

Libraries and Museums: Partners in Community Welfare

As communities continue to grow, and more people are drawn into cities, a struggle to offer free and equal access to education, art, information and recreation to all community members is transpiring. Throughout time, libraries and museums have proven to be community centers that allow people to seek information and to learn about things they may not have known about before. A strengthened relationship between libraries and museums, in which exhibits may be accompanied by a series of books or a relating artifact, may complement research being compiled by librarians and awareness that the museum wants to raise; such partnerships will create additional situations where patrons will be exposed to educational materials. In the case where an individual, or group within a community, is unable to pay to fees required to gain entry into some museums, library involvement may help bridge the gap so that these individuals are able to experience some of the items housed within a local museum. It is my belief that the functions of libraries will continue to intermix with the realm of museums in order to allow the individuals who visit both locations to gain a deeper level of insight into the items that they are viewing.

Although libraries and museums are separate entities, with one housing books and other forms of rentable and easily accessible information while the other houses pieces of history that could otherwise be closed off to the layperson, their similarities begin with their basic purpose of preservation. Patrick Lo (2014) describes the relationship between libraries and museums in his article by stating: "It is because objects collected and stored inside the museum are also meant to provide information about the object itself, i.e., the type of object, its context and relationships to other objects. From an information science

point of view, museums are therefore very similar to other types of repositories, such as libraries (books and other materials for reading and story) and archives (historical records and documents).” In this sense, it is plausible to say that libraries and museums are closely related to each other through the quest of bringing information and items that *could* be lost to society to the surface where it is easy to encounter. Both libraries and museums hold items that are sometimes considered controversial, such as the book *Mein Kampf*, or Nazi artifacts, in order to help the public retain history and derive the ability to learn from these points in our collective past.

Many museums are accompanied by a library that is either directly located within the building or close by. The benefit of this proximity is limitless, as libraries are able to help museum curators procure and present information in a cohesive unit that will be easy for museum-goers to digest. Urban (2014) notes that, over time, “the museum community recognized librarianship as a valuable profession that could make contributions to both museum functions and serve as a model for training museum workers.” For example, librarians working at the Bok Tower Gardens, a historical site in Florida, gather information that informs the visitor museum and information center. Similarly, these librarians gather information on carillons, whose music is a distinguishing factor of the Bok Tower Gardens. In other cases, librarians at museums like the Dali Museum or Smithsonian often work to organize, document and safely store the artifacts or related pieces.

Additionally, Kim (2012) notes that library study programs are supporting the growing relationship between libraries and museums through “an increasing emphasis on museums within the LIS program and that museum studies is gaining acceptance as an

area in the LIS field in the United States as LIS programs incorporate more museum relevant subjects into their infrastructure.” The support from education programs will streamline the integration process between libraries and museums by allowing library professions to better understand and suit the needs of museums. In turn, museums will benefit from the presence of librarians working with information technology within their walls.

It is possible for a future to be cultivated in which libraries and museums are closely related in a mutually beneficial manner. In order to maintain a community that is well informed, museums and libraries must work to remain within the realm of public interest. Both museums and libraries work closely with the community and with the community children through educational programs that draw in large audiences. Many libraries have cultural showcases to highlight the diversity in the country and community, which is something that museums could participate in. As many communities either house or are close to a museum, it would be possible for the museum curators to combine forces with libraries to bring in expert employees and items to highlight different aspects of the libraries’ cultural event. Similarly, librarians could attend museum events with books and information to highlight the exhibits and raise awareness for the library. Furthermore, as museums are often associated with entry fees, library involvement with museums would allow citizens who cannot afford those museum fees to view parts of the museum through their library.

Overall, the symbiotic nature of a relationship between libraries and museums is clear to me. The need for human society to have access to information and pieces of information is the founding principle for both libraries and museums, which necessitates

that both facilities remain modern with technology and clear in their presentation of information. These institutions can only benefit from a relationship, as community members becoming involved with literacy at libraries and historical awareness at museums will create a cycle of use that can keep libraries and museums open and busy while retaining a level of professional excellence. The future of this partnership can be predicted as one of growth; librarians will be able to integrate into the museum culture in order to bring in their backgrounds of information literacy that can only serve promote the goals of museums.

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