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TERRITORIAL MUSEUM

PROGRAM

FEBRUARY 6, 1973

TERRITORIAL MUSEUM PROGRAM  
PROPOSAL

Problem

Articles of importance in the historical and cultural development of the North are being removed from the Northwest Territories and deposited in various centres in southern Canada and abroad. This removal is being conducted by researchers licensed under the Archaeological Site Regulations, whose specimens are deposited with the National Museum of Man in Ottawa, by departments of the Federal Government which wish to establish a northern collection and, most seriously, by many untrained persons who obtain various artifacts when travelling, or working in the North. In the case of the latter group, the artifacts are often used as ornaments in the home and they are lost to Canadian society as a whole and Northern society in particular.

It is expected that the present rapid development of the North will lead to even greater pressure on the historical, archaeological and cultural resources of the Northwest Territories. There will be greater damage to historic and archaeological sites, an increase in pilferage of these sites and decreased emphasis on the native culture as tourist and industrial development occurs and urban expansion takes place. The result will be the loss of many articles of great significance to residents of the Northwest Territories and to Canadians as a whole.

Objectives

In response to these pressures the Government of the Northwest Territories wishes to initiate a program which will achieve the following goals:

1. Reduce the despoilation of historic and archaeological sites.
2. Retain items of northern historical, archaeological and cultural significance in the Northwest Territories.
3. Provide a restoration and storage program for historical, archaeological and cultural artifacts.
4. Preserve the native traditions of the North and contribute to the development and retention of pride in a northern identity.

### Factors

In February, 1971, the Northwest Territories Council expressed concern about the preservation of the history of the North and requested that the Territorial Government examine the whole question of museums. The Commissioner subsequently established an ad hoc Museum Committee, which was charged with reviewing museum policy and recommending the most feasible approach to the problem in the Territories. This Committee was composed of Dr. W. Taylor and Miss B. Tyler of the National Museum of Man, Mr. L. Martin of the Nova Scotia Museum and Mr. A. Stevenson, Mr. R. Carney and Mr. T. Boxer of the N.W.T. Historical Advisory Board.

The ad hoc Museum Committee submitted its recommendations to the Commissioner in the form of a report entitled Museum Document No. 2. A slightly modified version of the recommendations was submitted to the Northwest Territories Council as Recommendation No. 4-46, and was approved on January 28, 1972. The approved program recommended the establishment of a central museum in Yellowknife, with a strong extension orientation. The original capital estimate for the central museum was approximately \$700,000.

### Alternatives

The Commissioner of the Northwest Territories has authority under the Historical Resources Ordinance (Northwest Territories, 1970) to establish museums, designate historic and archaeological sites, create public archives and purchase artifacts of cultural, historical and archaeological significance. He has also been delegated the authority to administer the Northwest Territories Archaeological Site Regulations (Canada, 1960). The Commissioner, therefore, has the authority to develop a program to achieve the stated goals and it is felt that only the Government has the resources and continuity to effectively achieve these goals.

Four alternative programs would appear worthy of consideration:

- (1) The provision of increased assistance to the many small, community operated museums presently in existence in the Northwest Territories.
- (2) The development of two or three regional museums.
- (3) The development of one central museum to service the entire Northwest Territories.
- (4) The development of a central museum with a strong extension orientation for the support of community museums, or regional museums where community museums are not requested.

Alternative 1: The Support of Community Museums:

A number of community museums have been established in the Northwest Territories by groups of citizens who have an interest in the history and culture of the North. These museums range from very small establishments with limited display and storage facilities, to large collections which have been well cared for and well displayed. The collection started by the Oblate Fathers in Fort Smith is a good example of the latter.

Community museums, based on a local historical society, have the advantage of retaining local artifacts for local appreciation. Consequently they can generate interest among the local citizenry and increase the possibilities of obtaining items of value. These museums, however, also have a number of disadvantages. Because they are based on a local historical society, they are subject to all the hazards of voluntary community groups. The museums may operate well while a core of dedicated, interested persons belong to the society but the society may collapse once these persons leave. This is a major hazard in the Northwest Territories with its highly transient population patterns. The community museums that have had the greatest success in the North are those in Fort Smith and Churchill, which have been promoted by a permanent institution (The Roman Catholic Church) rather than voluntary historical societies.

Community museums are also hampered by a lack of funds. Consequently, their display areas are often inadequate, they cannot carry out any restoration program and they cannot afford the expertise required to operate an efficient, modern museum program. They are limited in their purchasing capabilities, their collections tend to be static and they cannot afford storage areas with the necessary humidity and other environmental controls. Increased funding of community museums by Government would alleviate some of these problems. It is doubtful, however, if all community museums could be funded to the level where they could afford trained staff and this staff would not be willing to operate without adequate facilities. The costs of developing the existing community museum program to the level required for the achievement of the desired goals would be prohibitive.

Alternative 2: Regional Museums:

The regional museum concept would see museums developed at a small number of locations in the Northwest Territories. The actual locations would be determined on the basis of existing facilities, collections, relation to a specific region or historical era of the Northwest Territories and accessibility. Local museums would receive no help under a regional museum program.

The regional museums would have the advantage of retaining artifacts in the general vicinity in which they were discovered or utilized. It is doubtful if their appeal in this area would be as great as community museums, however, for many artifacts would still have to be removed from the communities where they are presently held. With the poor communications and long distances in the Northwest Territories there may be little difference to the individual resident between sending an historic item from Fort Good Hope to Inuvik or from Fort Good Hope to Ottawa. Although he would have the satisfaction of knowing the item was

still in the North if he sent it to Inuvik, the actual chance of him ever seeing it again is not much greater than if he sent it to Ottawa.

The regional museums would avoid some of the expenses of the community museums. Resources could be concentrated and larger budgets would be available to each museum. This would increase their purchasing ability, allow the hiring of full-time staff and improve the display and storage facilities. However, the need for expert staff would not be met unless high salaries and sophisticated museum plants were available. The costs of providing these in two or more locations in the Territories would be extremely high and would represent an under-utilization of the resources available. In addition, the problems of co-ordinating two or more autonomous regional museums would present numerous difficulties, with the result that display exchanges would be infrequent and that most exhibitions would be static.

A further difficulty with regional museums lies in the determination of regional boundaries. In some locations there are two or more neighbouring communities which have community museums and in these situations at least one would have to relinquish its collection if the regional concept was accepted. There may, however, be regions in which only one community is interested in developing a museum. It may be advantageous to support a regional museum in such situations if the community promoting the museum obtained the assent of all the other communities in that region. Community museums would receive no support if a regional approach was agreed upon.

Alternative 3: One Central Museum:

The Central Museum concept would see the establishment of one museum in the Northwest Territories. This museum would obtain articles for display from throughout the Territories and from the existing community museums, which would lose all support.

The Central Museum would have the advantage of concentrating all resources in one place. This concentration would allow an adequate, sophisticated museum plant to be built and trained personnel to be hired to perform the restoration, storage and display functions required in a modern museum program. The purchasing ability of the museum would be more effective than if the same funds were divided between two or three regional museums and the quality of the institution should attract gifts, donations, etc., from individuals and corporations. The National Museum of Man, in Ottawa, has stated that they would be able to provide assistance and expertise to one good, professional museum in the Territories, but that they would not be able to provide this help to more museums, particularly if they were not of a professional quality.

The location of a central museum in Yellowknife has two additional advantages. The first is that the Government of the Northwest Territories must maintain archives of public documents in Yellowknife and these could be located in the Central Museum if it was established in the Capital. The second is that location of the museum in Yellowknife would give the museum staff access to all the resources of the Territorial Government and particularly those of the Department of Education.

The development of one museum has a number of disadvantages, however. The majority of Territorial residents would have little opportunity to visit this museum, whatever its location, and this would reduce their enthusiasm for the idea and for donating items to the museum. The advantage supplied by community involvement would be lost and this could be detrimental to the collection program of the museum.

The remoteness of the Central Museum could be mitigated by providing travelling displays which would be circulated to all



communities in the Territories, However, without local historical societies, the museum would have to rely on Government agencies, such as the schools, to arrange for exhibition of the displays. This is not a very satisfactory arrangement due to the operating schedules of these agencies and to other pressures on their time. The Central Museum would thus tend to become a storage house for collections and not the educational agency that the Government would like to see established.

Alternative 4: A Central Museum with a Strong Extension Orientation for the Support of Community Museums, or Regional Museums where Community Museums are not Requested

This fourth alternative combines the advantages of the central museum with the flexibility of community or regional museums and assumes that Regional museums would be developed when the communities of the specified region did not wish to have a local museum. The concentration of resources in one museum is retained and the advantages of community involvement are also retained. The Central Museum would have the funds to erect a modern, fully equipped plant and retain a fully trained staff to supervise the required restoration, storage and display activities. The existence of community or regional museums would encourage local persons to donate artifacts to a museum more accessible to them and would facilitate community involvement in, and appreciation of travelling displays which would be circulated by the Central Museum. The Central Museum would be a permanent institution which could care for the collections of any community or regional museum which became defunct due to lack of community interest or other reasons and it would also act as a source of expertise upon which the community museums could draw.

Although the Central Museum would be remote from most residents of the Territories, it would conduct a vigorous extension program. Displays would be prepared at the Central Museum and circulated

to all communities, making maximum use of historical societies where they exist. The result would be continuous circulation of exhibits and an increased awareness among the population of the history and culture of their own and other groups.

The Central Extension Museum program does have some disadvantages. Support would have to be provided to community and regional museums and historical societies. This reduces the amount of resources that would be available to one central museum. Also, residents may be concerned that although they donate artifacts to their community museum, these artifacts may eventually be transferred to the Central Museum. Such fears may reduce the willingness of individuals to donate personal property to local museums.

#### Selection of Alternatives

The above alternatives would appear preferable in meeting the stated goals as follows:

- (1) Reduction in the despoilation of historical and archaeological sites.

No museum program in itself can achieve this goal.

Despoilation can occur without anybody's knowledge in a region as large and as sparsely populated as the Northwest Territories. However, damage can be reduced by identifying and designating historic sites and then informing local residents, explorers, oil crews, etc., of their existence and the penalties connected with their illegal disturbance. The Commissioner presently has the authority to perform these duties but not the time to carry them out. A museum authority could fulfil this function but only fully trained staff would be qualified to make such decisions. This staff would only exist if a central museum was constructed. However, the professional staff would require the assistance of local persons and historical groups for advice and

information on sites and possible despoilation. Alternative 4, the extension museum alternative, would appear to meet this goal most effectively.

- (2) Retain items of northern archaeological, historical and cultural significance in the Northwest Territories.

At present many artifacts are deposited in the National Museum of Man and other similar institutes. Some are also in the collections of various federal departments in Ottawa. All specimens collected by persons licenced under the Northwest Territories Archaeological Sites Regulations (Canada, 1960) are presently sent to the National Museum of Man for cataloguing and are kept at that location. However, the Government of the Northwest Territories has been advised that many of these items could be returned to the North after cataloguing if a proper storage and display area was available and if a properly trained person was on staff to care for them. The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has also advised that they would transfer most of their collection under the same circumstances.

The second aspect of this goal must be the encouragement of private citizens to donate items and funds to the museum program. It has been pointed out above that many people may not be willing to donate to one central museum but would be willing to donate locally. However, there are also many non-residents working and travelling in the North who acquire various historical and cultural items that are of significance to the history of the Territories. Some of these persons retain their acquisitions for private enjoyment, but others donate them to various institutes in the south, such as the Glenbow Institute in Calgary. If a recognized, high calibre institute existed in the North they may prefer to donate to it.

In summary, the Government of the Northwest Territories will require a good quality, professionally operated museum if it wishes to increase private donations and obtain items from the National Museum of Man and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. It has been pointed out that the Northwest Territories cannot afford more than one professional museum. Therefore, either the one central museum or the extension museum alternatives would be most effective in reaching this goal.

- (3) The provision of a restoration and storage program for historical, archaeological and cultural artifacts.

Restoration of historic items and archaeological artifacts is a highly technical skill demanding extensive training, experience and modern workshop facilities. These could only be economically justified in one location. Storage also requires special buildings, as some items require stringent temperature and humidity controls. Again, these could only be justified in a central location.

- (4) The preservation of the Native traditions of the North and contribution to the development and retention of pride in a Northern identity.

To achieve this goal, the residents of the Northwest Territories must be provided with an opportunity to learn about the history and artifacts of all cultures in the Northwest Territories. This cannot be achieved by a static museum program which has one permanent display. Displays must be circulated around the Territories so that residents can learn about other cultures, so that displays can be changed and kept interesting and so that maximum use can be made of the collections of the various institutions in the Territories. The only type of organization that can achieve this efficiently is the extension museum program.

### Conclusions

In the light of the above, it would appear that the most effective alternative for the achievement of the stated goals would be the development of a central museum with a strong extension emphasis for the encouragement of community or regional museums and historical societies in the Northwest Territories. In addition, the central museum should be located in Yellowknife as it can then serve as the public archives of the Northwest Territories and the museum staff would be able to make full use of the resources of the Northwest Territories Government.

### Proposal

The Government of the Northwest Territories proposes the construction of a central museum in Yellowknife, as previously recommended by Council, and the development of a system of grants and extension services to serve all residents and reinforce local or regional museum facilities in the Territories. The central museum will collect, preserve and present artifacts, data, historical archives and other material pertaining to the human record in the Northwest Territories. Its disciplines will be archaeology, ethnology and history and it will stress display and other museum education functions.

The central museum will be a cultural agency of the Government of the Northwest Territories. Museum Policy will be recommended to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories by a Museum Board consisting of the Northwest Territories Historical Advisory Board and two representative each, from the Administration, the Territorial Council and the general public. A Director or Museum Curator, will be responsible to the Commissioner through the Executive Secretariat for the implementation of approved policy, for the planning and operation of a museum and archives program and for the identification of historic and archaeological sites throughout the Territories. He will also be responsible for the

museum grants program and for relationships with historical societies and community or regional museums.

The Museum Board will be asked to formulate a policy to allow for the affiliation of historical societies with the museum. This policy should encourage the societies to carry out research in their local area and to attempt to preserve items of historical value. They should be encouraged to place these historical artifacts in the hands of a museum and they may be encouraged to establish local or regional museums with the technical assistance and financial aid of the central museum. The local societies will receive support from the proposed system of operations and maintenance and capital grants that are part of the museum program.

Extension service activities will be a major responsibility of the central museum and it will serve as:

- a) a consulting agency for the development of community or regional museums and Territorial exhibit centres,
- b) a training centre for curators of community or regional museums
- c) a clearing house for incoming and outgoing exhibit loans where exchange programs for collections are established
- d) the communication centre between community or regional museums and various museum associations, and also the central communication agency between community or regional museums in the Northwest Territories.
- e) a developing and testing centre for educational projects such as native arts, children displays, scientific and historical exhibits.

The extension programs of the central museum will stress community participation by initiating adult evening classes in art, photography, archaeology and history; sponsoring clubs such as Old Timer's Clubs, amateur archaeologists, folklore, ecological and geological clubs; encouraging summer camps, field trips and other activities.