Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences

Brown-bag Seminar,
Smithsonian Institution
February 4, 2010

Museums and Education for Democracy: Some historical examples (including the Smithsonian Institution?) and a discussion

George E. Hein
Professor Emeritus
Lesley University
ghein@lesley.edu
http://www.lesley.edu/faculty/ghein/index.html

Outline:

1.Museums are Educational Institutions

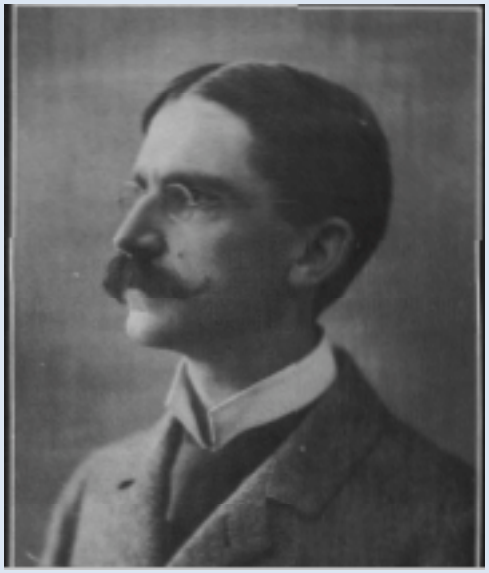
2. The appropriate education theory for museums is "progressive" (pedagogically and morally): John Dewey's theory

3. Examples of Museums as Democratic Educational Institutions
   a. Charles Willson Peale
   b. Newark Museum/Brooklyn Children's Museum
   c. The Barnes Foundation (not a museum!)
   d. Theodore Low

4. The Smithsonian Institution — a discussion

Dewey on Museums

Correspondence full of references for visits to museums



John Dewey, 1880's

My glasses were found, & as usual the supposition that someone stole them was false. . . . Last night, Schneider, Caldwell & I went down to a "Summer evening" concert at Battery D; part of Thomas's orchestra, admission 25 cents,--the first "show" I've been to since I came to Chicago. I tho't I had a program to send you but I can't find it . . . I haven't been invited out today & am going to see the Columbian [Field] museum, as it's "free" day--alone, & great will be the joy thereof.

&

JD to Alice Chipman Dewey children, 1894.08.05 (00169)

Our serious occupation is pictures, in which we are both interested. In fact I think I'm more interested in them than anything else outside of philosophy, & we have both been educated a la Barnes & our tastes agree.

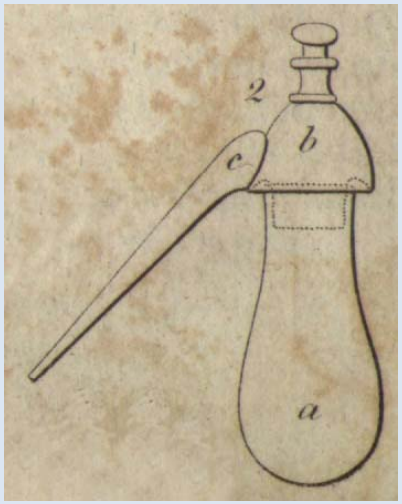
JD to George Herbert Mead, 1928.06.20 (05438)

Museums were an integral component of Dewey's pedagogy

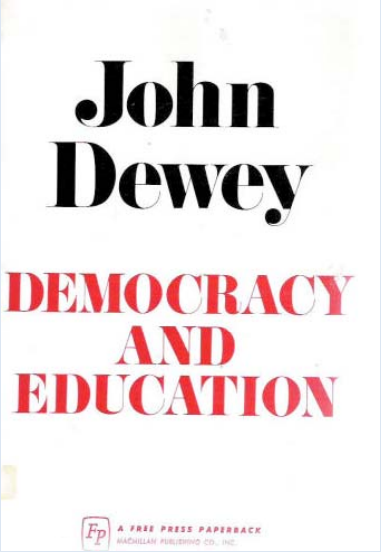
". . . Begin work after New Years on the basis of about 25 children between the ages of 6 & 9, . . . I don't know just what to say about hours, from 9-12 in the morning, but some afternoons a week to be given to going to see the country about, visit the museums &c." **JD to Clara Isabelle Mitchell, 11.12.1895 (00268)**

In *The School and Society* (1900), Dewey provides a schematic model of an ideal school that has library at its center of the ground floor surrounded by shops, kitchen, industries,, etc) and on the second floor a museum at its center surrounded by laboratories, art and music studios. He writes, “[school activity] is a living union of thought and the instrument of expression. This union is symbolized by saying that in the ideal school the . . . work might be considered to be that of the shops, passed through the alembic of library and museum into action again.

An **alembic** is a primitive distillation flask



Applying the democratic faith to education is the theme of *Democracy and Education* (1916)



Progressive education is the education needed for a progressive society, i.e. one that strives to become more democratic; to change the status quo in the direction of ameliorating gaps between rich and poor, immigrants and native born, social classes, etc.

For this purpose citizens need to be taught how to think, how to inquire.

The term “progressive” modifies society, not only education.

Democracy and Education, 1916

Life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment. Individuals die, but "continuity of life means continual readaptation of the environment to the needs of living organisms. The continuity of any experience, through renewing of the social group, is a literal fact. Education, in the broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life." MW 9, 4-5*.

Life experiences are educative, but in complex (advanced) societies formal education is needed because informal is too narrow and not so useful for transmitting symbols.
Primitive societies do education informally; young learn directly from older through joining in actions, but in more advanced societies knowledge is stored in symbols and there's need for more formal arrangements. But these can become "abstract and bookish" when divorced from their real world referents.

* MW refers to the standard edition of Dewey's writing, Middle Works, Vol. 9 is *Democracy and Education.)*

“Hence one of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional, modes of education. . . . To avoid a split between what men consciously know because they are aware of having learned it by a specific job of learning, and what they unconsciously know because they have absorbed it in the formation of their characters by intercourse with others, becomes an increasingly delicate task with every development of special schooling.” MW 9, p. 11.

Note: use of “informal” the sense of every-day, “apprenticeship,” that is educating through participation, living in society.
Museums are informal in two senses; the experience of going to a museum is educative—just as the playground, the family or entertainment may be educative—and in addition museums are “designed environments,” intentionally educative. (This is true as well of formal education, although the balance is different.)

Formal education with its emphasis on symbols and verbal learning can lead to less than ideal educational environments. "Why is it, in spite of the fact that teaching by pouring in, learning by passive absorption, are universally condemned, that they are still so entrenched in practice? That education is not an affair of "telling" and being told, but an active and constructive process, is a principle almost generally violated in practice as conceded in theory." (MW 9, p. 43)

Therefore, no matter what the educational setting, "active and constructive" means need to be provided. This is the basis for the pedagogic component of what we now call "progressive" education and applies equally to formal and informal education.

But more important is the <u>purpose</u> of education, the moral reason society educates. And the purpose Dewey proposes is "progressive"; one appropriate for a society that ***progresses****.*

The education of the immature which fills them with the spirit of the social group to which they belong [may be] a sort of catching up of the child with the aptitudes and resources of the adult group. In **static societies**, societies which make the maintenance of established custom their measure of value, this conception applies in the main. But not in **progressive communities**. They endeavor to shape the experiences of the young so that instead of reproducing current habits, better habits shall be formed, and thus the future adult society be an improvement on their own. Men have long had some intimation of the extent to which education may be consciously used to eliminate obvious social evils through starting the young on paths which shall not produce these ills, and some idea of the extent in which education may be made an instrument of realizing the better hopes of men. But we are doubtless far from realizing the potential efficacy of education as a constructive agency of improving society, from realizing that it represents not only a development of children and youth but also of the future society of which they will be the constituents. (MW 9, p. 85.)

The point of all this is a moral, social aim for education to contribute to supporting a progressive society, one that emphasizes increased social justice, more collaborative social relations and improves the quality of life for all its members: Such social aims are referenced throughout the rest of D& E.

Examples:

Consider the problems posed by present conditions “which split society into classes some of which are made merely tools for the higher culture of others.”. . . “School facilities must be secured of such amplitude and efficiency as will in fact and not simply in name discount the effects of economic inequalities, and secure to all the wards of the nation equality of equipment for future careers.” MW 9, p.104

“This conclusion [that we need to transform education] is bound up with the very idea of education as freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims.” MW 9, p.105.

Charles Willson Peale

© Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Charles Willson Peale
(1741-1827)

Photograph © 1990 The Detroit Institute of Arts

The largest room in Peale's Philadelphia museum, founded 1786

"In a country whose institutions all depend upon the virtue of the people, which in its turn is secure only as they are well informed, the promotion of knowledge is the first of duties."

Quoted in ***Useful Knowledge in the New Republic - C.W. Peale*** http://www.lewis-clark.org/content/content-channel.asp?ChannelID=376

Peale was a contemporary and colleague of advocates for public education for building our republican democracy

Thomas Jefferson, 1743-1826)
(statue at UVA-Wise)

At the first session of our legislature after the Declaration of Independence, we passed a law abolishing entails. And this was followed by one abolishing the privilege of primogeniture . . . These laws drawn up by myself , laid the ax to the foot of pseudo-aristocracy. And had another which I prepared been adopted by the legislature, our work would have been complete. It was a bill for the more general diffusion of learning. This proposed to divide every county into wards of five or six miles square; . . . to establish in each ward a free school for reading, writing and common arithmetic.

Thomas Jefferson letter to John Adams, October 18, 1813. Lee, G. C. (1961), *Crusade Against Ignorance: Thomas Jefferson on Education,* New York: Teachers College Press. 160-167

Charles Willson Peale:
Contributions to Museums for Democracy

1. Active civic life: military, public office, APS officer

2. Public museum – inexpensive and accessible; museum as educational means

3. Multiple areas: portraits, natural history, technology (each with distinct pedagogic/moral value)

4. Natural displays of animals
   a. Taxidermy
   b. Natural groupings

5. Public (popular) Lectures

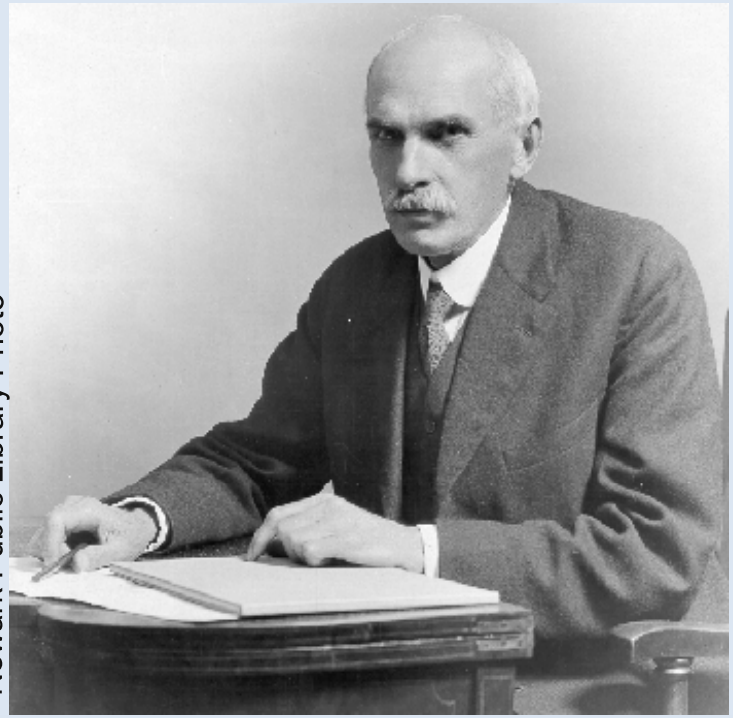
6. Efforts to establish a “national” museum—public support

C. W. Peale association with Burgiss Allison,

Allison had a progressive pedagogic approach to education

I have gone to some expense, to furnish myself with a variety of materials calculated to [connect instruction with amusement]: such as geographical, historical, technological and natural history cards, geometric blocks, dissected maps, tour of Europe, &cc amusements in optics, magnetism chemistry, &cc. some entirely new, and some in use heretofore; which have never failed to afford entertainment and information at the same time; and I have sufficient proof, that rendering the exercises of oratory more agreeable, by mixing something of the dramatic kind with their orations, gives them a relish for the study, a desire of excelling, and an animation in the pursuit, with which I could never inspire them when engaged in nothing but plain speaking; or when nothing of Play was connected with their business, or amusement with their study. **Burgiss Allison, letter to Benjamin Rush, July 2, 1792, *The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine (1790-1792)***

The Newark Museum



Newark Public Library Photo

John Cotton Dana (1856-1929)

Common Council Manual 1923

SITE OF NEWARK MUSEUM
Marcus L. Ward home, on Washington Street, opposite Washington Park, which land has been acquired for new city institution.

"For Dana, the true work of the museum as a service institution, was in enriching the quality of people's lives."

S. Weil, introduction to W. Peniston, (ed.) (1999) **The New Museum: Selected Writings of John Cotton Dana,** Washington: American Association of Museums

2002
49 Washington Street
Newark Museum
Photo from Jule Spohn

Louise Connolly, Head of Education at the Newark Museum

Educator, civic leader, supporter of women's right to vote.

© Newark Museum, used with permission

Louise Connolly
(1862-1927)

© Newark Museu

(See Hein, G. E. (2006) "Progressive education and museum education: Anna Billings Gallup and Louise Connolly", J. Museum Education, 31[3] 161-174.)

Connolly's early life

(Her experience studying while teaching school)

"I arose at six, and studied an hour before breakfast, and all the way to my school. I taught from eight thirty to three, and prepared the next day's work, and corrected papers until four, and studied all the way back home. I dined at five, and studied on the way to college, and attended classes for four hours, and studied all the way back home—in the streetcars, of course. My mother read aloud to me as I undressed, a story to take my mind off my work. On Saturday I did up the mathematics for the week, and on Sunday I wrote all the required papers. In the summer I made up the weaknesses of the previous winter and forestalled some of the work of the winter succeeding. And I took two degrees. B. S. 1888; M.S. 1898. The thesis of my master's degree was The Minerals of the District of Columbia.

Frances D. Twombly, "Louise Connolly: A True Teacher,"
in *Louise Connolly (Newark, NJ:* The Library and The Museum, 1928), pp. 11–12.

She embraced progressive pedagogy

. . .Then came the modern movement in pedagogy. It took off the shackles of dead forms that had trammeled the feet of teachers, and bade them walk. Some do not know to this day that their feet are free; but many are treading with firm step the uphill path that leads to high achievement just because they know enough to study the child as well as the subject . . . So we take out children to see the real thing, whatever that may be, and then to the museum where hand specimens of it may be found to remind us of it, and then we reduce our knowledge of it to language, and, finally, we look into books to be reminded by language of our experience-gained knowledge. . . .The whole city administration in any progressive city is a museum. A class reciting upon the function of courts has seen a court in session. The city itself is a still larger and fuller museum. A class desiring to sketch trees sits in the park or on its school-house doorstep for the lesson. . . Rivers are studied on a river's brink. **Louise Connolly, *The Educational***

Active in civic affairs:

At a meeting of the National Municipal League, she gave an address pointing out that schools have difficulties in meeting their civic responsibilities because “Training for citizenship is in the hands of those [i.e. women] who can never be citizens.” But when male teachers are appointed “they constitute an element of weakness” because “they lacked that valuable training which comes from competition with one’s peers.” Since men are “levitated into positions of administrative power not because of achievement, but because of sex.” And furthermore men, once appointed to positions of authority “are subject to influences that make civic courage hard to come by.”

L. Connolly, (1914) “Sane Methods of Civic Education,”
National Municipal Review, Vol. III, no. 2 p. 1-6.

Albert Barnes and John Dewey

Albert Barnes and John Dewey
© The Barnes Foundation

A close friendship (and mutual admiration and respect) for 33 years. Barnes believed that art was transformative and could enrich and improve life, and, thus, society.

"The key to Barnes' personality was that he believed in human perfectibility and was messianic about it. He believed in it because he was convinced he had proved its possibility in his own life. . .Barnes never doubted that he had molded his own destiny, and that he had done so by means of ideas derived from James, Santayana and Dewey. . . **Barnes also believed that ideas should lead to action, and that if we fail to act we stultify ourselves and in time become permanently paralyzed psychologically.**

Hart, H. (1963) *Dr. Barnes of Merion: A Biography,* New York: Farrar Strauss, p. 23-4.

The Barnes Foundation, Merion, PA

Dewey - Barnes Friendship—Political Action was a central component (Selected activities)

1918 (Summer) Polish Research Study in Philadelphia

1918-19 Opposition to provisions of peace treaty and subsequent negotiations. Barnes and Dewey contact Wilson administration.

1920-28 “Outlawry of War” effort leading to Kellogg-Briand Pact (Dewey has correspondence and friendship with Salmon Levinson and involves Barnes)

1925-27 Effort to influence art education at U. Penn and Philadelphia Schools and eslewhere (Dewey is “Director of Education, The Barnes Foundation”)

1927 Faculty members dismissed from a Pennsylvania State Normal school after complaint by American Legion for student protests concerning US government intervention in Nicaragua.

1928 Brookwood Labor College crisis, residential coeducational workers’ college accused of communist leanings.

1920’s-30’s Support for Harlem Renaissance, “negro” rights, etc.

1949 Race discrimination against Claude Clark, an African-American teacher at Talladega College, Alabama

Barnes recognized early in his life the association of thought and action and *the association of aesthetics to life experience.*

Barnes's combination of thought and action through aesthetic education was central to his efforts at the A. C. Barnes Co. beginning ~1908 and continuing into the 1920's.
(According to his and others' retrospective reports.)

We believe that the most valuable asset of this Foundation is the 20 years' experience in the working out of a community plan which is basically educational in the modern conception of the term. By that is meant education as a means of growth, of direction, of personal development cooperated in by a group of people who work for their livelihood in a corporation engaged in the manufacture of chemicals.

Barnes, A. C. *The New Republic, 1923,* Vol. 34, No. 432, March 14, pp. 65-67.

The general plan of the work, as well as the selection of topics of study, has at all times been based upon the educational principles of John Dewey. **The primary purpose has been to cultivate intelligence by showing the possibilities of which every-day life is full, and to make intelligence effective by setting it to work to realize those possibilities, to make labor free, spontaneous, rich in cultural as well as material rewards.** The plan has aimed at democracy in education, not by watering down knowledge or by relaxing standards of intelligence, but by making the whole process a cooperative affair, free from any authoritative control.

Mullen, M. *Opportunity,* 1926 (published by the National Urban League)

The Barnes Foundation Program as Progressive Education

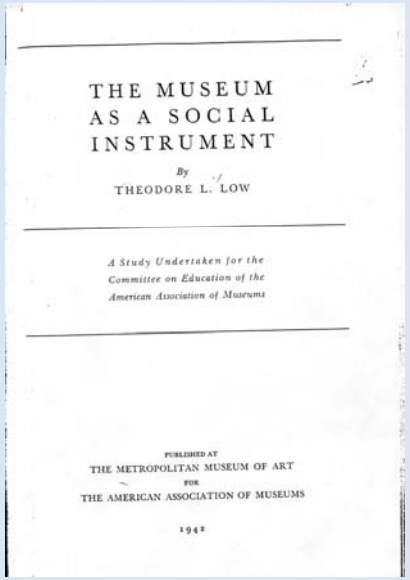
1. Education is the first priority
2. Education is conceived as method, process
3. The intention is to improve life; enable students to grow, learn to “see” (and to apply to life experience)
4. Developed and carried out in the context of progressive political action.

Preface to *Art as Experience* (excerpt):

My greatest indebtedness is to Dr. A. C. Barnes. The chapters have been gone over one by one with him, and yet what I owe to his comments and suggestions on this account is but a small measure of my debt. . . Whatever is sound in this volume is due more than I can say to the great educational work carried on in the Barnes Foundation. That work is of a pioneer quality comparable to the best that has been done in any field during the present generation, that of science not excepted. I should be glad to think of this volume as one phase of the widespread influence the Foundation is exercising.

Dewey, J. (1934*) Art as Experience*, LW 10, p. 8-9.

Theodore Low (1942) *The Museum as a Social Instrument*,



THE MUSEUM
AS A SOCIAL
INSTRUMENT

By
THEODORE L. LOW

A Study Undertaken for the Committee on Education of the American Association of Museums

PUBLISHED AT
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
FOR
THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

1942

"Briefly, the purpose and the only purpose of museums is education in all its varied aspects from scholarly research to the simple arousing of curiosity." . . .
And this education should be in the service of social action.

- Long history for museums as socially active
- Need reorganization, make education more prominent (not as a separate department)
- Need to be engaged in lives of people
  - Chose staff with social consciousness
  - Engage in "popular education" (new media)
  - Find interests of (potential) visitors

Smithsonian Institution as an educational institution?

1. Smithson's intention - unclear

2. Congress's mandate – fiercely debated and variously interpreted

3. Joseph Henry was not fond of "education" and opposed to both a museum and a library at SI

4. Both early and later history are mixed

Quotations on cover page, G. Brown Goode*, An Account of the Smithsonian Institution: Its Origin, History, Objects and Achievements, 1895.*

Promote as an object of primary importance, *institutions for the increase and diffusion of knowledge*: in proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.
GEORGE WASHINGTON,1796

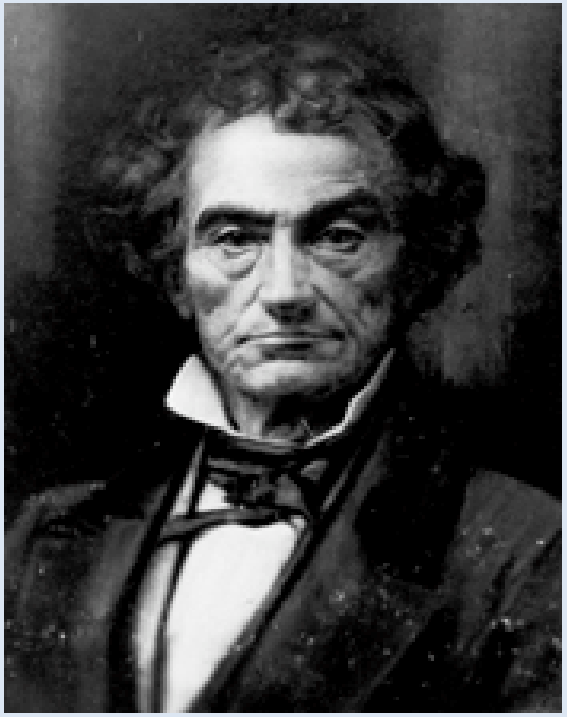
I bequeath the whole of my property to the United States of America to found at Washington *an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.* *JAMES SMITHSON, 1826*

Let the trust of James Smithson to the United States of America be faithfully executed by their representatives in Congress: let this result accomplish his object—*the increase in diffusion of knowledge among men.*
JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, 1846

Note: the inclusion of the Washington quote suggests an interest in an educated populace.

Debate on library and congressional investigation, 1855

The debate concerning the Smithsonian Institution continued after 1846 when the bill authorizing it passed in Congress and a Board of Regents was appointed.



Rufus Chaote's letter of resignation from the Regents in 1855(?) resulted in a congressional investigation.

“The word “INCREASE” is held by some of the zealous combatants in the Smithsonian controversy to be identical with “DISCOVERY” The idea seems to be that that knowledge can only be *increased* by the *discovery of new truth.* This is an arbitrary and untenable position. A mind experiences an increase in knowledge if it knows more than it did before . . . There is an increase in knowledge in the school, in the congregation, in the lecture room, if ideas not before known to them have been received in the minds of the hearers. . .

In a like manner a particular meaning has been crowded upon the word “KNOWLEDGE”—not its ordinary meaning in common usage, but a narrow, technical and special meaning. This has been done by confounding it with “science.” . . .”Knowledge” is all-comprehensive, embracing science, art, literature politics, business, the whole world of nature and culture, the entire realm of facts and reality, all ages and all they have contained.

Choate Rufus, (1955) *Smithsonian Institution : letter of Hon. Rufus Choate, resigning the office of regent of the Smithsonian Institution,* Washington, DC: p. 15

A description of Smithsonian activities 1929—no reference to education:

1. It carries on original scientific investigations . . .
2 It prints large memoirs and smaller original papers, publishes useful tables. .

3. It administers seven public governmental bureaus and also the Freer Gallery
4. It subsidizes approved researches by outside workers.
5. It is the official channel of exchange of scientific intelligence between the United States and the World.
6. It fosters scientific development of schools, museums and institutions throughout the world . . .by loans and distribution of . . .specimens . . .
7. It maintains at the Library of Congress. . . the foremost scientific library . . ..
8. It answers by mail an average of 8,000inquiries . . .annually gratis.
9. It gives occasional lectures and course of lectures by eminent scientists . . .
10. It confers medals of honor on eminent discoverers.
11. It procures foreign diplomatic and learned recognition and assistance for expeditions going aboard
12. It is the headquarters of AAAS and AAM . . .
13. It disburses annually funds. . . Which [recently] averaged . . .[$1,275,000].

True, Webster P. (1929) *The Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Scientific Series, Volume 1, p. 15-16..* Introduction. 12 volumes on topics such as "Old and New Plants, a Symposium," "Minerals from Earth and Sky," etc.

The educational Program Inventory (EPI) is the Smithsonian's first effort to systematically document educational programs, activities, media, and publications (activities, henceforth). Prior to EPI, uniform quantitative information was not available about educational activities and qualitative information was dispersed across the Smithsonian and not readily accessible. (p. 1)

In the first instance, "education" was to be broadly defined as the "transmission of known theories, syntheses, insights, perspectives, methodologies, information and applications from all areas of Smithsonian involvement to the public. However, the "transmission had to be aimed at "a well-defined population, with definite goals, objectives and desired outcomes. (p. 2)

Doering, Zahava, (1992) *Smithsonian Educational Activities: A Discussion Based on the 1991 Educational Program Inventory,* Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution.

Note: a "first effort" in 1992.

LESSONS for TOMORROW

VOLUME I: SUMMARY REPORT

LESSONS for TOMORROW

VOLUME II: APPENDICES

Concerns:

A realistic, explicit central vision for Smithsonian education does not currently exist. (summary, 1-1)

The Status of Education

Despite the mantra that “the Smithsonian is all about education,” a common refrain among interviewees was that the educational function, and the staff associated with it, are often not highly valued by management, research staff, and fellow professionals. This status issue has several dimensions and ramifications. (Appendices 8-1)

Opportunity

The Smithsonian is widely regarded as one of the central custodians of the history that makes us one nation. The Institution might therefore play a prominent role in educating the public about what it means to be American, and in raising awareness of, and appreciation for, the unique contributions that different linguistic, cultural, religious, and racial groups have made to our collective national identity. (p.. 15)

Activities possibly related to democratic educational goals

1.Content: *Running Against the Storm; A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the Constitution*

2.Methodology: Foster intelligent Inquiry (science and other areas; see Exploratorium's A. P. E. Project)
Challenge museological practice (see: Fred Wilson)

3. Institutional Organization and expansion, such as ACM, NMAI, NMAAHC

4. Staff experiences, structure

5. Mission related auxiliary programs: Citizen participation, such as Save Our African American Treasures, NMAAHC, (see, Lower East Side Tenement Museum)

6. Target underrepresented participants