a new effort to establish a suitable repository for the preservation of historical documents and other mementos of the city's past. The monthly meetings not only gave opportunity for the reading of many reminiscences of the early days by members whose recollections reached back for several decades, such as Jesse W. Hatch the shoemaker, but also brought gifts of the first shoemaker's mallet, a piece of the original Atlantic cable, the first postmaster's desk, and numerous other relics from members' attics, as well as early newspapers, books, brochures and even some manuscript records. A special committee assembled many of the portraits of pioneers made years before by Colby Kimble, Grove Gilbert and other early artists, while a retired photographer's gift of a file of Rochester negatives started a drive to collect photographs of local residents and scenes.²³

A locked showcase in the library of the university served as the first repository; when its inadequacy soon became evident, the Rochester Savings Bank, which had sheltered so many cultural efforts, made a room available on its top floor for the display of the society's treasures. However, as the accumulation of the relics of domestic, com-

mercial, and public life increased, that room also became overcrowded, and the society welcomed an opportunity in 1895 to move into the more spacious quarters assigned it on the top floor of the newly opened Reynolds Library on Spring Street. It was more suitable as an archives than a museum, though many three-dimensional items were displayed, but in 1909 when a volunteer firemen's parade from neighboring towns brought a number of old hand engines into the city, creating considerable excitement, the sad fate of Betsy Number 1, Rochester's first fire engine, which had been destroyed at Penfield a year before, was recalled, and the mayor announced his determination to supply suitable storage and exhibit space for such relics of the city's past.²⁴

The Seed of the Municipal Museum

Several factors strengthened the movement for a municipal and historical museum in these years. The annual shows of the Rochester Industrial Exposition, starting in 1909, brought out historic as well as contemporary exhibits and reinforced the desire for a permanent repository. Preparations for the centennial of Rochester's birth in 1812 focused attention on the community's history and gave the mayor a popular new use for the old Western House of Correction acquired by the city in 1911 in order to forestall its conversion into a state penitentiary. A dual plan to clear most of the site for a park, where the annual expositions could be held, and to remodel the former girls dormitory for a public library had already been approved when in October Elmer Adler, chairman of the library and museum committee of the Rochester Historical Society, approached Mayor Edgerton with the proposal that the society move its collections into one end of that building to form the nucleus of a municipal museum. The mayor responded with enthusiasm, and at Adler's suggestion invited an expert from the New York Historical Society to Rochester to help lay out the plan. Adler and other society leaders visited Buffalo to study the methods of the historical museum there. Preparations for the permanent display of its large collection of Indian relics, portraits of the pioneers, and other artifacts, and for special loan exhibits, were announced in July; finally on the eve of Centennial Day, September 14, 1912, the society held its first reception in the new museum.²⁵

When several thousand citizens visited the museum during the Industrial Exposition, which followed the centennial ceremonies, the City Council, reassured by the response, finally approved the mayor's

recommendations that a permanent Municipal and Historical Museum be created and placed under the supervision of the library board. The society's curator, Robert T. Webster, was placed on the public payroll and served until the appointment of Edward D. Putnam two years later. This change in personnel was perhaps significant, for the new curator emphasized the need for a stricter distinction between donations made to the society and those given outright to the city. An active campaign to build up the collection had brought in numerous gifts, among them the town crier's bell of 1812, the scales used in the first village postoffice, one of the first phonographs made by Thomas A. Edison, and numerous other items.²⁶

When Arthur C. Parker, New York State Archaeologist, visited the museum the next year, he praised its rich store of relics but urged that the exhibits be classified by subject matter and further cautioned against commitments for family displays. Putnam welcomed the advice as an endorsement of his plan to separate the society's exhibits from those of the city. Edward R. Foreman, as president of the society, enthusiastically endorsed the proposal but urged in addition that a distinction in purpose be agreed upon and that the society give the city all articles in its possession not strictly relevant to local history in return for public recognition of the society as the sole collector in that field. Numerous difficulties obstructed such a clear distinction, however, and the outbreak of World War One delayed a separation of the displays until January 1920 when the society's antiquities were finally segregated into the rooms on the west side of the ground floor, leaving most of the remainder of the north wing to the now more extensive municipal collections.²⁷

Yet the absence of rigid definitions of function enabled the municipal museum to extend coverage freely in response to local interests. Putnam, long a member of the Rochester Academy of Science, had a broad interest in archaeology, Indian lore, and numismatics. Moreover, active groups in the community supported each of these and several other fields of collection, as the show cases in the museum soon revealed. However, despite Mayor Edgerton's loyal support, funds for the museum proved barely sufficient to maintain the curator and two attendants, and new acquisitions had to be crowded into the available cases, many of them likewise donations, or hung in empty spaces on the walls. When Arthur Parker revisited the city early in 1924 he

found its museum jammed to the doors with a kaleidoscopic assortment of exhibits that not only baffled understanding but effectively obstructed inspection even by curious citizens.²⁸

Yet Putnam, though overwhelmed by the flood of donations showered upon him, was eager to learn, as his scrapbook, still in the museum's possession, indicates. He accepted Parker's invitation to visit the State Museum in Albany and inspect some of the new techniques for display applied there. Great strides had been made in a few progressive museums since George B. Goode first formulated the principle of educational displays in 1888. Goode, curator of the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, had found that institution so cluttered and incoherent that its numerous visitors seemed always to depart tired and bewildered, seldom if ever to return. His proposal, that exhibits should present a synthesis of an object, placing it in a functional setting or sequence and providing the observant visitor with a suggestive interpretation of its significance, was so far ahead of the times that few museum directors had the means or the imagination to implement it. Most curators continued the task of collection, seeking a complete illustration of all known species, leaving the hapless visitor to his own devices. Few achieved such austere perfection, since the procedure repelled even trained students in each specific field, and most museums became, like that in Rochester, musty public attics, useful only as storehouses for a conglomerate of antiquities.²⁹

Fortunately, however, Goode's theories had found lodgment in scattered institutions. An effort to bring school classes into the museums, first made at the Buffalo Natural Science Museum before the turn of the century, had revealed the need for guides able to interpret the displays, and the museum docent began to appear at a few institutions. The preparation of exhibits for circulation among the schools, introduced at Philadelphia by 1907, and the children's museums opened at Brooklyn and Boston a few years before, further demonstrated the new approach. The development of the historic-house museum and the discovery that restraint in the display of household articles appropriate to a specific period created an effective atmosphere of wide popular appeal, pointed the way for the large museum's advance. Period rooms and habitat groups represented creative applications of Goode's theories, and among the first to explore this costly field was the New York State Museum at Albany where Arthur Parker's six full scale Iroquois Indian life groups, arranged in front of painted backgrounds that

accurately represented the broader setting, achieved a dramatic effect. The completion of these habitat groups between 1912 and 1917 attracted widespread interest and broadened Parker's contacts among museum workers, particularly those with progressive temperaments. Few had the backing or the imagination to undertake the revolutionary overhauling of their institutions which the new technique required, and the stupendous reforms suggested by these displays so overwhelmed Putnam on his visit to Albany in 1924 that he suffered a heart attack on his drive back to Rochester.³⁰

But the task which overwhelmed Putnam, challenged Parker and when the city invited him to come to Rochester and assume full charge of its Municipal Museum late that year, he eagerly seized the opportunity. A new ordinance quickly placed the museum under a commission of three (later increased to seven) and granted it a regular place in the city budget. With a staff of nine workers, Parker tackled the job of reorganizing the exhibits. They built special cabinets of miniature exhibits for circulation in the schools and began the slow task of assembling habitat groups to interpret the life of the Seneca Indians and that of pioneers in the Genesee Country. In order better to define its scope, the commissioners changed the name of the institution in 1925 to the Museum of Arts and Sciences. Parker encouraged hobby groups to make use of its facilities and in 1934 helped to organize a Hobby Council, the first of its kind in the country, to conduct annual hobby shows at the museum. A searching probe by the Bureau of Municipal Research brought an enthusiastic endorsement of the program in 1931.

When the depression nevertheless curtailed the budget, Parker took quick advantage of the WPA funds made available in 1933 to employ artists, technicians and clerks in the construction of new displays that considerably transformed the museum.³¹

Mr. Thomas has reviewed the many contributions his predecessor, Arthur C. Parker, made to the Museum of Arts and Sciences in an earlier issue of *Rochester History*, and we can only summarize that story here. Dr. Parker, who received his honorary title from Union College in 1940, not only transformed its displays into educational exhibits that could both stir the imagination of idle visitors and instruct serious students, but also created a training institute for ambitious assistants whose assignment took them into neighboring fields and swamps

on nature study expeditions, into libraries and attics in search of accurate data for historical and scientific dioramas, and to many hill-top sites of Seneca and pre-Iroquois Indian villages for the archaeological materials with which the museum has constructed some of its most scholarly displays. The list of trained professionals, who have gone out to responsible posts elsewhere or have performed increasingly valuable services in the Rochester museum, is a notable one.³²

Still more important has been the stimulus given to thousands of school children, curious youths and adults, through the school extension program launched in 1930, the hobby clubs and public meetings, which so crowded the facilities at Edgerton Park (as Exposition Park was renamed in 1922) that a new building became necessary. The story of the donation of the building by Edward Bausch is well known, and its opening on East Avenue, late in May, 1942, represented a real accomplishment for Rochester in the museum field. We need only add that continued municipal support, plus that of the Rochester Museum Association, organized in 1935 and led for many years by Dr. John R. Williams, has enabled the museum, under the progressive leadership of its staff, to unite many of the community's educational and scientific interests behind the popular programs of this dynamic institution.³³

Other Museums and Galleries

The years which brought such radical changes to the municipal museum had their impact on the city's historical, scientific, and art groups as well. Although the extensive geological cabinet, prepared and sold to the university by Henry A. Ward, lost its dynamic interpreter with his sudden death in 1906, it retained the respect of natural scientists and found a place on the second floor of Dewey Hall when the Men's College moved to the River Campus in 1930. There it became associated with the zoological collection given by Dr. Richard Mott Moore among others, which occupied the third floor, and with various displays presented to the university by members or sections of the Academy of Science. The entire four floors of Dewey Hall served for a few years as a Natural History Museum under the direction of Dr. Edward J. Foyles, who undertook to remodel its displays, by constructing dioramas and dramatizing significant aspects of each collection. The students who assisted in this work secured a practical training in museum technology, but the cost of materials soon exceeded the meager budgets of these depression years, and following the retirement

of Dr. Foyles in 1938, the collections were stored or moved in a few cases to the Museum of Arts and Sciences.³⁴ These college cabinets, like most of the scientific museums of the second half of the 19th century, were chiefly important to their collectors; they were, in effect, the crossword puzzles of a generation of scholars fascinated by each additional link or unit added to their scientific patterns, but later students received little more inspiration from their crowded tables than we do from a completed puzzle.

However, if college attics across the country are weighted down by heavy crates of rocks, plaster duplicates of gorilla skeletons, and other stored and forgotten treasures of Ward's day, his generation's keen interest in the strange animals and plants of all parts of the world, which struck a more popular response from the start, continues to flourish in the public zoos, arboretums and herbariums of large cities. Rochester got its start in these fields with the planting of Highland Park in the early 1890's; it began to develop a zoo in 1896 and opened a conservatory in 1911 and a park herbarium in 1906.³⁵

We have, as previously noted, surveyed Rochester's art history in an earlier issue, but it is interesting to recall here that the efforts of the Art Club to found a gallery, after the sale of the Powers collection following the death of its patron in 1897, eventually received municipal encouragement in the form of a temporary exhibit hall at the Exposition grounds during the centennial year, 1912. The possibility that a public gallery might have evolved from that beginning, as occurred in so many other cities in these decades, was forestalled by the announcement of Mrs. James Sibley Watson's gift of a memorial gallery to the university. The opening of its Italian Renaissance building on University Avenue a year later, under the direction and support of the college, assured a prompt adoption of the best standards of art gallery techniques. The appointment of the club's able president, George L. Herdle, as director, took advantage of his many contacts in the principal art centers of the East to maintain a schedule of fresh shows by visiting artists. He welcomed the annual exhibits of the Rochester Art Club and arranged periodic displays of the art treasures normally secluded in local mansions and also those scattered in the humbler abodes of immigrants from abroad. Under Herdle's leadership and that of his daughter and successor in 1922, Gertrude Herdle [Moore], the gallery anticipated Parker's efforts at the museum to serve

the needs and interests of children with special tours and classes and through the loan of art works for display in school rooms. The enrollment of gallery patrons and of associate members actively working in some field of art and the launching of an annual show, later (1938) known as the Finger Lakes Exhibition, assured wide community participation, but the development of the gallery's public services, as compared with those of the museum or those of municipal galleries in other cities, has been restricted by limited resources which, however, make its very real accomplishments an eloquent testimony to the capabilities of its staff.⁵⁶

Meanwhile the Rochester Historical Society, unable to compete with its rapidly growing offspring, the municipal museum, which increasingly overshadowed its own displays at Edgerton Park, had channelled its energies, after the appointment of Edward R. Foreman as City Historian in 1922, into the field of publication. Under his editorship, and that of his successors after 1936, the Society brought out a succession of annual volumes which reached twenty four by 1947 (when mounting costs forced a discontinuation of the series) that only four large metropolitan historical societies had equalled in length or distinction. When the gift of a commercial building on Lake Avenue presented an opportunity in 1937 to open a separate historical museum under the direction of Sheldon Fisher, a former assistant of Arthur Parker, the cost of its independent maintenance soon proved too great for the society, which promptly abandoned the effort when another gift in 1940 made the historic Woodside mansion on East Avenue available for its headquarters. As the society had transferred its library and manuscript collections under a long term loan agreement to the Public Library at the time of its removal from Edgerton Park, so it now deposited most of its material exhibits with the Museum of Arts and Sciences, reserving for use at Woodside only those domestic furnishings, costumes, portraits and other items that would fit into the displays of a period house. The continued maintenance of that building and of an active program of lectures and parlor exhibits, under the leadership of Mrs. James S. Watson, Jr. as volunteer director, has brought the society back into the tradition of its founders in the late 1880's and has opened a distinguished early mansion to public inspection.⁵⁷

A similar opportunity to preserve the old Campbell-Whittlesey house on Troup Street had prompted Miss Helen Ellwanger to take

the lead in 1937 in the organization of the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York. The conscientious restoration of that dignified mansion with its Greek-temple architecture and its surprisingly colorful interior, as authenticated by the researches of Mrs. George B. Selden, provided Rochester at its dedication, in June 1939, with a charming replica of the gracious life of the more fortunate residents of its Flour City period. The new prominence given this noble structure by the completion of the Inner Loop past its lofty pillars assures a larger community interest, and the society has recently engaged Miss Helen Tanger as full time attendant.³⁸

Still another Rochester example of the historic house museum, which has become so prevalent in America, is the Susan B. Anthony House on Madison Street. It was largely through the untiring enterprise of Mrs. George Howard that the Susan B. Anthony Memorial Incorporated, which she organized in 1945, was able to acquire the former home of Mary Anthony and restore it in the authentic spirit of the period when the Anthony sisters made it the center of the woman's rights movement in Rochester. There Miss Susan Anthony spent many though widely scattered months recuperating after her numerous speaking tours and other campaigns; there she wrote her innumerable letters and resolutions, conferred with her biographer in the attic study, and entertained local and visiting leaders of the suffrage cause. There she spent the last and still hopeful days before her death in her eighty-sixth year on March 13, 1906; the continued maintenance of this modest Victorian home provides Rochester with an historic shrine of national, indeed almost world-wide, significance.³⁹

One other active interest that has appeared in each successive stage of our museum history has finally given birth to Rochester's most unique institution, the George Eastman House of Photography. The "20 fine pictures" in Stowell and Bishop's museum were of course paintings, but they were without doubt interesting only for their representational quality. The early daguerreotypists and Kelsey's Emporium achieved more accurate pictures and helped to nurture an interest in the new photographic techniques which captivated the youthful George Eastman in the mid-seventies and supported his efforts to simplify the process. Non commercial photographic exhibits and short-lived camera clubs appeared in Rochester during the nineties at the Y. M. C. A., Mechanics Institute and elsewhere, and after the turn of the century the Rochester Camera Club held annual exhibits featuring the work of

some of the most notable photographers of the day, including Alfred Steiglitz in 1903, as well as that of local enthusiasts. Perhaps the most extensive exhibit during pre-World War years was that set up at Convention Hall in July 1909 when the Photographers Association of America came to Rochester for its 29th annual convention. The 1785 registered delegates not only saw photographic art submitted from all parts of the country and Canada, but also participated in the first large inspection tours at Kodak Park, Bausch and Lomb, the Seneca Camera Works and their lesser rivals. The enthusiasm of the delegates reached such a pitch at the free banquet given by George Eastman at Ontario Beach Park that, after much urging, Eastman mounted a table on the hotel veranda but, with his "proverbial modesty," delivered only a few words.⁴⁰

George Eastman's modesty was matched by his responsibility, and both displayed his practical realism. As the city's most wealthy resident, Eastman had of course to build its largest and most elegant mansion, which he erected on East Avenue in 1905 and in the Georgian Colonial style then again in fashion. Its spacious accommodations for visiting celebrities, and for the Sunday musicales in which he took a quiet delight (as well as in the old masterpieces displayed on its walls), made it the unrivalled focal point of Rochester society during the next quarter century. Eastman's growing sense of social responsibility also led him to devote an increasingly large share of his great wealth to the community's well-being through many varied benevolences, yet in his modesty he probably never dreamed that the mansion, which he bequeathed to the university in 1932 as a residence for its president, would be remodeled fifteen years later as a museum of photography.

However, the continued popular interest in all forms of photography and the increased significance it has acquired in the modern world eventually created a demand for an adequate center in which the evidences of the growth of photographic art and of the evolution of photographic technology could not only be preserved but also be viewed by interested amateurs and studied by scholars. The successful development of this unique museum, under the leadership of General Oscar Solbert and Mr. Beaumont Newhall and with the backing of the University of Rochester and of the Eastman Kodak Company, has produced a museum that is not solely of one company or one industry. In its archives may be found prints of choice photographs from all countries, of early and of recent date. Its changing displays present

stimulating portrayals of various aspects of the art at different places and times, while permanent models and constructions show the evolution of the technology and illustrate its scientific principles. The addition of the Dryden Theater in 1951 and the reconstruction three years later, in a secluded portion of the ten-acre estate, of the modest Eastman homestead, brought from Waterville, New York, where George Eastman was born in 1854, help to make the George Eastman House of Photography still more attractive as a center both of community and of photographic interest.

As the exhibits and other public programs of several Rochester museums have developed, new techniques of communication have been explored and adopted. While the Rochester Historical Society, which as we have seen first launched a publication program in 1922, was compelled to substitute an annual leaflet, known as the *Genesee Country Scrapbook*, for its more weighty volumes after 1948, the Museum of Arts and Sciences began its monthly bulletin, *Museum Service*, in 1927, the Memorial Art Gallery issued its *Gallery Notes* as early as 1936, and the George Eastman House started its monthly *Image* in 1951. These publications have grown in size over the years as each institutional program has become more complex and the wealth of its researches has mounted. Moreover the three major museums have all added film programs which present historical or technical movies of a special interest that is often related directly to current exhibits in their halls or show cases.

In their varied efforts to extend the scope of their services the museum directors early discovered a need for closer collaboration in the planning and scheduling of programs. An abortive attempt to organize an Inter Museum Council occurred before the Second World War, but it was not until 1946 that the project was reviewed and successfully launched. Its member organizations include all six of the institutions whose development we have followed above, and four others in addition. Representatives from the University Library and the Rochester Public Library, both of which maintain active exhibit programs, and also from the Rochester Park Department and the City Historian's Office, join in the lively discussion of museum and gallery plans, and programs. The integration the council seeks in its occasional meetings is well illustrated by the cooperation all members are rendering to International Museum Week this October 8-14, 1956.

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