

October, 2003

# THE POWER OF TWO:



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An important new partnership in Los Angeles promises to give long-deserved visibility to the extensive Native American collections of the Southwest Museum of the American Indian. After years of struggle simply to keep its doors open, this venerable Southern California institution appears to be headed toward a stable future.

In a dramatic alliance between the Southwest Museum and the nearby Autry Museum of Western Heritage, the two institutions have charted a course to create a comprehensive and compelling vision of the Western experience and its impact on history, culture and art. The alliance will produce a new institution, to be called the Autry National Center. To this union, the Southwest Museum brings its superb collection of objects created by Native American people—a collection that surpasses

in quantity and significance the holdings of many institutions that are much better known to the public.

As curator of anthropology at the Southwest Museum from 1981 to 1986, I came to know a good deal about the quality of the museum's vast collections—and their potential value to scholars, Native communities and the public. I also experienced firsthand the peculiarities that for decades isolated this outstanding institution from the city's cultural and commercial centers. I learned that some Los Angeles residents thought the museum on the hill was a monastery, and once someone told me that they thought it was a jail. Joining with the Autry Museum to create the new Autry National Center will bring this important resource the wide public recognition it deserves.

COURTESY AUTRY MUSEUM OF WESTERN HERITAGE

# The Autry and Southwest Museums Join Forces in Los Angeles

BY PETER WELSH



## SOUTHWEST MUSEUM HISTORY

Founded in 1907, the Southwest Museum was Los Angeles' first museum, its formation due largely to the energy and inspiration of one of the city's most distinctive turn-of-the-century figures, Charles Fletcher Lummis (1859–1928), a journalist, publisher, photographer, amateur anthropologist and prolific historian of the southwestern United States. In 1884, the Harvard University dropout was working for a newspaper in Ohio when he was offered a job on a new paper out west, the *Los Angeles Times*. With a characteristic combination of vigor and showmanship, he decided to walk the 3,507 miles to California and to submit weekly dispatches en route. One hundred forty-three days after leaving Ohio, he arrived in Los Angeles a celebrity.

Just a few years later, however, after a stroke left him partially paralyzed, Lummis' career at the *Times* came to an end. To recuperate, he moved to a small town in New Mexico, where he launched his career as a freelance writer. In 1894 Lummis returned to Los Angeles to become editor of *Land of Sunshine*—a magazine that promoted California and the West. Lummis spent eleven years at the magazine, writing prolifically and becoming involved in numerous social causes. He was at the forefront of the movement to preserve California's Spanish missions; he formed a group advocating Native American

Two Los Angeles art institutions: the Southwest Museum (ABOVE) and the Autry Museum of Western Heritage (FACING PAGE).

rights called the Sequoia League; and, in 1903, he established the Southwest Society, the western branch of the Archaeological Institute of America. In 1907, with the support of wealthy Angelenos, the Southwest Society chartered Los Angeles' first "free public museum of science, history and art."

Ground was broken for the Southwest Museum in November 1912 atop a steep 38-acre site on Mount Washington, just southwest of Pasadena. Lummis oversaw the construction, and his idiosyncrasies are evident throughout. Most striking is the prominent tower; access to its ten floors is by a tightly spiraling staircase. The location created challenges from the beginning. In particular, the steep driveway to the fortress-like museum was inaccessible for many vehicles. Early visitors could trek up the hill on the rough steps of the "Hopi Trail," but eventually, most entered through a portal into a tunnel punched deep into the hillside, leading to a single-flight elevator that opened in the exhibition hall.

The Southwest Museum opened to the public in 1914 with halls of conchology (the study of shells) and Asian and European art, along with displays of Southwestern and California archaeological materials. By the 1920s, the museum had narrowed its focus to the cultural history of America's Native peoples and began sponsorship of extensive archaeological fieldwork in the Southwest and the Great Basin.

A critical point in the Southwest Museum's history came in 1932, when Frederick Webb Hodge took over as director. Hodge came to the Southwest Museum after retiring from the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation (now the National Museum of the American Indian). During Hodge's tenure, some of the museum's most significant objects and library materials were acquired, as it developed a reputation as a leader in anthropological scholarship.

Still, except for a few brief periods in recent decades, the Southwest Museum has struggled to maintain its stature in the city. As Los Angeles grew to the west, and as freeways spread into the valleys, the Southwest Museum's once prominent location became a liability. For the past 15 years, the museum has



SUSAN EINSTEIN/COURTESY SOUTHWEST MUSEUM

### Glorious Treasures 100 Years of Collecting by the Southwest Museum October 11, 2003, through July 4, 2004

The centerpiece for the celebrations marking the creation of the Autry National Center will be the exhibition *Glorious Treasures: 100 Years of Collecting by the Southwest Museum*, opening October 11. The exhibition, which will be on view in the Autry Museum's Showcase Gallery, will present a selection of some of the most important objects in the Southwest Museum's collection. Exceptional California Native baskets, Pueblo pots, Navajo textiles and a remarkable Nez Perce quill-wrapped horsehair shirt will be on display, as well as seldom-seen ceramics and clothing from the museum's Central and South American holdings. The exhibit's Western Americana section will feature the flag raised by John C. Frémont on the crest of the Rocky Mountains on August 16, 1842, during his march to California. The fine art area will include works by artists such as Maynard Dixon and Joseph Henry Sharp.

been exploring possible affiliations with other institutions. The alliance with the Autry Museum brings this search to an end.

### THE SOUTHWEST MUSEUM'S NATIVE AMERICAN COLLECTIONS

Hodge had come to the Southwest Museum at just the right time. Appreciation of Native American arts was a definitive element of the local bohemian "Arroyo culture" that had been inspired by the Craftsman Movement. As fashion changed, Hodge positioned the Southwest Museum as the logical repository for Native American collections that had been acquired by individuals who defined the movement, including George Wharton James, Charles Amsden, Grace Nicholson, Adam Clark Vroman and Edward S. Curtis. Hodge also enticed independent scholars such as George Bird Grinnell and Walter McClintock to deposit collections with the Southwest Museum.

The museum's collection is an international treasure. The quarter of a million catalogued objects of both historic and ancient materials created by Native American people includes more than 13,000 baskets, 11,000 ceramics, 1,300 Navajo textiles dating from the early 1800s to the present,

and more than 600 Pueblo textiles. The collection of Native American baskets is arguably the best in the world, with representative examples from all of North America. Another particularly important group of items is the painted hides and ledgers that document exploits of fighters during the Indian wars of the late 19th century. The group includes a muslin painted by Sitting Bull and a depiction of the Battle of the Little Big Horn by White Swan (Crow), one of Custer's scouts.

Any description of the Southwest Museum would be incomplete without mention of its library and archival holdings. The Braun Research Library surpasses the holdings of many universities in its special areas of collecting, and its remarkable photographic and manuscript holdings will continue to draw researchers from around the world. Among the 750 manuscript collections, George Bird Grinnell's includes more than 150 of his diaries documenting reservation life on

the Great Plains. The Frank Hamilton Cushing Manuscript Collection continues to support research into life at Zuni Pueblo in the late 19th century. Hodge's papers include field notes from his work at Zuni Pueblo.

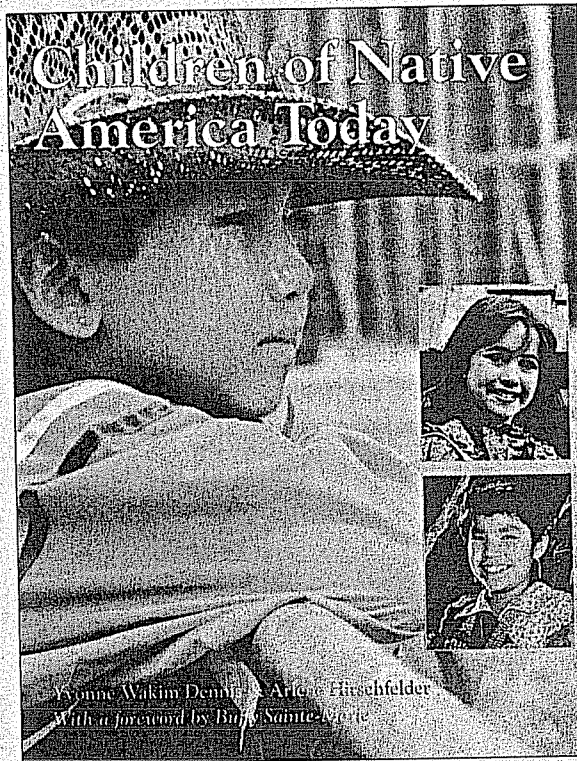
The photographic collection of more than 145,000 cataloged images includes everything from photographic prints to glass negatives, nitrate negatives and lantern slides. Especially significant among the photographers represented are Edward S. Curtis, Charles F. Lummis, John K. Hillers, William Henry Jackson, George Wharton James and Walter McClintock. There are substantial numbers of images of Hopi, Navajo, Blackfeet, Isleta, Luiseño, Cupeño, Chumash, Yokuts and Pomo peoples.

**THE NEW ALLIANCE**

The Autry National Center will ally three distinct entities: the Autry Museum, the Southwest Museum, and the Institute. Each institution will retain substantial intellectual independence while exploring new ways to present the complex human and conceptual landscape that we have come to know as the West. The Autry National Center will provide the organizational culture and structure to achieve this overall goal.

The Southwest Museum will remain in its Mount Washington location, benefiting from a newly opened light-rail stop. However, most collections will be transferred to a new building adjacent to the Autry Museum in Griffith Park. The new building will solve the Southwest Museum's long-standing need for state-of-the-art collections care. In addition, current plans call for the new building to provide 20,000 square feet of gallery space and 30,000 square feet of "open storage," so that much of the Southwest Museum's collection will be put on center stage.

Southwest Museum Director Duane King looks forward to expanding beyond the Mount Washington site so thousands more people can appreciate the majestic works that the museum holds. According to King, the ultimate goal of the alliance is "to have modern facilities that can accommodate hundreds of thousands of visitors, and present the kinds of exhibits and events that do justice to the collection and



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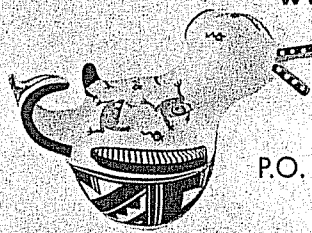
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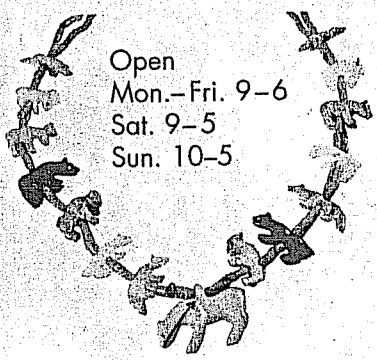
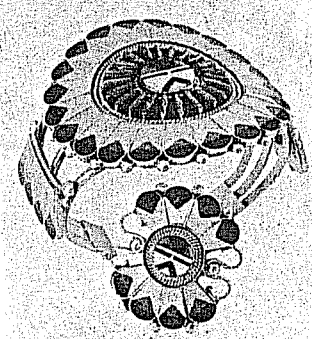
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**details**

**Southwest Museum of the American Indian**  
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 Los Angeles, CA

Light-rail service began in July  
 Closed Mondays

Admission: \$6 adults; \$3 youth  
 323/221-2164 or www.southwestmuseum.org

**Autry Museum of Western Heritage**  
 Griffith Park, 4700 Western Heritage Way  
 Los Angeles, CA  
 Closed Mondays

Admission: \$7.50 adults; \$5 students and seniors  
 323/667-2000 or www.autry-museum.org

to the people we serve." Moreover, King hopes the Southwest Museum can develop deeper relationships with Native communities, so that they "see the museum as a way to preserve their past and to progress to the future." In recent years the museum has worked collaboratively with groups such as Isleta Pueblo and the Blackfeet tribe. He is particularly interested in continuing to explore the possibilities of collaborative projects with tribal museums and in creating training and research opportunities for Native American people. King also hopes that Los Angeles' large, diverse and dispersed Native American population will see the Autry National Center and the Southwest Museum as a place to come together.

Autry Museum Director John Gray points out that this is not a merger, but the creation of something entirely new. Under the auspices of the new Autry National Center, Gray hopes to build the preeminent institutional setting for exploring the story of the West—a rich story of complicated and contradictory experiences in which each institution and the people they reflect contributes their own special vision.

*Peter Welsh is an associate professor of anthropology and director of Arizona State University's program in museum anthropology. He also directs the university's Deer Valley Rock Art Center, a museum and research center located at a major petroglyph site in Phoenix. He was Curator of Anthropology at the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles from 1981 to 1986 and was Chief Curator/Director of Research at the Heard Museum in Phoenix from 1986 to 1993.*

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