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Fail Museums: Problems and Survival

Museum is an institution collecting various artifacts that are the cultural heritage and the identity of nation. In the present, there are many kinds of museums, such as university museum, local museum, national museum, and private museum. All of them are founded from the intention and the fondness to give knowledge and entertainment for people, as well as to collect and preserve the cultural heritage. However, there is no anything can guarantee that all established museums will be successful. Some museums are very popular and have many visitors, while some museums encounter with problems and have to be shut down unfortunately.

During this spring semester, I have searched for information relating to archives, museums, and libraries; and found a lot of cases about museums where are closed down or almost shut down. They inspire me to be interested in their situation. In this term project, therefore, I intend to focus on the topic of failed museums in order to know the main reasons causing the museums are closed down and the solutions of problems by using nine interesting cases from the United States and abroad:

- African-American Alliance Museum
- American Folk Art Museum
- Jalan Museum
- John Lennon Museum
- London Fire Brigade Museum

- Movieland Wax Museum
- New Jersey Museum of Agriculture
- Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Museum
- South Street Seaport Museum

All information is collected, analyzed, and presented in alphabetical order of museums. These cases will be the good examples for people who work in this field, because they will realize the limitation and problems that can happen with them in the future.

African-American Alliance Museum

This is the first African-American Museum of Coweta County. It was founded by the African-American Alliance and opened in February of 2003. This museum is dedicated to the preservation and conservation of the cultural, historical, and architectural African-American heritage of community. It is located on the land owned by the Newnan City at 92 Farmer Street, adjacent to the Farmer Street Cemetery, which is believed to be the largest slave cemetery in the South. It provides a repository for African-American artifacts and records, and serves as a genealogy workroom for African-American research.

Recently, however, the museum has been denied to renew a lease by the city, even if the city and the museum board have had an automatic renewal clause. Newnan City Manager Cleatus Phillips, who made the request against renewing, explained that there were two competing boards and the secondary board violated the lease by closing the museum and alleging financial improprieties. Therefore, he decided to terminate the lease agreement with the organization running the city's African-American museum.

This is the severe problem of the museum. If the lease renewal is denied, the museum has to be shut down. However, there is still hope for it. The new lease may be approved by the city, if the board of museum meets the operational conditions and organizational issues as follows:

- To keep the museum open a minimum of 15 hours a week
- To present annual goals and work programs to the city council
- To maintain a list of officers
- To make all financial reports and membership lists available for city inspection.

In order to remain the museum, a new board was set up with Toni Teagle as president. The alliance's books appear to be in order and a functioning set of officers was formed to begin the reorganization. Eventually the museum got a new lease running for two years and it is still opening to provide access to public at present.

American Folk Art Museum

The American Folk Art Museum is the premier institution for the study and enjoyment of American folk art, as well as the work of contemporary self-taught artists from the United States and abroad. It preserves, conserves, and interprets a comprehensive collection of the highest quality, with objects dating from the eighteenth century to the present. The collection of the museum consists of portraits, landscapes, seascapes, trade signs, weather vanes, whirligigs, decorated tin, furniture, pottery, decoys, and quilts.

This museum was founded on June 23, 1961 by Arthur M. Bullowa, Adele Earnest, Cordelia Hamilton, Herbert W. Hemphill Jr., Marian Willard Johnson, and Joseph B. Martinson. On September 27, 1963, its galleries were opened to the public for the first time in the rented parlor floor of a townhouse at 49 West 53rd Street. Then the museum purchased adjoining town

houses at 45-47 West 53rd Street because of the inadequate size and facilities of the previous place. In 1984, the museum temporarily moved to a new house at 125 West 55th Street, and in 1989, exhibition facilities were opened at 2 Lincoln Square at Columbus Avenue near 66th Street which pays \$1 a year in rent to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A decade ago, the museum took out a \$32 million loan from New York City's Trust for Cultural Resources to construct the new impressive building on West 53rd Street in Manhattan.

This is the cause that led to the serious problem of museum. They spent too much money for the new building and could not handle it. They had the financial crisis because of the weak visitor numbers and the economic downturn. The museum defaulted on its debt and decided to close the museum, but fortunately, the new building was bought by MoMA for \$31.2million. To remain opening of the museum, they moved the entire collection into their much smaller Lincoln Square branch and the museum still continue to operate at this location these days.

Jalan Museum

This is a private museum on the banks of the Ganga in Patna, India. It has been opened for 81 years since 1930 without fail and housed the city's oldest private collection of rare artefacts. The collection consists of furniture, silver utensils, and porcelain services such as, French Louis XV and Louis XVI furniture; German, French, English and Chinese porcelain; Tibetan and Nepali wood carvings; ivory pieces and fine clocks; and Persian and Indian carpets. The museum always welcome visitors and the visit can be arranged on request and by invitation. However, it had to be close down for the public due to cracks and leakage during the rainy season in 2011. If artefacts are not checked in time and repaired, it will lead to great loss of

history and heritage. Nevertheless, the museum did not mentioned to the definite date to reopen for the public.

John Lennon Museum

This is the first John Lennon museum to be officially authorized by his wife, Yoko Ono. It was opened on October 9, 2000, the 60th anniversary of Lennon's birth, and was housed inside the Saitama Super Arena in Japan. Its collection had about 135 items included all kinds of musical instruments, clothes, music, and lyrics from all periods of Lennon's life. Over the 10 years, there were about 610,000 visitors came to visit the museum. However, this museum was closed down on September 30, 2010 because the exhibit contract with Yoko Ono expired and she would not like to renew it. She gave the reason that:

“John Lennon's destiny spanned the whole world. His spirit came alive through movement, and without movement, it dies. If the Museum which houses his spirit never moved, it would be a grave, not a museum. After ten years here, John's spirit is now moving on—looking onward to the next journey.¹”

From this message, it could be interpreted that a new John Lennon Museum might be reopened in a different place. Currently, all items on show were returned to Yoko Ono.

¹ Michael Winter, “First John Lennon museum closes after 10 years,” *USA Today* (September 30, 2010), <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ondeadline/post/2010/09/first-john-lennon-museum-closes-in-japan-after-10-years/1>.

London Fire Brigade Museum

It is the museum's fire station, once part of the original Southwark fire station in the 1870s. It was located at Winchester House in Southwark Bridge Road, London and stored a unique collection of historical fire engines. In this museum, we can learn about the items and the working of firefighters since the eighteenth century to the twentieth century. Although the annual visitor numbers to the museum have increased from 3,300 in 2005/2006 to 9,896 in 2010/2011, and the yearly cost of closing the museum and storing the collection are more than the yearly running costs of the museum three times higher, the Conservative leadership of LFEPA and the Mayor of London still considered to close down this museum in April 1, 2012 due to be sold off under plans to privatise training services. For all museum artefacts, they will be placed in secure storage until a permanent home is found for the collection.

However, the Friends of the London Fire Brigade Museum tried to keep the museum open to the public by setting up a Facebook page and an e-petition to gather support for their cause and their purpose was accomplished. The Conservative chairman of LFEPA, Cllr Brian Coleman, was withdrawing his proposal to close the museum. In addition, the budget amendment was agreed by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, therefore, the museum can remain open until June.

Movieland Wax Museum

It was the largest wax museum in the United States located in Buena Park, California. The collection of museum consisted of over 300 celebrity wax figures in 150 sets, such as James Dean, James Stewart, Sammy Davis Jr. and Carol Burnett. This museum was opened in 1962. At the beginning, the museum was very famous. Several actors and actresses attended cutting the

ceremonial ribbon and unveilings of their wax figures. During its peak in the 1960s, the annual visitor number drew up to 1.2 million.

Because of increased competition from upscale shopping malls and nearby amusement parks including Disneyland and Knotts Berry Farm, nevertheless, this museum had to be closed down unavoidably. It was closed already in October 31, 2005 and was replaced by an entertainment center included pizza parlor featuring arcades, food, rides, bowling and a small theater. About 50 of the museum's celebrity figures were shipped to a sister museum in San Francisco, and 80 others went to a museum in South Korea. Most of the rest were put up for public auction in March 2006.

New Jersey Museum of Agriculture

The New Jersey Museum of Agriculture is a not-for-profit educational institution. It was founded in 1984 and opened to the public in 1990. It is located on the Cook College campus of Rutgers University in North Brunswick. The mission of the museum is to chronicle the story of the Garden State's agriculture from the past to the future. It housed a collection of historical machinery, tools, and artifacts collected from New Jersey farm families by Wabun Krueger. The museum conducted thematic weekend programs and workshops for families, including the school programs to provide education and participation in each month.

The museum encountered with fundraising problems for the operating budget almost from the start, but they could save it from a financial disaster due to the success in convincing the governor to put several hundred thousand dollars into the museum in the mid-1990s. After that, the museum received an appropriation budget for \$360,000 from the state in the next year.

Over a period of years, however, the budget was whittled down to first \$180,000 and eventually to \$90,000. Finally, the entire appropriation was cut from the governor's budget in 2010.

Actually, it would need \$100,000 to get back on track. The museum could not remain open because of the financial restrictions; therefore they decided to close down the museum in February 14, 2011. Its collection was returned to Rutgers University, while the rest of the farming and American Indian artifacts might be auctioned or donated to other museums.

Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Museum

This is the private museum of the Rogers family located in Branson West, Missouri. The collection of this museum included all items of Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, the American star couple, such as the script book, horses, guns and cars. They considered closing the museum in December 12, 2009 after keeping for over 42 years. In the Special Announcement from Roy Rogers Jr., he stated about the causes of this decision that:

“First is the economy. People are just not traveling as much. Dad's fans are getting older, and concerned about their retirement funds. Everyone is concerned about their future in this present economy. Secondly, with our high fiscal obligations we cannot continue to accumulate debt to keep the doors open.²”

After shutting down the museum, more than 300 items from the Roy Rogers and Dale Evans collection were sold to the general public. Overall, the collection was auctioned for \$2.9

² Roy Rogers Jr., “Special Announcement from Roy Rogers Jr.,” Accessed April 12, 2012, <http://www.royrogers.com/announcement.html>.

million and most of them were sold for more than 10 times the expected price. These are a partial listing of some of the items that were sold at auction³:

- Roy Rogers' script book from the January 14, 1953, episode of This Is Your Life sold for \$10,000
- A collection of signed baseballs (Pete Rose, Duke Snyder and other greats) sold for \$3,750.
- A collection of signed bats (Yogi Berra, Enos Slaughter, Bob Feller, and others) sold for \$2,750.
- Trigger's saddle and bridle sold for \$386,500
- Two fabulous limited edition BB guns in their original boxes with numerous photos of Roy, Dale, Gabby, and Pat sold for \$3,750.
- Roy Rogers' flight jacket sold for \$7,500.
- One set of boot spurs sold for \$10,625.
- Various chandeliers sold from \$6,875 to \$20,000
- Roy Rogers' set of dinnerware plates and silverware sold for \$11,875.
- One of several sets of movie posters sold for \$18,750.
- A black and white photograph of Gene Autry with a touching inscription from Gene to Roy sold for \$17,500.

³ The Black Stallion: Fan Site by Tim Farley, "Roy Rogers Museum Closed; Memorabilia Sold," November 24, 2010, <http://theblackstallion.com/web/roy-rogers-museum-closed-memorabilia-sold/>.

South Street Seaport Museum

The South Street Seaport Museum was set up in 1967 by North Seymour, Jr., Peter Stanford, and Norma Stanford. It is located on 12 Fulton Street in New York City and housed exhibition galleries, a working 19th-century print shop, an archeology museum, a maritime library, a craft center, a marine life conservation lab, and the largest privately owned fleet of historic ships in the country, such as *Peking*, 1911 four-masted barque, *Wavertree*, 1885 fully rigged cargo ship, and *Pioneer*, 1885 schooner.

The museum had to be closed down in March 2011, since it encountered with the financial problem and the failure of museum administration. The museum tried to do everything to manage to shut down. The new exhibit of museum was not opened. The staff number was decreased because of furloughs and layoffs. Furthermore, the museum could not engage donors and visitors. From these situations, Mary Ellen Pelzer, the museum's president at that time, was called for her resignation.

Although the museum had to face with many problems, there were a lot of people who helped to solve problems and supported the museum until it could be re-open in January 2012 under the management of the Museum of the City of New York.

Conclusion

From the entire information, I can realize that the failure of museums comes from two factors: internal factor and external factor. The internal factor is the factor that museums can handle or control by themselves while the external factor is the factor from other things that museums cannot handle or control by themselves. In addition, the museum's problems can be

classified as five types: financial problem, location problem, collection problem, organization management problem, and socio-cultural problem.

Museum's Name	Date of Establishment	Date of Closure	Factor	Problem	Result
African-American Alliance Museum, Georgia, USA	February 2003	-	Internal and External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location problem • Organization management problem 	Opened by renewing the lease for two years
American Folk Art Museum, New York, USA	June 23, 1961	-	Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial problem 	Opened by moving to another place
Jalan Museum, Patna, India	1930	2011	Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection problem 	Closed
John Lennon Museum, Saitama, Japan	October 9, 2000	September 30, 2010	External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection problem 	Closed
London Fire Brigade Museum, London, UK	-	April 1, 2012	External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location problem 	Opened until June 2012
Movieland Wax Museum, California, USA	1962	October 31, 2005	Internal and External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial problem • Socio-cultural problem 	Closed
New Jersey Museum of Agriculture, New Jersey, USA	1990	February 14, 2011	Internal and External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial problem • Socio-cultural problem 	Closed
Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Museum, Missouri, USA	-	December 12, 2009	Internal and External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial problem • Socio-cultural problem 	Closed
South Street Seaport Museum, New York, USA	1967	March 2011	Internal and External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial problem • Organization management problem 	Closed in 2011 and re-opened in 2012 until now

From the table above, most of museums encountered with the financial problem which is the most significant element for the administration. The cause of financial problem is from both factors. The financial problem of New Jersey Museum of Agriculture aroused from the external factor because its operating budget was cut from the governor's budget causing the museum could not remain open. The lack of budget of American Folk Art Museum, on the other hand, was from the internal factor. It took out a \$32 million loan to construct the new building and faced the serious problem because of the less visitor numbers and the economic depression. Some museums had to confront with the socio-cultural problem which is the external factor and resulted from the change of social context. For example, in the case of the New Jersey Museum of Agriculture, since the living style in the present depends on industry and technology more than agriculture, it is usual that the museum will not be famous as in the past. For the location problem, it can often happen to museum, especially if the museum rent the location from others. Finally, the collection problem is a problem that has to be found all the time, although it is not a serious problem. However, In the case of Jalan Museum, if items are not preserved and conserved immediately, the museum will lose the collection perpetually.

After studying and analyzing all cases of museums, I obtained ideas from this project.

- Museum has to encounter with a lot of problems all the time
- Social and culture are inconstant.

As a person who will work in this field in the future, I can realize that the museum administration is not an easy task. If we need to remain a museum, we have to pay attention to everything such as budget, item, location, and staff. Furthermore, the museum has to be enhanced all the time in order to meet the requirement of visitors and donors, including the goal and objective of museum.

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