

FOREWORD

While obtaining degrees in biology and entomology from the University of Rochester, Ralph Lewis studied museum methods and worked in the university's natural history museum. In 1935 he came to work for the National Park Service as an assistant curator. He helped plan several new park museums and the Interior Department's headquarters museum in Washington before serving a year-long Rockefeller internship at the Buffalo Museum of Science in 1937-38. After five years as park historian at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, he became assistant chief of the Park Service's Museum Branch in 1946 and chief in 1954, overseeing the full range of Park Service museum activities. When development and operational functions were organizationally separated in 1964 he was made chief of the Branch of Museum Operations, the post he held until his retirement in 1971.

Fortunately, Ralph's involvement with park museums did not end at that point. Having edited the Park Service's 1941 *Field Manual for Museums* and written much of the Service's *Museum Handbook*, he was ideally equipped to prepare their sequel, the *Manual for Museums* published by the Service in 1976. As a volunteer, he has produced collection management plans for seven parks and spent thousands of hours arranging, cataloging, and caring for the collection at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. The origin of the current work, another labor of love, is explained in his preface.

The Park Service got far more than it expected when Ralph turned in the manuscript for this book. A work of true scholarship, it placed the evolution of the Service's museum program in a broad professional context. Because it was also too long to be published for convenient access in a single volume, Bureau Historian Barry Mackintosh agreed to edit it down. With characteristic generosity, Ralph had credited at length virtually everyone ever involved with the museum program; Barry had to delete some of the more peripheral players. At the same time, while Ralph gave due attention to his predecessors and successors at the helm of the program, he alluded to himself so rarely and indirectly that his name appears in the narrative only through the editor's intervention. Many of Ralph's notes and citations, which ran to nearly two hundred pages, had to be deleted or compressed. Readers wishing more detail than remains may consult his manuscript in the National Park Service History Collection at the Harpers Ferry Center Library.

From his long and leading role in the Service's museum program, Ralph necessarily came to this project with personal opinions on many of its personnel, policies, and practices over the years. He clearly believes,

for example, that the exhibition or other use of museum objects should not take precedence over their preservation. Although he is scrupulously fair in his treatment of controversial issues, always giving those of differing viewpoints their due, his own biases are evident. Readers not sharing them may not agree with all he says, but they should nevertheless welcome the unique perspective he brings to his story.

Museum curatorship in the National Park Service has benefited enormously from Ralph Lewis's leadership and ongoing involvement. Those who worked with him, and those of us who have followed him and cherish his continued presence, already well know this. Those who have not been so privileged will surely learn it from this book. Ralph may have been unduly modest about his own contributions, but his concern for park museums comes through loud and clear. If what follows leads more people to share this concern, it will surely have met his intent.

Ann Hitchcock
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