

The Public, Part 2

By David Dewey

Last time we were talking about what the public expects from their visit to a museum, and how those expectations obligate the museum.

The last thing I mentioned was the observation that what most visitors, especially children, want to do while at the museum is buy something from the gift shop. This item serves as a memory jogger and reminds the visitor of their entire museum visit experience. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the gift shop--it allows the visitor to acquire a personal piece of the museum, reinforcing their experience so it may be shared with others and increasing the likelihood of a new or repeat visit. Thus, the gift shop increases museum visitations!

Back to Mr. & Mrs. Average & their offspring. In a remote location such as ours, many of our visitors have planned to visit the museum, and have traveled over an hour to get here. During this planning and traveling, they have anticipated their visit and have formed expectations and mental pictures of what their visit will be like. These expectations usually include; being welcomed when they arrive, seeing interesting displays, and probably riding a train. This obligates the museum to "put on a friendly face." While we may not have enough members present to personally greet everyone, a well-signed and informative entrance lets visitors know, "Yes, this is the place, come on in!" And even though we may be busy (or having a bum day!) it is important to try and at least smile at the visitors when you first

see them--a quick wave and a "Hello" would be nice too! No matter what your personal level of experience is, to the visitor, you are the expert--especially if you're working on the equipment, or are wearing museum clothing.

Another thing that Mr. & Ms. Average anticipate (especially if their trip was a long one) are clean, modern, and spacious restrooms. I recently visited an Auto museum located in an old warehouse. Not the place you'd normally find nice facilities, but they had built a free-standing building inside the warehouse with first class, tiled floor, handicapped accessible facilities.

To recap the last two articles, the public expects a museum to: Welcome them, be interesting or entertaining, be organized and tidy, be relaxing, be a safe place for their family to visit, have a gift shop, and have nice restrooms. Not necessarily in that order! We've also talked about the importance of remembering that we are trying to relate to average people who may have no understanding of railroading, or railroading's importance to them and how it has shaped their world.

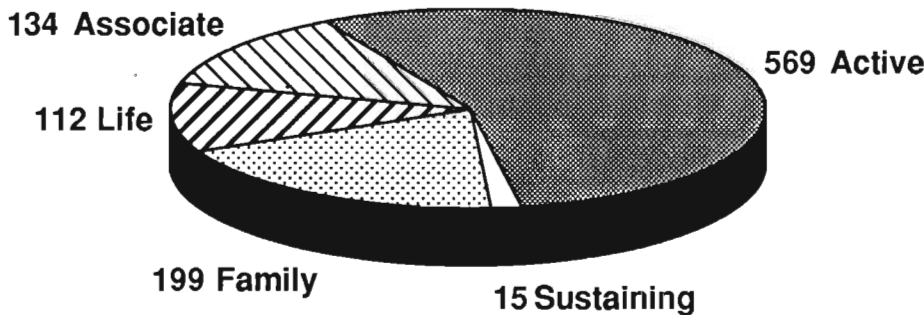
READ MORE ABOUT IT. I'd like to recommend an older (1957) book that still is one of the best easily read texts on sharing history: *Interpreting Our Heritage* by Freeman Tilden. Published by University of North Carolina Press. It's a small book (115 pages) that you should be able to find in your local library. I ordered my copy from a local bookstore a few years ago for around \$6.

Headlight No. 9

All of our members except Associate should by now have received issue No. 9 of the HEADLIGHT. This special 96 page issue contains a complete WP steam and diesel locomotive roster. Because of its much higher printing cost we have a suggested price of \$12.95 to hobby shops that retail the HEADLIGHT. Additional copies are available by mail, at some hobby shops and in our gift shop. We wish to thank John Ryczkowski and others for their efforts to produce this excellent issue.

Membership Report

as of July 2, 1993



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Of these, 30 are Charter members.*

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