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A CORNER IN MUSEUM OF NATIONAL EXPANSION

THE MUSEUM OF NATIONAL EXPANSION OPENED

The National Park Service opened on October 20 the first unit of a museum for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. This Memorial, established as a national historic site in 1940, commemorates the territorial enlargement of the United States and the westward movement of the American people. It occupies approximately eighty acres of the St. Louis riverfront, an area that for many years was virtually the gateway to the West. Buildings have been removed from thirty-seven city blocks and parts of three others, leaving three
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NATIONAL EXPANSION

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historic structures and a large cleared plot which has been graded and seeded awaiting continued development of the Memorial.

One of the buildings retained for its significant association with western history is the Old St. Louis Courthouse. The exterior has been cleaned and painted and so the Courthouse once more dominates the river front area, and inside, the careful restoration and rehabilitation are about one-third completed. Two large rooms in the finished portion, each containing fifteen hundred square feet of floor area, comprise the museum at present, with adjacent space available for future use. The rooms are advantageously situated on the main floor of the south wing close to the entrance of the building. One is used entirely for exhibition; the other contains in addition space for lectures, an information desk, and staff offices.

Because the Memorial in its unfinished state affords little evidence of its historical meaning, the primary task of the museum is to give a gen-

eral picture of the westward growth of the United States. Accordingly, plans that had been made for a larger future museum were condensed and revised to provide a National Expansion Room which would serve the immediate needs of the Memorial and also permit experiments with techniques to be used when the museum undergoes fuller development. Using the room at the right of the entrance corridor, twenty-eight exhibits were installed to tell in brief outline the story of American expansion. Lightweight secondary walls ten feet high were constructed of tempered hardboard and most of the exhibit cases recessed in them. The false walls offer several advantages—increasing the amount of available wall space, marking out a circulation pattern, giving a finished appearance to the general installation, permitting better regulation of light, and leaving the room itself essentially undefaced for future use. To provide adequate and well balanced illumination, indirect incandescent drop fixtures are employed for the room while the individual cases are lighted internally with fluorescent tubes. Most of the cases are

painted clear yellow inside to obtain full benefit from the light, and the furred walls are colored in two shades of blue. One purpose in the application of lighting and color is to give an attractive and stimulating effect to the installation as a whole.

In the National Expansion Room the basic factor underlying the design is the narrative character of the exhibition. The story of expansion has been broken down into a series of key statements, each of which is the subject of an individual exhibit. The exhibit is built around the idea, which is stated prominently in the case. This arrangement insures that every exhibit has its own limited function while being integrated with the rest, for the statements in sequence tell the story. In most instances specimens, pictures, manufactured devices, and labels are used in combination to illustrate or develop the key statement. One case, for example, bears the text "At the foot of the Alleghenies settlers of several nationalities mingled in the mid-18th century to form the first typically American frontier," and contains a series of objects representing the principal nationalities involved—a small plaid with a silver and agate tartan brooch for the Scots, a bit of crocheted lace for the Irish, a fine Pennsylvania slip-decorated plate for the German, and a Sheffield hunting knife for the English. The resulting frontier society is symbolized by a small scale model of a wooden plow. The story of the room opens with our European origins and the natural environment provided by the New World. Following an introductory section on the period of English and French colonization, the account of expansion opens as the frontier faces the Appalachian barrier and then touches in turn on the movement across the Alleghenies, the acquisition of Louisiana, the removal of foreign and Indian opposition to the occupation of the Mississippi Valley, the settlement of the Middle West, the territorial additions which rounded out our continental boundaries, and the occupation of the Far West. The sequence ends in 1890 when the frontier line no longer could be traced. Four important aspects of the story are presented by dioramas constructed in the Eastern Museum Laboratories of the National Park Service. Other noteworthy exhibits include a repre-



OLD COURTHOUSE, ST. LOUIS, HOME OF NATIONAL EXPANSION MUSEUM

sentative group of artifacts from the excavations at Jamestown Island, Colonial National Historical Park, which are used to illustrate English colonial culture; an unusually complete set of arms and accoutrements of the United States Dragoons; a fine pair of scalp leggins from the days of the Plains Indian Wars; and a number of good examples of pioneer craftsmanship. In each instance these objects have been selected for their contribution to the specific aims of the exhibits and are not shown merely for their own interest.

The second museum room, lying across the corridor from the first, has been given quite different treatment. Cases are not built in and the arrangement is planned to be as flexible as possible. While a few exhibits concerning the development of the Memorial and the history of the Courthouse are left in place, most of the equipment can be moved about freely to meet the requirements of special exhibitions, of which a series is in progress. The center of the room is kept open and will seat fifty people for illustrated talks which form a regular part of the museum program. At present much of the back half of the room is utilized by the museum staff as an office, but this space soon is to contain an exhibit depicting the role of St. Louis in the westward movement.

The museum is open from 9 to 4:30 on week days and from 1:30 to 5 on Sundays. In addition to the exhibits, guided tours through the Old Courthouse and over the Memorial area are provided, and historical travelogs of other National Park Service units are given each Sunday.

The development of the museum has been aided by the cooperation of numerous institutions and individuals, including especially the other museums in St. Louis. The carpentry required to prepare the rooms and cases was done by the Missouri Art Project, WPA.
