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Simon James Dawson was appointed by the Canadian Government in 1857 to explore the country from Lake Superior westward to the Saskatchewan. His report was among the first to attract attention to the possibilities of the Northwest as a home for settlers. He was later to build the Dawson Route from Lake-of-the-Woods to Winnipeg, Manitoba.

William George Richardson Hind accompanied his brother, Henry Youle Hind, as official artist when the latter was in command of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan exploration expedition of 1858. W. Hind revisited the Northwest in 1863-64 and did numerous paintings of the people and general scenes.

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COVER

Minstrel Fisher at ease in the Boar's Head Tavern of the Nonsuch Gallery, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature.

Photograph by Robert Barrow

GREAT Expectations

by Paul C. Thistle

toba perceive the CMA as an organisation which does not deal with their interests and concerns. They may also feel intimidated by the "high powered" museum professionals who attend such meetings and the "high minded" theoretical slant to the session topics.

An unrepresentative sample of opinion from small museum workers who did attend indicated that the sessions were too theoretical in nature, considering that a major concern of small museums — particularly at this time of year — is simply whether or not they will be able to open their doors to the public for the summer. In addition, the hefty \$165 registration fee (more for non-members), plus the additional costs for accommodation and/or travel, would take a rather large bite out of a small budget, even in view of the fact that a \$100 subsidy was available from the Association of Manitoba Museums (AMM) through a grant from the Manitoba Heritage Federation. Finally, when compared to the production of local museum associations such as that in Ontario, for example, the publications of the CMA also tend to be significantly more theoretical and less practical in nature. When, by reason of isolation and/or cost of travel, publications become the only service which small museums can avail themselves, such considerations become paramount when deciding where to spend limited budgets for membership fees.

An attempt to review a major conference such as this is not an easy task, and this writer has attended only one other (Toronto 1985) with which to compare it. This year's conference theme was to explore the changing expectations of museums, both by the public and by the profession, in light of societal

and attitudinal changes taking place.

The CMA Exposition put on by suppliers of museum related services and equipment was significantly smaller than that in Toronto. Indeed, the AMM conference in 1986 attracted as many exhibitors.

Although this writer did not attend, special interest groups within the CMA such as museum educators, marketers, registrars, training coordinators, and others held pre-conference sessions. Indeed, one of the major impressions to emerge from the conference was that these special interest groups are struggling to obtain a more prominent role in the affairs of the CMA.

Patterson Williams, Director of Education at the Denver Art Museum, delivered the keynote address. She maintained that the goal of museums should be to provide visitors with the opportunity of having the same type of experience with the collections as the curators in charge. They need not, nor should they, be isolated from the curatorial aspects of the museum operation. Evidence was presented to show that visitors are quite capable of achieving the same kind of experiences and the same levels of understanding which have attracted curators to the field. Museum visitors should, therefore, be challenged to perform on the boundaries of their capabilities through such strategies as Socratic methods of interpretation (see *Dawson & Hind* 10(1):24-28).

A plenary session on the "Expectations of the Museum Audience" heard an interesting presentation by consultant Marilyn Hood dealing with the characteristics of those who are infrequent and non-museum visitors (see also *Museum News* April 1983). The

The question has been raised whether or not the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) annual conferences are of significant benefit to the small museum community. Museums in Manitoba had the opportunity of finding this out for themselves as the CMA held its fortieth anniversary conference in Winnipeg at the end of May 1987.

Judging from the low turnout in Winnipeg, many small museums in Mani-

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ROBERT BARROW

One of the highlights of the 1987 CMA Conference was the Multicultural Pancake Breakfast, sponsored by the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature. Servers included, left to right, Elisabeth Mate, Janina Lorenc, Yoana Razma, and Elza Snikeris, coordinator of the event.

ranks of the infrequent visitors are believed to hold the most potential for developing museum attendance growth. To attract this group, Hood recommended that museums focus on programmes with clear potential for social interaction with the family, ones which provide opportunities for active participation rather than pure intellectual activity, and ensure that the museum environment is clearly recognised as a comfortable and inviting one. Jon Litton of Woods Gordon Management Consultants then gave a rather pedestrian account of the changing demographic environment to which museums must adapt. Well known trends in aging population profiles, family structure, ethnicity, income, and competition were summarised.

Because of a personal interest, this writer skipped sessions which may have been relevant to small museums dealing with tourism and educator/curator relations, choosing instead to take in the session on ethnocultural museums. Sophia Kachor, Director of the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre in Winnipeg, and Gloria Cranmer Webster, Curator of the U'Mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay, British Columbia, identified the differing goals of such cultural centres, which are not only to preserve a traditional culture but to encourage and develop a living culture among the members of a contemporary ethnic group. It was also pointed out that it is a mistake to assume that these named ethnic categor-

ies are monolithic entities. Characteristic pressures of factionalism within these communities are also a concern for ethnocultural museums. Mainstream museums do attempt to serve ethnic communities as was pointed out by Barbara Reid, Multicultural Projects Officer at the Royal Ontario Museum. However, she maintained that, short of representation on the governing board, all else is seen to be simply tokenism. Ethnic communities must be allowed to develop a sense of ownership if mainstream museums are to be successful in reaching the ethnocultural audience.

Another plenary session dealt with "The Competition!," a subject with which few museums seem to have concerned themselves in the past. Marg Meikle, broadcaster, heritage consultant, and a former curator, pointed out in her presentation that museums have much in common with the new mega-attractions such as the West Edmonton Mall. Both institutions are audience driven, both focus on material culture, both hire curators and commission exhibitions. In fact, Meikle made the case that people learn to look at museum exhibits by shopping! However, despite marketing strategies which may be transferable, Meikle argued that museums can never hope to compete directly with the mega-malls and, in fact, should attempt to differentiate themselves as much as possible.

Dr. George F. MacDonald, Director of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (formerly the National Museum of

Man), by using the example of Epcot Center in Florida, challenged the assumption held by many museum workers that such attractions simply promote insignificant kitsch and ersatz popular culture. He pointed out, however, that the Epcot Center engages scholars for serious research and is able to attract exhibitions of foreign national treasures in competition with major museums. In addition, professional foreign nationals are employed by Epcot Center to work on the exhibits and to provide craft demonstrations and performances. MacDonald argued that the Epcot approach provides more of the "real thing" in human terms than do most museums in their parallel attempts. In short, Epcot Center was praised for providing more dimensions of the "real thing" and more effectively conveying complex cultural messages than museums presently do.

Because of a particular issue raised at a Board meeting, this writer was attracted next to a session rather dryly titled "Gifts, Bequests, and the Income Tax Act." Philip Palmer, from the federal Department of Justice, spoke on the problems arising out of Revenue Canada's increasing concern over the inflation in the valuation for taxation purposes of donations of cultural property to museums. Museums were cautioned not to provide valuations directly, nor to arrange for outside appraisals, since the museum then becomes liable to legal action for giving bad tax advice should Revenue Canada not accept the valuation provided. The donor and Revenue Canada should agree before a tax claim is made.

Continuing the theme of "Great Expectations," the session titled "What is Expected of Museums in Light of New Technology?" dealt with the theoretical



ROBERT BARROW

Enjoying the delicious array of foods at the pancake breakfast is, left, Victoria Shaw, AMM Second Vice-President. Serving is Elna Broddy, center, and Irene Moxness, right.

and the practical aspects of the changes in relationships in the museums which are mediated by new technologies. Stanley Horner, Associate Professor of Fine Arts at Concordia University, spoke about the basic process of disillusionment, disillusionment, and resolution in learning to deal with technology, whether it be simple (e.g., a blanket) or complex (e.g., a computer). He stressed the importance of the learner recognising what is happening during the process (what social scientists call "metacognition"). Inez Wolins, Instructor of Museum Education at the Bank Street College of Education, reported on research in museum learning mediated by technology such as video and computers. She cautioned that technology can be misused in the museum context and it does tend to reduce the amount of attention paid to the exhibits. Here we might go back to Marshall McLuhan's aphorism "the medium is the message." In other words, museum visitors using computers learn about computers, not about the exhibit the technology is supposed to be interpreting. Wolins recommended the use of such technology to help visitors attain visual literacy skills or concepts and ideas to assist them by looking at the exhibits. Her basic point was that technology in museums should be used to transmit procedural knowledge outside the gallery or even off-site rather than declaratory information within the exhibit.

During the current age of financial restraint and cutbacks, demands for

accountability, and of course ever increasing expectations, a popular session at many museum conferences in recent years has been stress management. Psychologist Dr. Mitchell Shack made a presentation in which he pointed out that stress arises basically from work overload (often caused by unrealistic expectations), conflict, change, ambiguity, and fear. He argued that most stress is in fact self-generated and self-imposed. Indeed, the key to stress management is to change one's own perception of the situation, to stop fearing failure, to prioritise, to take necessary breaks, and to be assertive. Fernand Lalonde, Director of Personnel Services at the National Museums of Canada, emphasised the need to have a planned strategy to cope with change. Dr. Lynne Teather, Coordinator of the Museum Studies Programme at the University of Toronto, focused on the need for shared values, networking, and collaboration in handling stress.

Finally, a wrap-up session heard the summary impressions of Jean Trudel, CMA Vice-President, and Dr. David Hemphill, Managing Director of the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature. Their comments on the conference centered on the new (and potentially deleterious) emphasis by museums on marketing and attendance development; the increasing importance of the special interest groups within the CMA; the lack of curators in attendance; the new emphasis on process as opposed to content; the emerging tension be-

tween traditional museum values and the needs of clients; and the dialectic between actively seeking while at the same time fearing or resisting change. Dr. Hemphill also voiced the perception that the average delegate to the conference seemed to feel a lack of knowledge and/or competence which inhibited wide participation in the discussions. Comments by workers in the smaller museums overheard by this writer confirmed this impression. As mentioned at the beginning of this review, many in the small museum community may indeed feel that all of this is quite beyond them. This appears to be one of the main reasons why so few of Manitoba's small museums (31.4% in 1983) are members of the CMA — they perceive their real needs to be met more effectively through membership in the AMM. Indeed, if this were not so, there would scarcely be a need for provincial museum associations at all.

Nevertheless, workers in Manitoba's small museums would have found it worthwhile to attend this year's CMA conference, if only to lend their support to the hard work of the local organising committee. Despite the great (and seemingly unattainable) expectations raised at such conferences, small museums sometimes need to look beyond their own immediate practical concerns in order to grapple with the more lofty theoretical issues and, indeed, with the basic philosophy behind the museum movement which justifies our existence. As Philippe Mailhot of the Musée de Saint-Boniface summed it up so well in his comments at the closing session, workers in small museums should attend these CMA conferences because it is good to know that, given our limitations, at least we are heading in the right direction!