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Museums Need Adequate Funding

ONLY by surveying our past can we project the future. Yesterday is not going to return, but by considering what has already happened in the light of today's circumstances, we may guess what tomorrow may be like.

That is a main reason why museums and libraries are important. Most of mankind's progress has been achieved because imaginative individuals have been able to build upon accomplishments, discoveries and inventions of their predecessors and the recorded history of religion, science, art, mathematics, business and philosophy.

This has immediate significance for Oklahoma, because two major new museums are under consideration. One is the historic estate of former Gov. E. W. Marland that may be purchased by Ponca City for development as a public museum. Another is a movement in Oklahoma City to convert the Frank Buttram mansion into an art museum comparable to Philbrook Art Center in Tulsa.

Oklahoma has a few excellent museums and a number of others that have considerable room for improvement. Both of the proposed museums have a potentially high cultural and historical value. But how many museums do we need, and how many can we afford?

Older states have been collecting and displaying relics and artifacts since colonial and Civil War days, and they are building more. A recent

report says that a new museum opens somewhere in the United States every three days.

The nation's 5,000 museums are attracting more than 700 million visitors a year, according to the American Association of Museums. Increased leisure time, higher standards of education among young people, and imaginative exhibition techniques are reasons.

This sounds like success, but actually many museums are having to cut back on facilities, services and staff because of rising costs. Many great museums are badly under-financed.

The public has come to expect museums to offer more than "open storage" of antiques. This has led to concept parks and theme institutions, such as the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center, and related presentations that tell stories.

The National Museum of Natural History in Washington recently spent more than \$1 million to build an elaborate hall that features sound effects in a full scale reproduction of a tropical rain forest. Some think that is too much of a good thing.

The Smithsonian Institution has opened the Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in a controversial building on the Mall to house 6,000 paintings and sculptures valued at \$60 million. Joseph H. Hirshorn, an immigrant who made a fortune in mining, donated the art, but it cost the government \$15 million to put up the building. Maintenance, staff, and other expenses will continue to cost taxpayers dollars.

Adequate finances must be provided to keep such an institution going, as well as to get it started, or it may fail to accomplish the worthwhile purposes for which it is intended.