

## GEORGE GUSTAV HEYE — 1874-1956

George Heye died on January 20, 1957, at the age of 82. He occupied a unique place in the history of New World anthropology, because he assembled the largest existing collection representing the aboriginal cultures of this hemisphere. He also created a museum to house and exhibit it, and he gathered around himself, for a time, a technical staff competent to appraise, publish and increase his collections. Yet later his financial structure collapsed and his staff melted away; thus he had years of difficulty in maintaining the legal stipulations necessary for tax exemption of a public museum. Today, the new director, E. K. Burnett, states that the museum has weathered the financial shoals and is hoping again to expand.

Heye, who came from a wealthy New York family, studied engineering at Columbia and Hamburg, then worked as a railroad engineer in Arizona, where he first came in contact with living Indians and ancient aboriginal artifacts. After a short experience in Wall Street, he decided that he had the financial resources and the bent to devote his life to accumulating the artifacts of aboriginal America.

Heye never studied anthropology but he was not a dilettante and, by experience in handling the material, he became a connoisseur in many phases of native art. Embarked on a career of collecting at a period when there were few anthropologists with formal training (and most of them were tied up by teaching), he sought the best and most experienced help to be had. From 1904 onward, he was not satisfied with mere purchases of specimens, but sent out well-financed expeditions which brought in material with accurate field data — a subject to which we shall return. Heye himself was a member of many early expeditions and helped publish the results. These field trips established the nucleus around which a technical staff was later built.

We shall not trace in detail the development of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. Much of the story is contained in a pamphlet entitled "The History of the Museum" (*Misc. Series*, No. 55, 1956). Heye's private collection soon became too large for one individual to handle. Few remember that part of it once was on loan at the University Museum in Philadelphia. At one time, there were negotiations with the American Museum of Natural History in regard to constructing a "Heye Wing," to be at his disposal for life.

This fell through because Heye insisted, as was then current practice in many museums, that his collection must always be displayed as a unit.

In order to house his material, Heye rented several floors in a loft building on 33rd Street in New York, where it remained for many years until installed in the present location. Over 40 years ago, when the writer first saw these collections, they were not open to the public and could be seen by invitation only.

Not long after the present Museum was opened to the public, Nicholas Murray Butler, then President of Columbia, and George Heye, a Columbia graduate, had a meeting to discuss the question of amalgamation with Columbia as a university museum. Heye remarked afterwards, "I am Director for Life by the articles of incorporation. Why should I make somebody else my boss?" Probably both institutions still could be strengthened by closer if informal cooperation.

Heye's technical staff stemmed from his offering to finance field trips and publication to individuals working for other institutions, who first came to him on leaves of absence. This was followed by offers of permanent salaries and pensions. Pepper, Saville, M. R. Harrington, Hodge, Skinner, and Cadzow were among the first to join up; there was also a group of great technicians, including Bush, Coffin, W. C. Orchard, and Turbyfill. Since Heye's death, Charles Turbyfill today is the only living individual who has seen the entire contents of the Museum.

We were all of us, I think, drawn towards Heye by the prospect of a new dream museum: hard work demanded, technical skill expected, publication under a great editor (Hodge) assured, financial care for life promised — in days when there were no pension systems for anthropologists. Our group was a harmonious team and productive, as is shown by the list of publications. Among the older men were great scholars of outstanding generosity who shared their knowledge and experience with all.

Heye's story is not entirely one of success, for he was a strong willed character who liked to do things in his own way and did not make full use of the technical help he had assembled. For the guidance of future students, we should point out that the Museum catalog, of which

Heye personally took entire charge for most of his active life, is not what it should be.

For this there are several reasons. In the first place, no field catalog numbers were entered in the Museum catalog and a great deal of information has thus been lost. On the other hand, Heye, if requested, personally added the Museum catalog numbers to the field catalog. Some of these double entries still exist in private hands.

In the second place, nothing is entered in the catalog as "provenience unknown." Saville and the present writer once were shown a small statue of unrecorded type, acquired in a mixed collection without data, and were asked where it came from. One of us guessed Guatemala, the other Venezuela. I do not remember which Heye chose, but a guess was recorded as fact.

Heye had no interest in potsherds — once they were cataloged and added to the count of specimens in the Museum. When the Museum storage was moved to the Bronx, over 70 barrels of sherds were thrown away. So far as is known, there is no record of what was discarded. Some of these sherds came from stratigraphic cuts which had not been published.

George Heye led a complicated personal life, with which we are not concerned. His treatment of some of those who had served him loyally and well is still recalled and resented. On the other hand, others will remember his hospitality, generosity, and understanding. His museum is his monument. For the foreseeable future, no student of aboriginal Americana need leave New York to secure unpublished material for his thesis.

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