A New Kind of Museum

One hundred thousand hours of child activity in Oklahoma have been spent in the various children's museums maintained in thirty towns since December 1, 1938. That would be fifty years of continuous work for one man working steadily at the normal rate of forty-four hours per week with only eighteen days of holiday a year.

What could induce children to put in so much time?

The Statewide Museum Service, financed and operated by the Works Projects Administration of Oklahoma is under the technical direction of the Visual Education Department of the University of Oklahoma, a service of the Extension Division.

But—Children's Museums! How could 100,000 children be induced to spend even one hour in a museum? The answer lies in the fact that a Children's Museum is not the museum that is pictured in your mind when the word is casually spoken. The children's museum is not a dusty storehouse of inanimate objects; it is not a scientific laboratory; it is not a hush-hush place full of antiquities; it is not a solemn, high-hat gallery of fine arts.

To all intents, a Children's Museum is in existence wherever an interesting object is surrounded by interested children. The museums that are being conducted in Oklahoma go one step further: the directors insist that the interesting object be surrounded by child-activity. Now that does not mean play, even in the sense of purposeful play as promulgated by the progressivists in modern education; rather it means the activity of the child's mind seeking out of the object all realistic facts about it and coordinating this information through personal activity so that reproduction of the thing and all ideas related to it may become actual.

This leads to a number of kinds of activity which range from drawing and carving to such elaborate processes as determination of specific gravity and other simple scientific activities.

But—you say that is the very aim of the curriculum as pursued in the classrooms of all schools. True. But in the museum the pressure of control is relaxed and the child enters into the activity solely because of his interest. It has long been recognized that child-initiated activities teach the child more per minute than any amount directed or demanded by adults. Perhaps this accounts somewhat for those 100,000 hours spent in children's museums in Oklahoma.