



*Some exhibits from children's museums: wood carving from Collinsville; Indian materials at Carnegie; a miniature log cabin; and an explanatory panel showing steps in manufacture of cotton cloth*

The Statewide Museum Service seeks first of all to use some of the leisure time of the child because it has become obvious that after-school hours and week-end hours hang heavy on some children's hands. It is also easy to see how many agencies, including picture shows and radio, usurp much of the child's leisure time and keep him from any active self-initiated endeavor.

The staffs of the thirty children's museums have learned that they must not imitate the methods of the classroom, for too much direction is as effective as a radio in keeping the child from doing things on his own initiative. Besides, the child has already had six or more hours a day in the classroom. He is looking for freedom of action and will get it if he has to spend all the rest of the day in an alley searching refuse piles.

The aim of all children's museums is to satisfy the need of the child to find out what he wants to know. The pessimistic idea that children have to be driven to learn and coerced into action, and deprived of much normal self-expression in order to accomplish a good job is outlawed from museum workrooms. There is no high-pressure interference from adults; what control is exercised by the staff is too subtly handled to be noticed.

Planning, planning, and re-planning the disposition of materials, arrangement and presentation of objects, and provision of supplementary materials for use is carried on far into the night so that the hour spent by the child in the museum work center will result in benefit to him if he never enters the door again; although the aim of all this elaborate planning is to insure his return until he is caught by the museum habit.

The children in Oklahoma have been busy for the past year doing everything that you could imagine: they have in one museum published a student newspaper, in another they have carved figures of pioneers and Indians in wood so well that these pieces are now on exhibit in a museum in Washington, D. C.

The program for 1939-40 will include the production of visual aids for classroom use as well as the regular program of child activity in the museum work centers. The work will again be under the close supervision of the University of Oklahoma through the Extension Division and will be technically supervised by R. Boyd Gunning, director of the Department of Visual Education.

## A New Kind of Museum

ONE hundred thousand hours of child activity in Oklahoma have been spent in the various children's museums maintained in thirty towns since December 1, 1938. That would be fifty years of continuous work for one man working steadily at the normal rate of forty-four hours per week with only eighteen days of holiday a year.

What could induce children to put in so much time?

The Statewide Museum Service, financed and operated by the Works Projects Administration of Oklahoma is under the technical direction of the Visual Education Department of the University of Oklahoma, a service of the Extension Division.

But—Children's Museums! How could 100,000 children be induced to spend even one hour in a museum? The answer lies in the fact that a Children's Museum is not the museum that is pictured in your mind when the word is casually spoken. The children's museum is not a dusty storehouse of inanimate objects; it is not a scientific laboratory; it is not a hush-hush place full of antiquities; it is not a solemn, high-hat gallery of fine arts.

To all intents, a Children's Museum is in existence wherever an interesting

object is surrounded by interested children. The museums that are being conducted in Oklahoma go one step further: the directors insist that the interesting object be surrounded by child-activity. Now that does not mean play, even in the sense of purposive play as promulgated by the progressivists in modern education; rather it does mean the activity of the child's mind seeking out of the object all realistic facts about it and co-ordinating this information through personal activity so that reproduction of the thing and all ideas related to it may become actual.

This leads to a number of kinds of activity which range from drawing and carving to such elaborate processes as determination of specific gravity and other simple scientific activities.

But—you say that is the very aim of the curriculum as pursued in the classrooms of all schools. True. But in the museum the pressure of control is relaxed and the child enters into the activity solely because of his interest. It has long been recognized that child-initiated activities teach the child more per minute than any amount directed or demanded by adults. Perhaps this accounts somewhat for those 100,000 hours spent in children's museums in Oklahoma.