THE LIBERTY HALL MUSEUM

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When a society or a civilization perishes, one condition may always be found. They forgot where they came from. They lost sight of what brought them along. The hard beginnings were forgotten and the struggles farther along. They became satisfied with themselves. Unity and common understanding there had been, enough to overcome rot and dissolution, enough to break through their obstacles. But the mockers came. And the deniers were heard. And vision and hope faded. And the custom of greeting became "What's the use?" And men whose forefathers would go anywhere, holding nothing impossible in the genius of man, joined the mockers and the deniers. They lost sight of what brought them along.¹

-- Carl Sandburg

What will happen when the Liberty Hall site has been completely excavated and its history recreated as much as possible? It is quite possible that a small museum will be available to the public displaying the culture of this Scotch-Irish group that inhabited Liberty Hall almost two-hundred years ago. A museum representing the reconstructed culture of the Scotch-Irish group that inhabited Liberty Hall would be an excellent way to collect, preserve, and display what a good deal of hard work has exposed through archaeology. Having a museum to display this reconstructed culture would be valuable to the school in that it would be an educational institution. "The chief claim for the importance of museums as educational institutions lies in the objects they collect and protect. They use objects -- original evidence usually available only in a museum -- to tell the dramatic story of the earth through some period of time."\(^2\) This museum would also be invaluable to the community for a variety of reasons. "First of all, it would benefit all the schools in the area, it would be instructive for all residents, it would provide a realistic picture of a portion of the

community's history, it collects, preserves and displays material often of no intrinsic value, but priceless for illustrating the community's past, and last it would be an infallable index to a community's progressiveness.  

There are three types of museums today. There is the art museum, the science museum, and the history museum. The museum formed from the Liberty Hall excavation procedures would be a history museum. The term "history" is used because it infers that the museum is related to "discovering, preserving, and interpreting important knowledge about past human behavior."  

A historical museum should be sure to present, or display five basic things indicative of this type of museum. 'It should display the first exploration, early settlement, its economic growth, lines of trade and communication, as well as giving a representative sample of the persons living in that culture.' In other words, the poor people in the community should be highlighted just as much as the rich persons are in the various displays.

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5 Ibid., p. 57.
Having briefly discussed why a museum would be beneficial, and what type of museum would be constructed, I think we should delve into the actual organization of this museum. The organization of this museum could be done effectively through displaying how each of the five hypotheses was tested. As we have learned, before excavation procedures begin, it is a good idea to set down a set of hypotheses you plan to test. This gives the program several realistic goals to attempt to solve.

The first hypothesis is that the Liberty Hall Academy, established by the Scotch-Irish, was quite different from other early academic institutions. One exhibit could be completely devoted to the validity of this hypothesis. For example, this exhibit could reveal that the academy, situated where it was, was the first school of its kind west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. This exhibit could also display the rules that were to be obeyed by the students. These, being as strict as they were would also uphold the validity of this hypothesis.

The second hypothesis is that the school was culturally isolated. Another exhibit could be devoted to the validity of this hypothesis. More work needs to be done to decide whether this hypothesis is true or not. The situation of Liberty Hall at the time it was occupied would tend to uphold the hypothesis, in that
the school was culturally isolated. However, many artifacts have been discovered through excavation which would tend to make this hypothesis false. For example, the Spanish coins indicate that some type of trade may have taken place within this culture. Pottery fragments discovered also tend to negate this hypothesis. Nevertheless, further excavation may give the real answer, if not this exhibit could give both sides to this hypothesis.

The third hypothesis states that the students' extra-curricular activities were limited. This seems to have been the case. Not much has been found in the way of children's articles, other than marbles. Research has also shown that these students had to abide by a strict set of rules. A third exhibit could be devoted to this hypothesis as well.

The fourth hypothesis states that the Scotch-Irish group that inhabited the Liberty Hall Academy was a homogeneous one. As of now this statement would appear to be valid since research has discovered this was indeed an all-male group that attended the academy. A fourth exhibit could be devoted to the validity of this hypothesis as well.

The fifth hypothesis states that the Scotch-Irish placed little emphasis on aesthetics. Histories indicate
that the Scotch-Irish "were tough, pragmatic, and impressively uninterested in the elegant life". This would be the largest of the display areas because this hypothesis deals on a large scale with the Scotch-Irish culture itself. As of now there are arguments for both sides. The rules that were placed upon the students tend to uphold this hypothesis, in that they were a very strict culture. However, pottery that has been excavated reveals a definite emphasis on aesthetics as well as a regard for elegance. Some of the pottery has beautiful designs with various colors. A culture not interested in aesthetics probably would not have pottery like this. Maybe this exhibit will have to defend both sides of this hypothesis.

There are two kinds of exhibits, temporary exhibits and permanent exhibits. These exhibits I have just discussed would be permanent exhibits because they are the actual foundation for the museum itself. There are two kinds of permanent exhibits, the systematic and the ecological. "Systematic exhibits are organized according to similarity of the objects and their 'genetic' relationship to each other."6 "Ecological exhibits are

6 Ibid., p. 116.
organized according to area, 'habitat', or living relationship to each other.\textsuperscript{7} An example of an ecological exhibit for Liberty Hall would be a reproduction of a room in the Liberty Hall Academy with furniture, pottery, clothing, and educational utensils being displayed. An example of a systematic exhibit would be one displaying all the various types of pottery that have been discovered at Liberty Hall. These examples should bring to light the distinction between an ecological exhibit and a systematic exhibition.

Temporary exhibits differ from permanent exhibits in a number of ways in addition to the matter of time. Temporary exhibits have more flair; they are organized in a manner to gratify all of the senses. It is gaudy, noisy, conspicuous, and at the same time superficial, but universally appealing.\textsuperscript{8} These techniques attract and hold the attention of the onlookers much more than boring, lifeless exhibits. "The museum must attract visitors and give them a pleasant experience while educating them."\textsuperscript{9} This type of flair is seem much more in temporary exhibits

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p. 116.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p. 130.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., p. 131.
rather than permanent exhibits because the rules are suspended for temporary exhibits. "A temporary exhibit offers much more freedom than a permanent exhibition."\(^{10}\)

A permanent exhibit must be part of your overall plan, such as defending the validity of the five Liberty Hall hypotheses. On the other hand, the short-term exhibition can be experimental and not limited in subject matter. It can also be installed quickly and inexpensively, and is not so importantly calculated as a permanent exhibition. These types of exhibitions could benefit a Liberty Hall Museum also. Temporary exhibitions could be set up in addition to the five permanent exhibitions. These temporary exhibits may "include photographs, documents, and objects which for one reason or another are not a part of the permanent exhibits."\(^{11}\)

"A good exhibit, regardless of what kind it is, will have certain characteristics:

(1) It must be safe and secure.
(2) It must be readily visible.
(3) It must catch the eye.
(4) It must be neat and in good order.
(5) It must hold the onlookers attention.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 131.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 117.
(6) It must be worthwhile.
(7) It must be in good taste."^{12}

In effect, a good exhibit will employ significant objects of importance in a well planned fashion. Good planning involves "good labels, harmony between objects and labels, and good design."^{13} Using this type of planning and care will insure that the onlookers will enjoy themselves while they are being educated.

There are four approaches to planning an exhibit. The first is known as the "open storage" approach. This means that as soon as objects are acquired they are put on display. This often accounts for a lack of organization and eventual chaos.

The second approach is known as the "object approach". This means that the exhibits are planned, and the objects are taken from collections. "The objects are 1) selected; 2) arranged in a case; 3) researched; 4) labeled; and 5) lighted."^{14} This often leads to a display with no educational content.

The third approach, the "idea approach" is an attempt to arrange objects to present a certain idea. This

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^{12} Ibid., p. 118.
^{13} Ibid., p. 119.
^{14} Ibid., p. 121.
method leads to a presentation with "many words, some pictures and no objects."

The fourth, and best approach, is known as the "combined approach". This means that objects and ideas are selected at the same time. This approach reinforces the main thrust of your museum by using significant, worthwhile objects. In the realm of a possible Liberty Hall museum this approach should definitely be considered.

So far I have discussed why we should have a museum, what type of museum, and how to arrange the museum. The next topic to be explored here will be how to initiate or start this museum. "Organizing a museum, like starting any other organization, requires a collective effort of a number of persons enthusiastic about the project." Enthusiasm is the main point to be stressed here. The initial success of the efforts to start a museum is directly proportional to the enthusiasm behind them. This informal group, or committee must agree on what type of museum to establish. In our case undoubtedly a history museum. It must then decide on the kind or organization and governing body it wishes to have. This hypothetical Liberty Hall museum would be

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15 Ibid., p. 122.

pretty small so a good organization plan may be one such as this:

(1) Director
(2) Secretary
(3) Curator of Collections
(4) Curator of Education
(5) Librarian and Archivist
(6) Janitor

This group must also decide on the possible "location of the museum, its initial program, and its preliminary scheme of financing." Once these basic concepts have been discussed by the group, they can take their plans to their overseer. In the case of a Liberty Hall museum the overseer would most likely be President Huntley. The main reason for this meeting is to let the overseer become aware of how significant a role a museum would play in the school, as well as in the community. After this, careful preparation and planning should take place. A few important committees should be set up, such as "Membership, Finance, Exhibits, Programs, Publicity, Nominations, and Incorporation and Bylaws." With this the museum should

17 Ibid., p. 81.
18 Ibid., p. 82.
be fairly well on its way provided everyone is enthusiastic and doesn't lose interest.

In addition to this brief discussion on plans for a possible Liberty Hall museum here are several guides that should be of some help.

"(1) The amount of floor space devoted to exhibits should probably be no more than one-third of the total floor space of the building.

(2) In the daily operation of the museum, the most important consideration is security; the second is cleanliness.

(3) The whole purpose of the museum and all of its activities is public education. Any expenditure of time, money, or opportunities must ultimately be justifiable as contributing significantly to this end.

(4) The properly run museum operation is one whose values and priorities are in keeping with the order of obligations: A) collections; b) records; c) exhibits; d) activities.

(5) Objects in the museum's collections must be significant. That is, they must be useful in teaching facts and illustrating concepts. Objects of no great aesthetic or educational
"value do not belong in a public museum." 19

"The modern museum has reached a stage of
development where it seeks to spread its educational
message beyond its own walls." 20 This definitely holds
ture for a possible Liberty Hall museum. "We must all
surely agree that there can be no substitute for historical
truth" 21, and a Liberty Hall museum would convey this
well to the students of Washington and Lee University as
well as the general public. "Every college, and every
University has the work of creating and maintaining good
museums of its own as tools for its teaching and research." 22


20 T. R. Adam, The Museum and Popular Culture (New

21 I. N. Hume, Historical Archeology (New York: A.

22 L. V. Coleman, College and University Museums
(Washington, D.C.: The American Association of Museums,
1942), p. 65.
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