

Museum Notes

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BY BEVERLY SHIFFER

One of the many services offered to the public by your Iowa State Department of History and Archives is the tours conducted through the building. Led by competent and devoted guides, these tours are a favorite with the school children of Iowa, and are entertaining and educational for them and their teachers as well. In 1964, an estimated 18,270 children were led on 522 of these tours.

Children from all over the state of Iowa have a wider understanding of their state's history through the unique manner of actually seeing the things which were instrumental in making our state what it is today.

With five types of tours—Wildlife, Geology, Indian, Pioneer, and General—these are calculated to appeal to every taste or to a specialized field of learning. In the Pioneer section children observe objects such as foot-warmers, knitted doll clothes, old diaries, dishes, silverware, furniture, jewelry, and all the other things which so well represent the lives of their ancestors. The boys are always especially interested in the wide collection of firearms as the guide explains the difference between percussion and flintlock, a rifle and a musket, types of shot and the accuracy of each piece, while the girls find the amusing anecdotes about the cooking utensils, appliances, and household methods of past ages of special interest.

Of course, the wildlife exhibits are a favorite stopping place for both boys and girls as they observe mounted animals in their natural habitat, some familiar to them, some no longer on the Iowa scene.

The Indian relics, skeletons, weapons, toys, tools, artifacts, and even a scalp or two, all have a special eerie effect as the children imagine actually being back in the old days when Indians roamed freely over our land. They learn of the various tribes which were native to Iowa, their social and religious customs, living conditions, hunting skills, how they kept warm in the winter and cool in the summer, methods of acquiring and making clothing, the difference between the Woodland

Indian and Plains Indian and the different types of housing preferred by each, and the fads, fables and folklore attributed to each tribe. In spite of the thorough lecture given by the

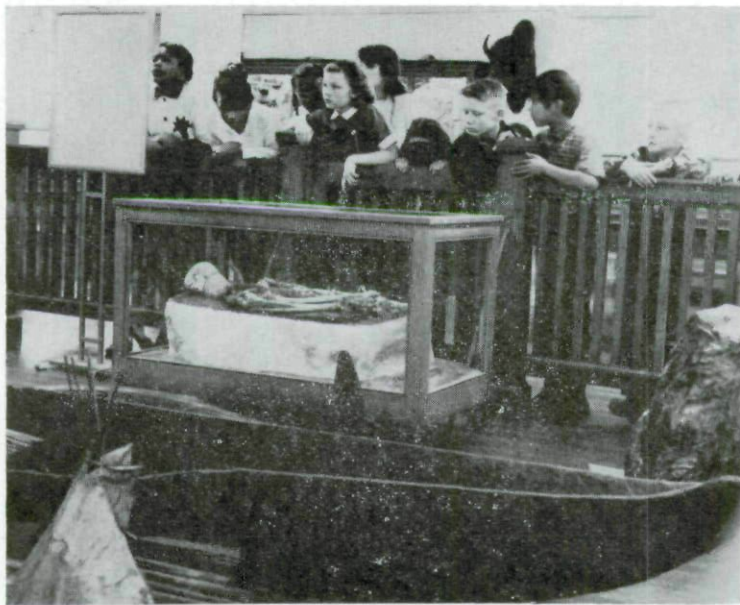


Photo By Beverly Shiffer

guide, there are always a few eager hands up to ask questions at the conclusion of each tour, and you can be sure that for days afterwards these children will be watching for any odd-shaped rocks on their way to school in hopes of finding a "real arrow-head" for their very own.

As the tour continues, the children can hardly imagine themselves riding on one of those odd-looking contraptions called an "early bicycle," or their fathers driving one of those electric, steam or gasoline automobiles with nothing but a stick to guide it, or buzzing along at 35 miles-per-hour in a 1902 Cadillac Convertible with chain drive; but they can imagine themselves in the covered wagon, the huge Conestoga wagon, or one of the stagecoaches bumping along at break-neck speed with the previously mentioned Indians in hot pursuit. The usual comment to the guide at this point is, "But these are much bigger than the ones on T.V.!"

In the geology department it is hard even for an adult to realize that they are viewing evidence of *billions* of years of geologic time. Represented here are fossils, formations and rocks, some dating as far back as the Pre-Cambrian period. On display here is the finest example of crinoid specimens in the world, and they not only learn what a *geode* is (a hollow, spherical or lenticular rock enclosing a cavity which is lined with crystal or other mineral formations) but also how it is formed and whether it is botryoidal or cryptocrystalline quartz. The eyes of the miniature rock collectors light up at the sight of the beautifully colored quartz samples, the amethysts, and the agates.

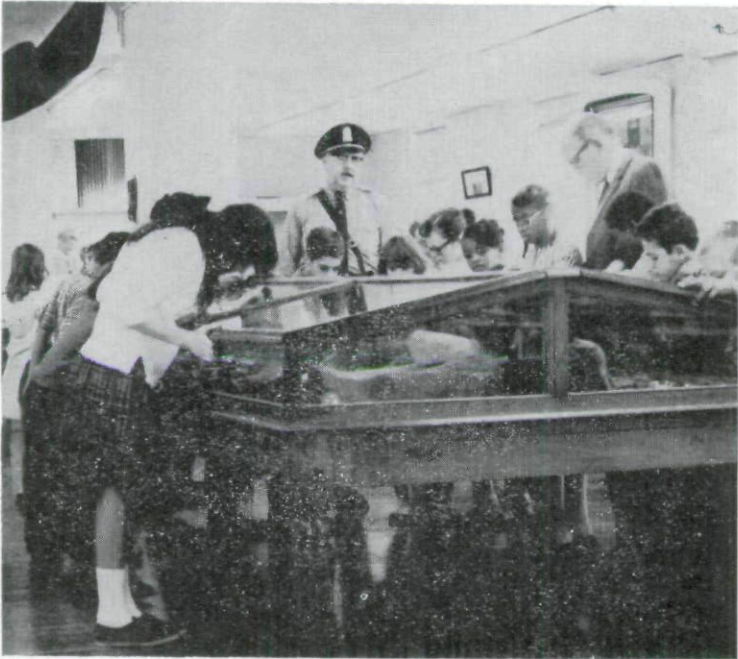


Photo By Beverly Shiffer

Thousands of letters from these children have been received, expressing appreciation for the many things they learned while visiting their State Museum. These letters convince us that our most enjoyable task here is also our most rewarding one.

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