THE MUSEUM DIVISION, 1935-1946

The decision to place development of museums for the eastern historical parks in the hands of the National Park Service's most experienced museum worker led to results of wider import. It established a museum staff capability in the director's office that would remain uninterrupted for 35 years, until creation of the Harpers Ferry Center. It in turn stimulated the definition of Service-wide policies and procedures aimed at making park museums equal to any in America in terms of professional practice. It promoted the concept of a central staff to serve all park museums, a necessary factor in attaining professional standards. The activities of the central staff helped forge a unified chain of museums, each under the local control of the park superintendent but sharing a common nucleus of professional skills and guidance.

In 1935 history museums as a class lagged behind museums of art or natural history in numerous ways. The Park Service plunge into this backwater added substantially to the fund of ideas about history museum aims and methods. Most park museums also represented a distinct and as yet poorly defined category, now known as site museums. Here, too, the Service made important contributions to theory and practice. On the eve of America's entry into World War II, publication of the *Field Manual for Museums* won for the Service a position of international repute in museology. Meanwhile, the funding of park museum work eluded a stable solution.

The Eastern Museum Division

Carl Russell reported for duty in Washington on January 17, 1935. He found that the Branch of Research and Education had done nothing on the eastern museum projects while waiting for the allotment of funds to "equip" the new buildings already under construction. The fiscal year during which the money would be available was already more than half gone. His three branch colleagues had no real understanding of the task he faced and little incentive to help. Harold Bryant, the assistant director in charge, did not rate museums as important components of park interpretive programs and regarded Russell's assignment as a temporary measure to meet a passing need.[1]

Verne Chatelain had a stronger interest in museums for historical parks. He considered them part of the domain he stood on the verge of winning in his fight for a separate branch of history. But he did not foresee more than a subordinate role for Russell, whom he thought would merely produce exhibits specified by the historians. Neither Chatelain nor Bryant sensed

what Russell saw clearly: that museums required thorough, knowledgeable planning. The field historians were not equipped by training or experience to prepare such plans. When Chatelain came to realize that Russell would have to provide the plans as well as produce the exhibits, he tried more obtuse methods of control.[2]

Earl Trager as chief of the Natural History Division had less involvement in Russell's mission because it concerned the historical parks primarily. But circumstances made him somewhat hostile as well. The new museum projects posed a threat to Trager's operation of the shop at Fort Hunt, and he would soon lose an even more cherished responsibility. The secretary of the interior's office was absorbing his Visual Education Section, taking the staff and equipment with which the Natural History Division was carrying on an active program of still and motion picture photography. Moving Russell into the office space vacated by the section rubbed salt in the wound.

The newly arrived museum expert thus began work at cross purposes with the branch establishment. He foresaw a museum division that would provide the continuing professional basis for the Service's entire museum program.[3] Sharing this vision not at all, Bryant was justified in considering Russell's status temporary. Furloughed from his permanent civil service post, Russell became a PWA employee on January 19. The PWA appropriation would expire on June 30 and Congress had not acted to assure any extension of the program. The $65,000 allotment for eastern museum projects had to cover his salary and travel, the hiring of equally temporary museum planners and preparators, the purchase of exhibit cases and library furniture for the museums under construction, and the equipping of an exhibit production laboratory. It also had to pay for his office furniture and secretary.

Before Russell could start to analyze these needs, museum matters at Colonial National Monument called him away. He spent eight days at the park trying to get the staff started on a museum development plan. Superintendent Floyd Flickinger's younger brother showed the most interest and agreed to undertake the assignment. For several months Russell nursed the hope that the finished plan could serve as a model for other historical parks. But the local staff could not decide among various proposals for future development, and the plan failed to materialize. The only solid accomplishment of the visit was a rough exhibit plan for a temporary installation. Russell worked it out with the historians and architects at the park to fit the reconstructed kitchen of the Swan Tavern complex at Yorktown. It provided about all that Colonial's $3,050 share of PWA funds might suffice to produce.[4]

After only a few days back at his desk another matter requiring a museum expert again diverted Russell from the main task. Fort McHenry,

one of the parks transferred from the War Department in 1933, would shortly acquire by gift the E. Berkley Bowie Collection of some five hundred items, mostly firearms. The Service wished to have them on display by September 12, Francis Scott Key Day. Russell spent two days in Baltimore studying the available space and viewing the collection. The trip allowed him a long evening of discussion with E. W. W. Hoyt, Baltimore-based museum case salesman for Remington Rand, Inc. This company had taken over the business of A. N. Russell and Sons, manufacturers of Library Bureau and Russell-Built exhibit cases. Carl Russell knew from his Yellowstone experience that these cases with their narrow extruded bronze or aluminum frames, polished plate glass, and virtually dust-tight construction offered both protective and visual qualities he wanted park museums to have. Hoyt, driven by the depressed economy, was ready to work hard for a sale.

Hoyt gave Russell all the help he could in working up specifications for the exhibit cases to be purchased under the current PWA program. Russell welcomed this help, for the procurement deadline did not give him time to wait for completion of the exhibit plans, and he could not even visit each park scheduled to receive cases. Hoyt joined in talks with the architects to assure compatibility with planned interior spaces and finishes. He could also detail the intricate extrusions for the case frames, which had special features such as channels to hold filter wicks. Both men fulfilled their intentions in this collaboration. At the bid opening on June 10 Remington Rand submitted the only bid and obtained the $22,000 order. Russell got the quality products he wanted, and Hoyt his salesman's commission. Hoyt continued to be helpful, pushing the Fort McHenry cases through production in time for the September event.[5]

Hoyt also let Russell know that Albert Brill Russell needed a job. A. B. Russell understood the fabrication of museum exhibit cases as well as anyone in the business. He could match Hoyt's skill in drafting practical specifications and do so without direct ties to any single manufacturer. A grandson of A. N. Russell and son of a former Library Bureau president, he had managed the museum case factory for years. After Remington Rand took over, he was replaced. Carl Russell hired him in the summer of 1935 as museum equipment engineer. He remained a valuable staff member as long as PWA-funded projects required the procurement of exhibit cases.[6]

A. B. Russell contributed more than the meticulous detailing of case construction. His sensitivity to needs voiced by curators and preparators set in motion a progressive modification of cases for use in the parks. Case bases increased in height to bring specimens into optimum viewing range. Other changes in dimensions, lighting, and glazing followed in later years as did the development of cases recessed into walls without sacrificing secure, dust-tight but accessible enclosure. A. B. Russell also established

a pattern of good working relationships with case manufacturers that continued for at least 25 years.[7]

Carl Russell's visit to Baltimore had emphasized in other ways the urgency of his staffing problem. The eastern museum program needed both preparators to build exhibits and planners to plan them. Russell proposed sending planners into the parks where PWA-funded museums were under construction. He wanted people with at least some museum training or experience and with a solid background in American history. When this combination proved practically impossible to find, he chose to accentuate the museum component by calling the positions curatorial, although they scarcely fitted the definition. Having drafted job descriptions for three grades—field curators to be paid at the annual rate of $2,900, assistant curators at $2,300, and museum assistants at $1,800—he started recruiting.

Returning from a visit to the American Museum of Natural History, where Clark Wissler recommended three of his Yale graduate students, Russell stopped at Morristown to check on progress.[8] A fresh look at the Morristown collection after he had seen the gun collection for Fort McHenry convinced him that he needed a real curator expert in firearms. His search led to a government employee in Washington who collected antiques as a hobby and had a special interest in weapons. John A. Sachse entered on duty March 19, 1935, apparently the first Park Service employee to bear the title of curator. After two weeks of preparation in Russell's office he went to Morristown to help develop the new museum at the park. There Vernon Setser, an ECW historical technician assigned from the park staff to prepare the exhibit plan, was trying to apply Russell's concept of a narrative museum, while Sachse favored the old method of simply displaying the whole collection with minimal explanation. His lack of academic qualifications hindered communication with his colleagues, and his organizational relationships with them were vague. Under these circumstances he left his post without orders in August and returned to Russell's office in Washington.[9]

Russell sent Sachse immediately to Fort McHenry, where his knowledge of guns was needed in a less complex situation. There he laid out and installed a temporary display of the Bowie collection in time for the September celebration. Afterward he catalogued the Bowie collection, photographed the objects in it, and prepared temporary labels. Then he demonstrated a growth in understanding by successfully planning a more permanent gun exhibit based on the collection. In line with Russell's progressive museological ideas his plan called for installing a selection of weapons and accouterments to outline the story of firearms in American history. Numerous illustrated labels would supplement the specimens. The bulk of the Bowie material would comprise a study collection in visible storage on the second floor. The plan also pointed out the environmental

hazards of the harbor-side location and the necessity of regular inspection and preservative treatment. Approved and carried out, this plan along with the collection catalogue marked Sachse's principal contribution. He went on to draft plans for a narrative exhibit to tell the Fort McHenry story and worked briefly on weapons collections at the Fredericksburg battlefield park and Morristown before his death in August 1938.[10]

In March and April 1935 seven prospective curators received notice of their appointments, two as assistant curators and five as museum assistants. Like all PWA positions, these were filled from a list maintained in the secretary of the interior's office. Getting on the list required the endorsement of the local Democratic Party chairman at the applicant's place of residence, although not every chairman questioned every applicant's party affiliation. In any case, Russell apparently got the men he requested. Each of the seven had some museum-connected experience, but science rather than history predominated in their graduate training. Most were archeologists or ethnologists, one was a botanist, and one was an entomologist. They all accepted appointments that extended only to June 30.[11]

Each appointee reported to Russell in Washington for indoctrination before proceeding to the park where he would become a paid employee. His first assignment, he learned, would consist of preparing a general museum development plan, or prospectus as it was later termed. Collaborating with ECW historical technicians in the park, he would have to decide what facts and ideas the proposed museum needed to communicate. With the subject matter in succinct narrative form he would then outline the number and nature of exhibit units to accomplish this. The narrative and exhibit outline constituted the development plan. As soon as he submitted it, he was to start work on a detailed exhibit plan, called the museum master plan, specifying the content of each unit. Russell also felt it necessary to take each novitiate privately to the lounge of the Powhatan Hotel a few blocks up 18th Street, where he could speak freely about the serious antagonisms that existed in the Branch of Research and Education. The projected museum plans would have to navigate these troubled waters to gain approval.[12]

The novice curators carried with them a written guideline as well. Addressed to them and signed by Associate Director Arthur Demaray, it outlined the objectives of park museums, told how museum work in the Service was organized, and defined seven steps in the process of developing a park museum. What no one but Russell fully understood was that it also constituted the preliminary charter for the museum division he was striving to get established. The procedures it prescribed looked more to the future than to established practice. It followed closely the wording of a proposed Service-wide code of procedure he had drafted, whose full scope neither Bryant nor Chatelain was ready to approve. The code was in fact a

carefully studied revision of one prepared by Ansel Hall that would have confirmed Hall's central role in the museum program and left Russell at best as his eastern representative. Russell had begun rewriting it before being asked. Official recognition of his title as Chief, Eastern Museum Division, independent of Hall followed within a month Demaray's signature of the memorandum to the curators.[13]

The memorandum contributed to another effect perhaps not consciously intended. It stated clearly that "scientific and historical collections form the foundation for most exhibits" but conditioned this axiom by pointing out that graphic devices could help exhibits tell their stories. Reference to the versatile array of artists and craftsmen at the museum laboratory underlined the potential availability and usefulness of pictures, maps, models, and other visual aids. This reinforced several factors tending to diminish the role of historic objects in the museums being planned. The military parks to which the planners went lacked substantial collections of appropriate artifacts, even though some might have tons of unprocessed battlefield debris. Neither the curators nor the historical technicians could identify and interpret such objects in more than a rudimentary way, for scholarly study of material culture had as yet produced few reference works to help them. Few historical museums had tried to present a narrative history by means of specimens. No one really knew how to do it. The planners, on the other hand, could readily turn to the recently published 15-volume *Pageant of America* and the older 10-volume *Photographic History of the Civil War* to see for themselves how effectively pictures could combine with relatively brief texts for this purpose.[14]

In consequence, the first batch of eastern exhibit plans relied on graphic devices much more than on artifacts, prompting the following description of the first museum installation:

> The planners . . . ignored the existing collection of historical relics. Illustrations were chosen on the basis of effectiveness. Even when pertinent objects were available, they were rejected if other devices seemed better. . . . The result is a historical museum almost without relics! In their place specially prepared paintings assume considerable importance. Maps, diagrams and models are used frequently. Most of the historical objects that are displayed merely supplement the vital illustrations and are placed on the floor of the cases.[15]

The description applied equally to contemporaneous historical installations in such western parks as Scotts Bluff, which Russell had planned the previous year. The guideline document had led park museums into an experimental mode that would produce further changes in current practice.

The initial experiments began in April as each planner/curator entered on duty at his park. Kenneth B. Disher went as curator and Nathaniel Everard as museum assistant to Chickamauga and Chattanooga National

Military Park, museum assistants Alden B. Stevens and Robert D. Starrett went to Shiloh, curator John C. Ewers and museum assistant Ralph H. Lewis went to Vicksburg, and Morris Titiev went alone as curator to Guilford Courthouse.[16] They set to work with little time to spare before their jobs terminated at the end of June. A joint resolution of Congress approved April 8 gave the President $5 billion to fund the various emergency relief agencies for another two years, but money to continue the eastern park museum projects was not released to the Service until February 1936. Russell did receive authority to prolong the current work beyond June 30, but for only one month. He made a quick trip to check on the progress of his planning curators, visiting Guilford Courthouse on June 24 and going on to Chattanooga the same night. Stevens and Lewis met him there with drafts of the Shiloh and Vicksburg plans. After reviewing the work accomplished so far, he sent Stevens to Great Smoky Mountains, Lewis to Hot Springs, and Titiev to Antietam National Battlefield Site to start museum plans there.

By the cutoff date Russell had obtained seven museum development plans and five exhibit plans from the curators he had sent to the parks. None of the exhibit plans contained all of the detailed specifications required for production. Work had to stop before that point, the men having been told that if they returned to Washington at their own expense, the Service would rehire them for another temporary project. Although his insistence that intensive planning precede exhibit preparation had not netted Russell a single completed exhibit plan, he felt the need to demonstrate the nature of these documents. He chose a sixth plan, equally incomplete but done under his watchful eye, to reproduce and distribute as an example.[17]

The success of Russell's eastern assignment and the future of his hopes for a museum division depended on getting exhibits prepared and installed in the new museums being built through PWA. He did not wait to have the exhibit plans in hand before setting up a central exhibit preparation facility. Lafayette Hall at Morristown had been selected the previous year as the best location. In February 1935 he began purchasing supplies and hiring preparators.

Arthur Ohlman, a versatile craftsman, was the first, followed by Wilfrid Swancourt Bronson, John W. Dawson, and Rosario Fiore. Bronson had accompanied the Bingham Expedition as artist and had already begun his career as a prolific writer and illustrator of children's books on various aspects of animal life. Dawson was trained particularly in oil painting. Fiore, a sculptor, adapted well to the miniature scale usually needed for museum exhibits. The preparation staff increased by six in late March: Joseph Andrews, a sculptor who later served as principal preparator for the National Museum's Department of Anthropology; Otto H. Jahn, a general preparator who specialized to a degree in large maps; artists Basil E.

Eastern Museum Laboratory at Morristown, c. 1936. Preparator Wilfred Bronson and curator John Ewers collaborate on an exhibit.

Martin and Harry C. Wood; Wilfred J. Mead, a technician and photographer who had worked under Russell at Yellowstone; and David H. Stech, probably an artist. By the end of May the group included at least two more artists, Joseph Colgan and Lloyd W. Biebigheiser.[18]

Having a talented staff at this stage created two temporary problems. Russell needed to find appropriate work for the men pending completion and approval of exhibit plans, and someone had to manage a potentially volatile crew. Several of the artists pitched into make layouts and sketches for the Morristown exhibit plan. Others built and installed some orientation displays for the Statue of Liberty, which the Service had recently acquired. When it became clear that Vernon Setser, the Morristown historian acting as museum planner, should not shoulder the extra task of shop manager, Ohlman served as interim leader.[19]

The new eastern museum program entailed a multifaceted workload that grew quickly. Russell found that he needed an assistant to oversee the planning and another to supervise exhibit preparation at Morristown. He soon had in mind the men he wanted for these two assignments but could not justify under PWA a pay rate to match their existing salaries.

The planning aspect being more urgent, he asked first for the transfer of Louis Schellbach from Berkeley. Schellbach understood from experience what park museum plans should accomplish and had amply demonstrated professional knowledge, skills, and energy for the task. His ECW status in the western program made it possible to offer him $3,800 rather than the

lower amount set in the PWA schedule. A telegraphic order from Associate Director Demaray proved necessary to force his move over Ansel Hall's resistance. Schellbach reported in Washington on April 12, and for the next month and a half he gave good support to the planning program for the six PWA park museum projects. He found the office strife and administrative constraints frustrating, however, and some of his actions threatened to upset carefully nurtured relations with the architects. In early June Russell shifted him to a fresh planning job that suited him better and kept him productively engaged until he returned to Berkeley in September.[20]

Before the architectural problem came to a head, Russell had obtained his other assistant. It took only two encounters with Ned Burns to convince him that Burns was the "best man I know of in preparation."[21] Burns in fact knew a great deal about museum work besides exhibit preparation. As a schoolboy he had discovered the Staten Island Museum near his home. Under the tutelage of William T. Davis and Charles W. Leng, museum volunteers and renowned amateur entomologists, Ned received field training in observation and interpretation that any park naturalist might envy. When his father's death ruled out college and required him to help support the family, the Staten Island Museum offered him a job as guard. His duties included janitorial work, serving as projectionist for public lectures, giving talks and tours, and preparing exhibits that included three creditable miniature groups. After five years he joined the preparation staff at the American Museum of Natural History, where he learned taxidermy among many other skills. At night he attended classes in design, painting, and sculpture at the New York School of Industrial Arts and the Art Students League.

After nearly six years at the American Museum Burns was offered the post of chief preparator for the newly organized Museum of the City of New York. Burns did more for the museum than create outstanding exhibits. He served as its business manager and later as assistant director. His responsibilities ranged from hiring guards and maintenance staff to defending the budget at city hall. In the process he gained a working knowledge of local politics down to the ward level. All this helped equip him to administer a major national museum program.[22]

When Russell conferred with Burns in New York on February 23, he had little hope of attracting him to the Park Service. The museum paid Burns several hundred dollars more per year than the Service could offer. It must have been a surprise to receive an application from him in March stating that he would accept a salary of $3,800. To meet that price Russell probably had to wait until Schellbach's transfer to PWA set a precedent. By the end of April worsening conditions at the inadequately supervised preparation shops led him to recommend Burns' appointment as superintendent of field laboratories at Morristown. The salary grade delayed

approval, but Burns entered on duty June 3. He reported for a brief introductory assignment in Washington while Russell's architectural problem was boiling.

Until 1934 the architectural development of park museums proceeded smoothly. Herbert Maier designed most of the museum buildings and supervised their construction. Through his association with Hermon Bumpus and the Buffalo Museum of Science he gained an understanding of the special functional needs that characterize museums. He also worked comfortably within Park Service design constraints, which called for the use of native materials and a rustic style fitting the natural settings. Jesse Nusbaum, who designed the Mesa Verde museum building, also knew from experience what kinds of space a museum required. At Yosemite and Yellowstone Russell learned to work hand-in-hand with the architect as he planned and installed exhibits. Such collaboration continued when the 1934-35 PWA program funded five new museums in western parks. Service architects in the San Francisco office tackled the building designs and specifications in coordination with exhibit planning being carried on by the augmented curatorial staff headquartered at Berkeley. Architect Leffler Miller served as an effective go-between, working in the field with exhibit planners while keeping in close touch with his professional colleagues preparing the building plans.[23]

The simultaneous PWA program in the East faced a different set of circumstances. The influx of historical parks from a government reorganization in 1933 brought the Service many architectural problems. The new areas contained numerous historic structures in critical need of preservation or restoration. They also lacked buildings of various kinds necessary for their increased public use. The Branch of Plans and Design promptly set up an eastern division under Deputy Chief Architect Charles E. Peterson to prepare designs and specifications and inspect the work of construction contractors.

The 1934-35 PWA allotments provided for new combination administration/museum buildings in five eastern parks: Chickamauga and Chattanooga, Guilford Courthouse, Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Morristown. The eastern architectural staff undertook planning for the first four and contracted Morristown, the largest, to New York architect John Russell Pope, who had designed the Roosevelt Memorial Wing for the American Museum of Natural History and would soon be awarded the architectural contract for the National Gallery of Art. Adapting its design guidelines to the eastern situation, the Service called for buildings that would reflect in style and materials local structures characteristic of the historical period commemorated by each park.

By the time a museum expert who could advise the architects became available in the director's office, three of these projects were already under

construction. Plans for the other two were completed in the spring of 1935.[24] Predictably, those designed by Service architects without special knowledge of museum requirements proved ill-suited to their purpose. The Vicksburg building resembled so well an antebellum plantation mansion that a later superintendent converted it to his residence and packed the museum off to a utilitarian frame structure elsewhere in the park. At Chickamauga the museum occupied a balcony overlooking the lobby. Not only was access by a single stairway poor and perhaps hazardous, the space opened onto the lobby along one side and had windows along the opposite wall leaving only the short end walls as convenient exhibit areas.

After Russell arrived in Washington, he lost no time in establishing contact with the architects. When he could study their plans more closely, he found that the "Branch of Plans and Designs [sic] guards the interiors they are building quite as carefully as they do the exteriors." He could hardly blame the architects for the poor treatment of museum needs, for his own branch had done nothing to define them. Instead he resolved to work as best he could within the shortcomings of the projects underway to build a solid basis of cooperation for the next round of new museum facilities.[25]

Louis Schellbach nearly spoiled the scheme. Working with the planning curators, he incited some of them to challenge the architects and demand changes, mostly the closing of windows. His objections were valid but untimely. When they involved Pope's plans for Morristown, Tom Vint, chief of Plans and Design, called for a top-level conference. He appreciated the deficiencies in design but needed to establish acceptable procedures. His understanding leadership and Russell's commitment to shared responsibility in museum planning insured that curators and architects would do their best to keep in step as they worked on such projects. Although the immediate future gave relatively few opportunities to practice the principle, continual interplay between the two professions over the years clearly benefited Park Service museums.[26]

Russell's dream of a central museum division to serve all the national parks became a reality on December 2, 1935, when Director Arno B. Cammerer signed Office Order No. 312. "Until further notice, all matters pertaining to museum activities of the national park system will be handled by the Museum Division, Branch of Research and Education, of which Division Dr. C. P. Russell is hereby designated as Chief," it stated in part. "The functions of the Museum Division are to supervise and coordinate all museum activities, including those of the Field Education Division, the new Interior Building Museum, the Museum Laboratory at Morristown, New Jersey, and the Fort Hunt (Virginia) Model Laboratory."[27] The order terminated the brief existence of the Eastern Museum Division as an organizational unit.

The Interior Department Museum

The Department of the Interior faced what Secretary Harold Ickes saw as an identity problem. The average taxpayer could surmise what most federal executive departments did from their names—Agriculture, Commerce, Post Office, Treasury, and War, for example. But what did Interior do? To help answer this question Ickes decided to establish a museum whose exhibits would explain the history, purposes, and activities of the various bureaus. The construction of a new building for the department provided the opportunity to carry out his idea.

In mid-February 1935 Associate Director Demaray told Russell he was recommending to the secretary that Russell serve on a small committee for the proposed museum. Russell gave the matter little thought for several weeks until he learned that he was chairman of the committee and that Ickes expected action. The committee promptly conferred with the architect for the new building and learned that he was allowing less and less space in the floor plans for a museum. His tune changed late in April after the secretary made it evident that he was in earnest. The museum would occupy an entire wing of the first floor close to the main entrance. Russell was still unenthusiastic but ruefully conjectured that "one fool minor project like one museum in Washington, D.C., will probably be the salvation of a coordinated national program of museums in the National Parks."[28]

Russell got busy contacting the various bureau heads and estimating costs. When the Service received notice on May 24 that a $100,000 PWA allotment for the Interior Museum would be forthcoming, the project became an urgent activity of his division. He seized the opportunity to reassign Schellbach as chief curator of the museum beginning June 1 and make him responsible for producing the necessary plans. The initial phase would be especially complex, so Russell assigned Ned Burns to help. Burns, who was just entering on duty, needed to become familiar with the overall organization of Park Service museum work anyway, so his introductory stay in Washington served a double purpose.

Schellbach and Burns spent the first half of June developing a scheme to convert the space designed for offices into a functional exhibit hall. They had to cope with a long, narrow, rather low-ceilinged wing containing a double row of load-bearing columns. They also had to work out reasonable adaptations of wiring, heating, and air conditioning provisions not originally intended for museum purposes. Their solution involved a system of furred walls dividing the space into alcoves that provided a well-defined area for each bureau's exhibits. The alcoves would be cove-lighted and the walls would accommodate recessed cases designed to roll out for access to wiring and ducts. In mid-June Burns took up his post as superintendent of the preparation laboratory at Morristown well acquainted with the physical

requirements of its first big production job.[29] Schellbach continued on the detailed planning for conversion of the wing and by the end of July was ready to have exhibit planning start.

Four of the planning curators whose appointments terminated July 31 returned to Washington to work on the Interior Museum. Schellbach assigned Kenneth Disher to the Bureau of Reclamation exhibits, John Ewers to those for the General Land Office, Morris Titiev to those for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Ralph Lewis to those for the Bureau of Mines. Fritioff Fryxell joined them to prepare the Geological Survey plan. Titiev transferred to Chatelain's staff in the new Branch of Historic Sites and Buildings after about two months and Alden Stevens succeeded him. Stevens also worked on the National Park Service alcove.

Each curator had to consult with bureau officials, digest the information the bureau wanted to present, develop an acceptable story sequence, and then prepare detailed exhibit specifications including label copy. The curators had no office but worked at their planning around a large reading table in the stacks of the Geological Survey library. After Schellbach transferred back to the Field Division of Education at Berkeley in September, Fryxell filled in as acting chief curator until late October when his promised appointment in Berkeley became available. Russell then assigned coordination of Interior Museum planning to Disher. The curators submitted exhibit plans for five of the bureaus during October.[30]

On the average the Interior exhibit plans made better use of specimens than had those for the first round of historical park museums. Some of the subject matter, including Indian material culture and technological aspects of surveying and mining, lent itself to objective illustration. When finally installed, the museum's 95 exhibit units contained a thousand objects. The museum also had to deal with unavoidably prosaic matters of bureaucratic policy and organization, which were difficult to make visually stimulating. To counterbalance less exciting displays, the plans called for increased use of dioramas, including ten of these popular devices. Miniature groups modeled in perspective and blended into painted background scenes were not new to museums, although calling them dioramas was a recent misnomer. They had captured the imagination of many visitors to the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. The fact that Ned Burns was an acknowledged master in the art of diorama creation doubtless influenced the planners as well.[31]

At Morristown Burns readied the laboratory to start production of the Interior Museum exhibits as quickly as progress on the curators' plans would allow. He could appreciate the influence the project might have on the future of the Park Service museum program. The laboratory's handiwork would stand on display at the seat of power. The secretary of the interior, the director of the National Park Service, and their principal

lieutenants would inevitably see and react to the exhibits. On this evidence the decision-makers would tend to judge the capability of the Service to create park museums of creditable quality and functional value.

To meet the challenge Burns strengthened the preparation staff. First he brought in two young men who had worked under him before on difficult and successful dioramas. Donald M. Johnson and Albert McClure, who possessed fine manual skills and a knowledge of the technical problems involved, would become mainstays of the prewar laboratory and in due course assistant chief preparators. Their arrival gave Burns 21 people hard at work on the Interior Museum exhibits by the end of 1935: twelve preparators, three per diem carpenters, and three additional per diem helpers along with John Ewers as field curator, A. B. Russell as equipment engineer, and Maxwell S. Fulcher as clerk. Preparation was then well underway on three dioramas, two mural maps, a set of four large paintings, and several smaller illustrations.[32]

The diorama probably started first had as its cannily chosen subject General Washington welcoming Lafayette on the steps of the Ford House in Morristown. This scene for the Park Service alcove well illustrated the nature of the new historical parks. The proximity of the Ford House to the laboratory simplified the task of copying intricate architectural details, with consequent cost savings. The laboratory could save more money by reusing the molds and data to duplicate the group, with only minor changes, for the Morristown museum. Burns would later cut costs on two more park museum dioramas by modified reproduction of others in the Interior Museum.

In the next few months Burns hired five more excellent preparators. Herman Van Cott and Lee Warthen were mature artists, talented and free from temperamental eccentricities, who painted historically accurate illustrations to carry exhibit narratives. Arthur A. Jansson worked on diorama backgrounds to a large extent. Rudolf W. Bauss and Frank G. Urban came as skilled model makers, Bauss having served a full apprenticeship as a wood carver on fine furniture in Germany. Burns also had on the payroll William H. Jackson, Civil War veteran, pioneer photographer, bullwhacker, and artist. Then in his early nineties, Jackson worked in his own New York studio. He painted several pictures for the Interior Museum, but his unique contribution consisted of costume sketches and notes for a diorama depicting the 1870 Yellowstone campfire where the national park idea traditionally originated. Because Jackson himself had camped in Yellowstone as a member of the 1871 Hayden Expedition, his advice lent considerable authenticity to the details.[33]

To support the work of the preparators the laboratory relied for curatorial services on John Ewers, Alden Stevens, Robert Starrett, Paul Hudson, Ralph Lewis, and Stuart Cuthbertson, the latter a former historical

technician at Vicksburg. They had to finish exhibit plans for the remaining bureaus and provide the voluminous information on which production of the illustrations, maps, models, and other graphic devices depended. One curator stationed at Morristown supplied a flow of such data from sources in the New York area and checked the accuracy of what the artists produced. Others in Washington gathered from the bureaus specimens, photographs, and all the facts and figures the exhibits would present.

In the spring of 1936 Burns transferred from Morristown to Washington. He was chief curator of the Interior Museum until August, when he became acting chief of the Museum Division. The change brought wider responsibilities with less opportunity to concentrate on Interior Museum matters. The Morristown laboratory was left in charge of Arthur Jansson, who was not well equipped for the role. Production nevertheless continued without apparent loss of quality until Burns resumed personal oversight. This came about when the laboratory moved to the second and third floors of the Ford's Theatre building in Washington, over the Lincoln Museum, that fall. The new location enabled Burns to maintain the Museum Division office in the Interior Building and spend time almost daily at the laboratory.

Two preparators left the Service rather than transfer to Washington. Wilfrid Bronson resumed writing and illustrating books at his Hudson Valley studio. Lynn A. Royal, a model maker from the University of Rochester museum, probably returned to that city. The six per diem employees could not follow the laboratory. The group that did go suffered some gradual erosion as individual preparators found positions in other government offices that seemed more permanent than a PWA project. Burns hired a few temporary replacements as needed, and at Secretary Ickes's request he employed Harry L. Raul, a quiet, middle-aged, pipe-smoking artist, as a diorama sculptor.

Exhibit preparation more than kept pace with construction of the new Interior Building. The contractor began finish work on the museum wing in March 1937. By July the laboratory started to install the dioramas. A strike by the contractor's painters delayed progress, as did difficulties encountered by the case manufacturer. The Interior Museum finally opened to the public on March 9, 1938, under Park Service operation. It received favorable comment and began attracting some 10,000 visitors per month. Paul Hudson, designated acting curator, set it on an active course with support from the laboratory. The exhibits underwent the minor modifications that normally follow a new installation, and the laboratory made a few changes to update information—a service the museum would continually require but seldom receive.

Hudson organized collection storage and records and worked especially to develop use of the museum. He opened it Sunday afternoons, publicized it, prepared a mimeographed leaflet, arranged temporary displays,