Development of BYU's Teaching Museum: A History of the Museum of Peoples and Cultures

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The Development of BYU’s Teaching Museum: A History of the Museum of Peoples and Cultures

Carlee Reed History, Mentored by Paul Stavast

Introduction

The Museum of Peoples and Cultures (MPC) has been a part of BYU since 1966. The MPC’s mission is to “inspire students to life-long learning and service and [mentors] them in collections-focused activities.” As the MPC has developed, it has influenced many students as they gain experience for later careers, in addition to educating them on different cultures. As of 2008, there was not a thorough recording of the progression and development of the museum. Over the past five years, the archives have been organized and made easily accessible. In addition to the archives, I researched into the history of the museum, and interviewed past directors to uncover the full development of the MPC and the effects it had on BYU and Provo.

Method

I researched and analyzed four main sources of information:

1) Interviews with three previous Directors: Dr. Dale Berge, Dr. Joel Janetski, and Dr. Marti Allen recording their desires for the development of the museum during their tenure.

2) MPC Archives: background information and specific documents regarding the creation of policies and intent of the museum.

3) Anthropology and Archaeology Department Archives: insights into the development of the museum from the University’s perspective.

4) University Archives: insights into how the MPC sought funding and support.

Research Summary

This project compiled the history of the MPC from its initial conception in 1961 to its establishment in 1966 and ends with the hiring of a new director in 1984. The research has provided information regarding the struggles and desires of the initial founders of the museum. Archaeological and ethnographic objects have been collected on campus since the days of Brigham Young Academy. These collections were not maintained well. Some ordering of these objects came with the establishment of the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology in 1946. In 1961, Dale Berge, an archaeology student, initiated the effort to take the collections and place them on display for other students to view in the Erying Science Center. In 1966, the display officially became the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology when the department was moved to the basement of the Maeser building. Unfortunately, Archaeology Department struggled to find funding and resources so the museum could do research and adequately house its collections. The Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology was developed and organized system that would allow students and faculty members to do research, but space was severely limited.

In the late 1970’s, museum staff and anthropology faculty proposed the creation of a University Museum of Peoples and Cultures combining the Bean Museum, Earth Science Museum, and Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. While this idea was evolving, the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology was relocated to Allen Hall in 1980-81. The move to Allen Hall was supposed to be temporary until the University Museum of Peoples and Cultures could be completed. However, it did give more space to the museum and was a slight improvement over previous workspace. Still, Allen Hall was not designed for museum needs such as collections care and display (it had previously been a dormitory). The MPC has progressed immensely since its beginning in 1966, but as of 1984, with the new Director, Dr. Janetski, the MPC still had a long way to go before considering itself a fully functioning museum.

Impact

By establishing the history of the museum, the MPC has a better understanding of itself, which can be used to apply for grants that will further develop the collections, archives, and programs area. The MPC has a document providing evidence of desire and willingness to educate the community, and shows how dedicated the museum is to serving its communities. The document has organized information regarding the early years of the museum and shows how the MPC has interacted with the community. This document records the impressions, impact, and experiences of the museum throughout the supervision of its four directors. Documentation of the staff actively advancing and focusing on achieving the mission according to national standards will help the MPC gain accreditation by the American Association of Museums (AAM).

Timeline

- 1966 Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Maeser Building
- 1968 Dale Berge hired as Assistant Director
- 1979 Proposal for University Museum
- 1980-81 Move to Allen Hall in lower campus
- 1982 Re-named Museum of Peoples and Cultures
- 1984 Joel Janetski hired as Director of MPC
- 1993 Splitting of storage; area allocated in MOA
- 1999 Marti Allen promoted to Director of MPC
- 2001 Expansion of storage area into Building 67 (Old Albertson's Building)