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MUSEUM WORK AT THE CAPITAL
OF CANADA

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MUSEUM WORK AT THE CAPITAL OF CANADA

Museum work at Ottawa, the capital of Canada, has recently received a renewed impetus from the completion of the new Victoria Memorial Museum building, and from the number of men interested in museum work who have been added to the staff of the Geological Survey. While the authorities of the Museum of the Department of Marine and Fisheries contemplate greater activity in the near future; while the National Art Gallery is pressing for a new building; and while the Ottawa College maintains a small museum, yet the greatest development centers in the Museum of the Geological Survey, which is naturally taking the lead in the museum work of the whole Dominion. Its policy of giving due attention to research, education, and recreation, without sacrificing any one of them, gives it a sound foundation on which to build.

The Museum is a division of the Geological Survey, which is a branch of the Department of Mines, and is thus supported by the Canadian Government. It dates from the foundation of the Geological Survey of Canada in 1843, and devotes its energies chiefly to the geology, mineralogy, paleontology, zoology, botany, and anthropology of Canada. In 1880 the Survey was moved from Montreal to the building in Sussex Street, Ottawa, and in 1911 to the present Victoria Memorial building.

The chief officer of the Geological Survey is the director, under whom are technical officers whose training especially qualifies them for museum work. They form the museum staff and from them an advisory committee has been appointed to take the initiative in all

museum matters. The best interests of the museum are considered to be served by encouraging the members of the staff to visit other museums, and to attend the meetings of scientists and museum administrators.

The new Victoria Memorial Museum building was erected at a cost of over a million dollars. It is practically fire-proof and is more than ordinarily satisfactory for museum purposes. The lighting is good by day, and can be supplemented by electric light supplied by dynamos in the building. There are three elevators for passengers and one for freight. At present seven large halls are available for exhibition while three more, now occupied by the National Gallery, are expected to be ultimately available for the museum. The adjacent land at the ends of the building provides ample space for additional buildings in architectural harmony with the main museum. Such additions would serve for offices, shops, and storerooms as more of the present building becomes needed for exhibition purposes. The building is maintained and cared for by the Department of Public Works, and is policed by the Dominion police.

The expeditions of the Geological Survey explore the more remote and varied regions of British North America, and because of the initiative, resourcefulness, and inventiveness of the men in charge, valuable collections are brought back to the Museum. So abundant is this material that the Museum is often able to send considerable quantities of specimens to other institutions. Specimens are purchased when needed, but the collections obtained by the survey are accompanied by much more valuable data in the form of photographs, maps, measurements, labels, accessories, etc., and the cost of collecting is less than that of purchase. One expedition in 1912, working about four and a half months, brought in one hundred and thirty-five boxes of specimens at a total cost of not over one thousand dollars, or less than eight dollars per box.

In order to prepare the material gathered by the Survey both for research and exhibition, skilled mechanics and artists are being added to the staff. It is recognized that one of the greatest needs of museums today is more mechanical and clerical help to release the higher paid specialist from much of the work which could just as well be done by others and so enable him to devote his entire time to his special work. Desirable shop work is often of such a special character that one has to search far and wide to find suitable men. One of the shops is devoted to the construction of relief models from topo-

graphic maps and photographs; another to preparing vertebrate fossils. Here the bundles of rock-enclosed fossil bones sent in from the field are unwrapped, the fossils freed from the matrix, broken bits cemented together, and prepared for exhibition. This shop is provided with the latest and most approved tools. In fact, all the equipment recently acquired is of the best, which in the end, of course, is the most economical. Some of the exhibition specimens are of old-fashioned mounting as obsolete as the frigates of Nelson's time, but they are being rapidly replaced by modern work from the museum's own shops.

Two of the large halls are already provided with cases; while the estimates for the current year provide for increasing this number to five halls. An Atlantic coast bird group about eighteen feet in length has been planned, a model for it has been made, and the material is partly prepared. An expedition is now in the field securing material for a group illustrating the Carolinian fauna, which extends only into the most southern part of Canada.

The public is welcomed during the process of installation, and we have many partial or tentative exhibits intended to be replaced by modern preparations as soon as possible. Before describing the exhibition halls there may be mentioned many study collections which contain some material too valuable to be subjected to the light of exhibition, specimens of value to scientists but of little interest to the average visitor, and other materials which do not lend themselves readily to exhibition. It may be of interest to note that in the anthropological department there are phonographic archives containing a large number of records of songs obtained from the various Indian tribes of Canada. Some of the tentative exhibits are especially simple, graphic, and pedagogic, in order that they may give elementary instruction and serve teachers and their classes, but such exhibits do not lack appreciation from the general public. One of these shows the difference between moths and butterflies. Another shows the life history of moths and butterflies. The labels are typewritten for the present in order that visitors may not have to wait until they have been fully edited and printed on the museum press. Some of these exhibits may be made permanent merely by perfecting the labels, while others will need rearrangement, remodeling, the substitution of better specimens, and the addition of more material, such as specimens for comparison, maps, models, photographs, drawings, casts, handbooks, and even scientific monographs. There is little appreciation

outside the ranks of museum workers of the amount of patient work necessary to install an exhibit so that it will be graphic and pedagogic, and so the museum work of the future may grow to be better than that of the past.

Some of the tentative exhibits are installed without cases, as in the hall of vertebrate paleontology, where they are enclosed by ropes and wooden bars supported by pipes screwed into iron disks of sufficient weight so that they cannot be easily displaced. Removable screens have also been made, every fourth one provided with a door and lock. Four or more of these can be laced together to form a room to surround an exhibit which is being remodeled or arranged. They are to be painted in harmony with the cases so that they are not noticeable at a distance, and when not in use they may be stored in a very small space. They take the place of temporary screens and are very much more economical as temporary screens are so often built and destroyed.

Temporary cases for an archeological exhibit have been provided at an expense of less than two hundred dollars merely by screwing some discarded case tops onto laboratory tables and painting them dead black. The tables cost about eight dollars apiece and serve very well for temporary purposes. When permanent cases are available the tables can be freed for use in the laboratory by the removal of only four screws. It might be said that these temporary exhibition cases entailed no expense to the exhibition side of the work, for the laboratory tables would be required in any event. This exhibit has been supplemented by scientific memoirs based upon collections from some of the regions represented.

Until general guides to the collections can be prepared a brief directory of the building has been printed on our own press. One of these will be framed and placed at the foot of each elevator and it is our intention to post them in public places in the vicinity. When each department can write two or three pages for each line of the present directory the result will be a brief guide to the entire Museum. A hand-book of some thirty or forty pages illustrated by fifteen full-page plates is in the hands of the printer but it relates only to one case of specimens, and while such hand-books are desirable, too many museums overlook the need of the public for a very brief guide to entire halls and to the whole museum. On the other hand, hand-books to one or two cases, similar to the one just mentioned, are also desirable. A visitor may have insufficient time to study the collection in detail, and such a hand-book enables him to study it elsewhere.

It illustrates more than half the specimens exhibited in the case, so the visitor from Halifax or Vancouver may carry to his friends at home a glimpse of a large part of the exhibit with a full description and reference to authorities, in case he cares to pursue the subject into original sources.

The Museum is making a special effort to prepare timely and useful exhibits. One of these, placed in the most conspicuous portion of the main entrance, was hastily made to meet an impending demand for knowledge. In 1912 the tent caterpillars were so numerous in the vicinity of Ottawa that they destroyed the leaves of many shade and ornamental trees in the city and many fruit trees on the farms, as well as forest trees. They were even so numerous that their presence on the tracks delayed railroad trains many hours. The number of eggs on the trees in the spring of 1913 showed that this damage would be repeated, so this exhibit was prepared for the benefit of the people. One side of the case shows the life history of the tent caterpillar and some of the trees which it attacks. On the opposite side of the case are shown some of the means of controlling this pest. There are birds, lumps of chemicals, and a pail of commercial tanglefoot, things of small value in themselves but indicating how people may protect themselves against this insect danger. Magnifying glasses are used as an adjunct to this exhibit so that some of the smaller specimens may be more easily seen. When pressing need for such an exhibit is past it may be retired or placed in another part of the building. This is an example of how officers of the Museum are endeavoring to find out what is useful to the people, to prepare a helpful exhibit, and to invite the people, through the public press, to avail themselves of it. The citizens pay the taxes which make the scientific work of the institution possible and the staff feel in honor bound to lay aside their research for a time in order to explain in non-technical language such results of their study as may be valuable or merely interesting to the public.

Another way in which the Museum has been useful is illustrated by a page of designs taken from Indian handiwork which was distributed by an art teacher among his students at the public schools for the purpose of bettering the designs of furniture, wall paper, stoves, etc.

Officers of the Museum have sometimes served the public on commissions or in other ways outside of the institution. For example, one of our men was a member of the international commission which arbitrated the seal question.

No admission fee is charged. The Museum is open to the public from nine to five on week days except Christmas. The impressions of childhood are so easily made that every possible effort is made to attract the children. It is hoped that even greater attractions may be offered to working people and children as public opinion develops and the Museum gains in facilities. Normal school classes frequently study in the exhibition halls under the direction of their teachers, and these students, who are soon to be teachers themselves in the scattered schools of our country, may spread far and wide the truths learned at the Museum. All classes, from the most humble peasant to the Governor-general are amongst the visitors. It is unfortunate that the hours when the Museum is open coincide so closely with the hours of labor as to give only those who have wealth or leisure the greatest opportunities to visit the Museum. It is really the people who are unable to travel, or perhaps to buy books and pictures, who need the services of the institution more than any other class.

Among other facilities of our Museum may be mentioned the library of the Geological Survey, containing over twenty thousand volumes on natural science, which is at the disposal of the staff and constantly receiving additions especially chosen for their use. The library naturally suggests a tie between the Museum and other educational institutions, making it one with the schoolhouse, the library, and the research laboratory. Newly acquired books are placed in a special book case, as are the recent magazines.

A lecture hall forms part of the equipment of the Victoria Memorial Museum building, and this year's estimates include funds for furnishing this hall with the necessary seats and with projection apparatus. Here will be held lectures for scientists, teachers and their classes, and for those who wish general entertainment along the lines of our work. Even now short informal talks by members of the staff, sometimes illustrated with lantern pictures or by specimens in exhibition halls, offices, and shops are given when desired.

Space in the lecture hall and other parts of the building will undoubtedly be used soon for the meetings of scientific societies and other organizations carrying on related work so that the Museum may be expected to become a center for the scientific activities of the country. Space may also be given, from time to time, for temporary exhibitions which may find a place in the Museum without disturbing the regular work. The National Art Gallery of Canada is even now occupying

three of the large halls of the building. It is expected that the Gallery will in the near future require a building of its own, and that the Museum will need the space now occupied by the Gallery.

The photographic division of the Survey is perhaps as well equipped as any in North America. It maintains a vast store of negatives taken on expeditions and in the Museum, and it makes lantern slides. The negatives form a national historical archive, which will be of increasing value as time passes. It affords illustrations for the publications of the Museum and the Survey and for scientific and educational works. They may also be used in the popular press and many will serve educational purposes through encyclopedias, text-books, magazines, and newspapers. The lantern slides may be used eventually throughout Canada, as well as in the lecture hall, for educational purposes.

In order to extend more widely the knowledge of the Museum, publishers are encouraged to make postcards from photographs furnished and carefully labeled by the Museum. One of these, for example, not only shows a picture of the Museum building, but informs the reader that the Museum belongs to the whole country, houses various natural history collections, carries on expeditions and research, prepares exhibits for the scientist, the teacher, and the pupil, and issues publications which are widely distributed. These postcards are handled through the regular trade and entirely without expense to the Museum.

In order to carry the Museum to the people of the country who cannot visit it in person, the Geological Survey for many years has made a practice of sending cabinets of minerals throughout the Dominion. A cabinet containing five trays of minerals with a book describing them is sent to certain of the higher schools throughout Canada, while a smaller collection in an exhibition tray is sent to lower schools. Other departments of the Museum will take up this extension work as soon as possible for the purpose of making the collections helpful to all the people of the country. This idea is in full harmony with the work of university extension, traveling libraries, and branch banks. Probably the Museum will become eventually a clearing house for all the museums of the Dominion. Material may be either loaned or given to the smaller museums, of which there are over thirty, most of them in the larger cities or college towns of the east. It would cause no loss to the people of Canada who support the Museum to give specimens to these other museums as there they would be accessible to more people and housed without cost to the government.

In this way the Museum would do its work more effectively than if all the specimens were held at one place. It would gain space for exhibits and reach a greater number of people without having to pay for the extra space, light, heat, and other maintenance.

The time will no doubt come when the Museum will go even farther than this and install useful exhibits and moving picture lectures on railroad cars which may be side-tracked at places where no museum exists. The business men of Canada both last year and this have sent a train known as the "Made in Canada Special" throughout the length and breadth of the country. This train contained exhibits of the manufactures of the country, and stopped only a few hours in the places visited, but it was thronged with visitors anxious to learn of the manufactured products of the country. Agricultural colleges and railroads have been using a somewhat similar method to uplift the people, and if business men find it worth their while to educate the citizens it would seem to the author to be the duty of educators to consider this method for museum extension. Revolutionary as it may seem, it is probably true that the museum work of the capital of Canada will, before many years have passed, include this kind of museum extension work among its activities.

The work of the Museum is apparently on a sound foundation. It would be difficult to imagine the kind of men we have on the Survey allowing excessive zeal for popular exhibits to vitiate scientific truth. On the other hand elementary educational work and recreation for the public is considered a proper and desirable part of museum activity. We may thus look forward confidently to sane progress in museum methods in the central Museum and in any other of the Canadian museums which may affiliate with it.

