

# THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MUSEUM IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

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## 1. THE IDEA OF A MUSEUM

A museum may be defined as a place where collections of objects are preserved and exhibited; a repository of relics which reflects the phenomena of man, nature or both. In other words it is a place which preserves the objects of nature eg. the natural history museum of plants, animals and fossils, or a place which has come into existence through the medium of the human hand and brain eg. daily life, ethnology, culture and art.

The word 'museum' is derived from the Greek work 'museion', which in translation means 'a sanctuary dedicated to the Muses of Greek mythology'. The nine Muses held positions of esteem among the daughters of Zeus and used, as an abode, the grotto on Mount Helicon and the sacred well of Hippocrène. The Muses were assigned the task of revealing to man the magic of the arts and the mysteries of science. In late Roman times, the Muses were differentiated according to their functions: Calliope (heroic poetry); Clio (History); Euterpe (glutes); Terpsichore (lyric poetry-dance); Thalia (comedy); Polyhymnia (mimic art); Urania (astronomy). Although the names and the functions of the Muses vary considerably, the Muses remained the most influential and lovable creations, the personifications of the highest intellectual and artistic aspirations, the inspiration of poetry and divine wisdom.

Thus the idea of preserving material relics for posterity was recognised as early as classical times, although the idea of a place specifically set aside in a special building, is of more recent origin. Nevertheless, the preservation "mentality" provided a catalyst for museums both qualitatively and quantitatively, although one should not neglect the stimulus provided by the Renaissance in Italy and later in Europe generally.

The museum as an institution should not only be identified with the preservation image. In addition to its **preservation image**, the museum provides a **display service**. In fact the process of **collecting, preserving and presenting** is an inseparable trinity, whether it is in the sphere of natural history or cultural history. This concept of collecting, preserving and presenting has not always been emphasized or even recognized, and it is only really in the modern museum that it has reached fruition. The modern museum reflects a changing emphasis of philosophy of life and mode of existence and bears witness to the interests, ambitions and attitudes of the community of which it is an integral part.

While the path of museum development may not present an exciting epic, the present image of museums is an exciting one. Museums have, to a large degree, discarded the cloak of "dullness, dryness and death", and are no longer viewed as a refuge from inclement weather conditions, Sunday afternoon boredom and public holiday inertia. The increased popularity of museums is not only the product of additional finance and aesthetic progress in the arrangement of

exhibits, but especially the consequence of a new attitude of mind which recognises the educative value of museums, either at the level of scholarly research or school-child curiosity. This is reflected in the increased museum-school liaison and the number of museum attached to educational institutions eg. universities.

## 2. A SCHOOL MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CONSERVATION

In a world dominated by scientific-technical trends, there is clear evidence that man's natural environment is being threatened by the by products of the scientific revolution. Words such as 'pollution' and 'nature conservation' are being used with an ever increasing frequency. The conservation of natural resources has become a 'sine qua non' of man's future existence. This is realized by both individuals and organizations who are devoting a great deal of time, energy and money to this very worthwhile project.

Another by-product of the technical revolution is the increased tempo of life, while material values have very often supplanted the spiritual ones. Amidst the turmoil of pressure and change man is in definite danger of losing perspective of his true role as a social being. Under the so-called hammer of 'progress', man's cultural heritage is gradually being whittled away and being replaced by a modern and seemingly more efficient physical domain. Not only are the relics of man being impaired by the destructive agency of time but also by man himself in the quest for 'progress'.

Since the relics of man's culture are the means of linking man's past with his present, thus ensuring the necessary continuity, it is imperative that man's relics be preserved. After all, are not the material remains of the past the vehicle by which man can understand himself and his historical past? It is fortunate for man, that there is an increasing awareness of cultural presentation and conservation. However, it is also a matter of concern that so much of South Africa's cultural heritage has fallen prey to "innovation and reconstruction." Nevertheless, it is heartwarming to know that organizations of the nature of the Simon van der Stel Foundation are in existence and are doing fine work in the field of cultural conservation.

Young people should be encouraged to contribute to the cultural conservation project by preserving the relics of man in a school museum, by preserving the antiquities in the home, by visiting battle-fields, historic homes, historic sites and museums. An attitude of mind in this sphere and developed at this stage, will ensure an adult of the future who has an awareness of conservation. For was it not once said: "Man without learning and the remembrance of things past, falls into beastly sottishness?"

In addition "History is too vast a subject to be confined to the classroom and too far ranging to be restricted by a time-table. It contains limitless opportunities for moving out into the world. History is the

sum of humanity and must not be divorced from man and world by the school bell. Historical characters are more than names: They were men who breathed, who hoped and feared, who were in the world as we are. If we are to understand their times, we must understand the men themselves, and for this we must go to the relics and the reminders they have left" (Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters: The Teaching of History, p.153).

It is therefore against the background that cultural conservation is vitally important to man, that young people should develop an awareness of conservation, and that history is not confined to the cover of a textbook and to the four walls of a classroom, that a history museum was established at the Krugersdorp High School.

### 3. THE MODUS OPERANDI

A sincere belief in the educational and other values of a school museum is the initial motivating factor in undertaking such a project. A preliminary meeting of the history department staff was scheduled to discuss all relevant matters. This was followed by the distribution of circular letters to the parents and museums in South Africa requesting materials for exhibition purposes. The venue at the school was meticulously prepared by members of the school history society ensuring both security for the exhibits and a degree of aesthetic quality. As the materials were brought in by the pupils, so a temporary catalogue was prepared. Once the main body of exhibits were arranged into South African and International sections, a permanent catalogue was prepared, which at this stage refers to some five-hundred exhibits. As a fitting climax to this joint teacher-pupil project, the official unveiling of the "A.N. Boyce Museum" plaque was performed at a function at which Professor A.N. Boyce addressed the history society and presented an exhibit to the museum. And so the museum was born.

The history society is primarily responsible for the organization of the museum. A priority duty is that of being in attendance in the museum at those times of opening to the school body. The museum is open at both intervals, while a pre- and post-school session is instituted at times when a museum competition increases the flow of visitors to the museum. In addition, members of the history society are responsible for suggesting ways and means of improving the museum, both in the display area and in the operational sphere. Finally, the society also undertakes a variety of fund-raising activities designed to provide the necessary financial backing for the purchase of exhibits, curtaining, carpeting, printing materials, picture-frames and competition prizes.

At this stage it is convenient to provide a list of the other activities which the society can undertake: present a paper for discussion, organizing the visit of a guest speaker, debating, mock trials, parliamentary sessions, model making, drama production, recordings, photographic competitions, audio-visual programmes, excursions, film evenings, historical evenings, community projects, creating an historical awareness in school, current affairs board, newspaper production, general publications, "School History" research, Parents' Day and the production of teaching aids. There is therefore considerable potential for enabling a historical society to be a living organism, vibrant and enthusiastic.

### 4. THE PURPOSE OF A MUSEUM

One may pose the question: "To what extent does the existence of the school museum have a value in the educational teaching (pedagogic-didactic) situation?" As a result of practical experience in this sphere, one can state with assurance that the museum can illustrate the following:

1. It can serve to illustrate the values of studying history.
2. It can serve to illustrate what history is, what content it covers, the scope of history, course of history, classification of history and development of history.
3. It can serve as a point of departure in assignment work.
4. It can provide the basis for material used to undertake a practical exercise in the historical method, e.g. school history.
5. It can form the basis for competitions, quizzes and questionnaires.
6. It can serve as an introduction to lessons.
7. It can be used as a resource centre.
8. It can be used as a means of pupil evaluation.

To what extent is a school history museum a practical project? One may take the point of view that in terms of the number of activities and expenditure of time, money and energy, the museum does not justify its existence. There are obstacles, but these are not insurmountable. It would be a "rare" school which faced so many problems that a museum undertaking is an impossibility. It is a worthwhile and challenging project and one that deserves full consideration. **This is an opportunity for the history teachers of South Africa to play a significant role in the conservation of our cultural heritage.**

### 5. THE CONTENTS OF THE MUSEUM

#### 1. Historical Newspapers

These may be original newspapers, e.g. the outbreak of World War II as reflected in the newspapers of the 3rd and 4th September 1939; the landing of man on the Moon; the end of the Vietnam War. Alternatively, reprints of previous issues are made by newspaper and other companies, e.g. the establishment of Union in 1910, the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915. Pupils and adults derive great delight in reading the events, advertisements, and details of a period in the past.

#### 2. Framed Newspaper Headlines

Here one is concerned with merely one dramatic page, which is framed and attached to a wall of the museum, or placed in a periodical display rack.

#### 3. Framed Historical Documents

Usually commercially produced, these documents are facsimiles of originals, e.g. the Retief-Dingaan Treaty produced by the Voortrekker Museum in Pietermaritzburg; the Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen American States in 1776.

#### 4. Framed Historical Photographs

Original photographs from a wide range of scenes from the immediate locality. Calendars reprint

original photographs; newspapers also offer such historic photographs. The visual impact of the photographs is quite considerable.

5. **Framed Coins and Banknotes**

Placed behind a frame, security is enhanced. These coins and notes should be related to a particular period of time and a particular event.

6. **Framed Stamps**

These should also be relevant to a particular historical period or event; may be arranged chronologically or thematically.

7. **Historical Models**

Usually produced by the pupils, but may be commercially made. Examples of models: O'Neill's Cottage, Parthenon, Roman Chariot, Medieval Castle, Monastery, papyrus scrolls, Tower of London.

8. **Historic Maps**

Originals, reprints, cotton handkerchief maps used by the soldiers in the Second World War.

9. **War Materials**

Maps, charts, instructions of soldiers, weapons, photographs, clothing and uniforms, badges, decorations, P.O.W. documents, eating utensils, compasses, binoculars, hand-grenades, leather ware, helmets, newspapers, books, propaganda pamphlets, survival kits, posters.

10. **School Materials**

Magazines, photographs, report cards, note books, textbooks, hymn books, spoons, cups, trophies, uniforms, programmes relevant to sporting, academic and cultural occasions.

11. **Books**

Early publications, including sets of encyclopaedia, bibles, dictionaries, history books, diaries. Recent publications, e.g. "With Shield and Assegai", "Voortrekker Trails."

12. **Historical Monument Series**

Books, models, photographs, pamphlets.

13. **Commemorative Issues**

Coins — 1820 Settler 150th Anniversary: Kimberley Centenary; Pretoria-Delagoa Bay Railway line, magazines, brochures, cups, books, diaries.

14. **Paintings**

Originals, prints.

15. **Personality Parade**

Framed photographs of national and international personalities, past and present.

16. **Archaeological Finds**

Stone implements and weapons, skulls, shrapnel, mining equipment, mineral water bottles.

17. **Travelogue**

Framed postcards of cities with historical treasures — London, Paris, Rome, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town.

18. **Film Programmes**

Arrangement of booklets, e.g. Waterloo. Young Winston, Shangani Patrol, Tora Tora Tora.

19. **Selected Feature Booklets**

Produced by companies, newspapers — Heritage of Gold, Historical Monuments of South Africa.

20. **Historic Flags**

A selection of national flags, international symbols builds atmosphere in the museum.

21. **Museum Brochures**

A selection of brochures from museums in South Africa and overseas.

22. **Primary Source Materials**

Publications containing primary source material — diaries, letters, documents, maps.

23. **Specific Displays**

Possibilities include Gold, Diamonds, the Voortrekkers, The Huguenots, The Anglo-Boer War, the French Revolution, Napoleon, Africa.

The exhibits will to a large extent depend on the community in which the school is situated. In the case of a rural setting, the exhibits will reflect the way of life of a rural community, with emphasis on the soil and agriculture. In a school, situated in a mining community, one would find exhibits, relevant to the story of mining in the area. Whatever the case might be, the improvement of communications has brought each community closer to every other community, enabling a cross-fertilization of ideas.

Pictures help young people to understand clearly what they would otherwise have to imagine. Pictures may also help to correct mistaken impressions. A printed page becomes more meaningful for the young reader if it is accompanied by suitable illustrations, indeed pictures are indispensable supplements to reading. They are an effective means of communicating subject-matter and often may form the core of the lesson. By means of striking pictures the interest of children can be aroused because they give colour and romans to the subject.

**A.N. Boyce:** *TEACHING HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS.*