

OUTDOOR MUSEUMS

The merest suggestion of a new development is given in two of the tables of Part I, which show that museums of science have appeared recently in national parks. However, there is no hint of the promise which this holds out to museums of science in general, and there is no indication of its relation to museums of history.

The story of the movement ushered in by museums in national parks has been told elsewhere.⁵ The idea underlying it is that museums attempt too often to tell indoors, with the aid of objects that are fragments or imitations, stories that should be told outdoors where nature has provided genuine illustrative exhibits. Trails through woods and fields thus come to be regarded as paths of learning, and shrines built along the trails—trailside museums, each given over to a restricted subject—are found to be more useful for some kinds of instruction than "aisleside cases" in a museum building. It was inevitable that this doctrine should take root first in national parks—among mountains, river valleys, glaciers, forests, and an abundance of living things. The first demonstration was made a few years ago in the Yosemite where a committee of the American Association of Museums built a central museum and began a system of trailsides now taking in Glacier Point, Mariposa Grove, and Tuolumne Meadow. The most recent demonstration is an extensive series of trailsides created in the Yellowstone by the same committee under the continued leadership of Hermon Carey Bumpus.

Coming when decentralization of museums is under much discussion, trailsides in national parks are just in time to catch the imagination. Museums in cities have been moved to search local parks for natural features that can be explained on the spot. They have viewed State parks with a new interest. In consequence trailsides have already appeared in both of these settings.

The influence has spread into the field of history also, and it can be seen at work in the new Colonial National Monument, the George Washington Birthplace National Monument, and other historical areas administered by the National Park Service. At headquarters of the service a newly appointed park historian is developing history education, just as the park naturalist has already developed nature education in the parks. Historical houses may thus come to be foci of educational activity along the trails of history.

Museums of history in cities, some of which operate historical houses, are also studying the possibilities of this new decentralized museum instruction. Attention has also been drawn to the idea through the interest aroused by extensive reconstruction projects like the one at Williamsburg, Va., and Greenfield Village at Dearborn, Mich.

⁵ Coleman, Laurence Vail. *Contributions of Museums to Outdoor Recreation*. Washington, D. C., 1928. Copies of this report to the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation are obtainable from the American Association of Museums, Washington, D. C.