

THE BRITISH MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION, THE CARNEGIE CORPORATION AND MUSEUMS IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1932-1938: AN OVERVIEW

Elda Grobler and Fransjohan Pretorius

*Department of Historical and Heritage Studies, University of Pretoria
Pretoria 0002*

Die Britse Museumsvereniging, die Carnegie Corporation en museums in Suid-Afrika, 1932-1938: 'n Oorsig

Dié artikel handel oor 'n ondersoek na die betrokkenheid van twee buitelandse instellings by 'n opname oor Suid-Afrikaanse museums in die 1930's. Die opname is deur die publikasie van 'n verslag en 'n museumgids gevolg in 'n tydperk waarin weinig of geen museumliteratuur in Suid-Afrika veral verskyn het. Die verslag het 'n wye verskeidenheid aspekte rakende museums gedek – van die administrasie, uitstallings, navorsing en die publiseer van navorsingsresultate, personeelsake, tot selfs taksidermie (in daardie stadium 'n belangrike aspek van museumwerk) en geboue. Een van die belangrikste aanbevelings van die verslag was dat samewerking tussen museums behoort te verbeter. Die gevolg was die stigting van die Suider-Afrikaanse Museumsvereniging in 1936. Die verslag het ook die belangrikheid van die opvoedkundige funksie van museums beklemtoon, met die gevolg dat verskeie museums hulle opvoedkundige dienste deur middel van toekennings kon uitbrei. Museumpublikasies het ook gebaat en het uiteindelik tot gevolg gehad dat 'n kommissie van ondersoek na museums deur die regering aangestel is.

Sleutel terme: Carnegie, Andrew; Carnegie Corporation; Miers, Sir Henry; Markham, Sydney Frank; British Museums Association; museumgids; museumopname; SAMA; *SAMAB*; Suider-Afrikaanse Museumsvereniging

This article is an investigation into the role played by two foreign institutions in a museums survey in the 1930s that resulted in the publication of a Report and a Directory which deal to some extent with South African museums at a stage when not many museum publications appeared. The Report covered a wide range of museum matters from the administration of museums, displays, research and research publications, staff matters, even to taxidermy (at the time an important aspect of

museum work) and museum buildings. A very important recommendation of the Report was the necessity for better cooperation between museums. This resulted in the establishment of the Southern African Museums Association in 1936. The report also emphasized the importance of the development of museum educational activities, which resulted in the allocation of grants to the education divisions of several museums. Other outcomes were publications and eventually the appointment by the government of a Commission of enquiry into museum matters.

Key words: Carnegie, Andrew; Carnegie Corporation; Miers, Sir Henry; Markham, Sydney Frank; British Museums Association; museum directory; museums survey, *SAMAB*; Southern African Museums Association, SAMA

Introduction

This article aims at highlighting the involvement of two foreign institutions with South African museums: the British Museums Association and at their instigation, the Carnegie Corporation of the United States of America. The Carnegie Corporation is best known for its investigation into the Poor White problem in South Africa in the 1930s and for the Report of the Carnegie Committee which was published in 1932 in five parts.¹ By way of contrast, however, the results of an initiative taken by the Museums Association in Britain who requested the Carnegie Corporation to become involved in museum surveys conducted throughout the Empire, is less well-known. One of these surveys on museums resulted in a detailed Report, also published in 1932, covering the museums of British Africa and the British Mediterranean. The Corporation also produced a museums directory for these museums that was published the following year.²

For the purpose of this article the only available source for the investigation of the activities of the British Museums Association was *The Museums Journal*, the mouthpiece of the Museums Association. From the first volume, dated July 1901 – June 1902, *The Museums Journal* reported a wealth of details on the Association as well as

¹ F.W. Grosskopf, *The poor white problem in South Africa. Report of the Carnegie Commission I*, (Stellenbosch, 1933).

² H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums. A report on the museums and art galleries of British Africa together with a report on the museums of Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar by Alderman Chas. Squire and D.W. Herdman to the Carnegie Corporation of New York* (Edinburgh, 1932); The Museums Association (compl.), *Directory of museums and art galleries in British Africa and in Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar* (The Museums Association, London, 1933).

on general museum matters. *The Museums Journal* was also the main source for establishing the attitude of the Association and its functionaries towards the survey.

The Report³ contains the information obtained during the survey. As a result of the survey far more, said Sir Henry Miers, was known about the South African museums at the office of the Museums Association in London than anywhere else.⁴ The Report consisted of two parts, the first of which was on museums and art galleries of British Africa by Miers and S.F. Markham. The second document, a report on museums in Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar, undertaken by C. Squire and D.W. Herdman, is not discussed here. The African survey incorporated the so-called British Empire in Africa – the Union of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, the East and West African territories and Mauritius.⁵ Eight chapters (49 pages in all) dealt with the Union of South Africa and included 32 museums of the 40 in British Africa,⁶ while only 13 pages were devoted to the remaining African regions. The Report was thus the main source used for analysing and presenting information about South African museums in this article. These sources have been supplemented by literature and documents available at the National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria.

The initiation of the African survey

The Carnegie Corporation was established by Andrew Carnegie in 1911.⁷ Since 1925 there were links between the British Museums Association and an organization known as the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust,⁸ established in 1913 for the well-being of the people of the British Isles.⁹ This trust provided the Museums Association with an office and a paid secretary,¹⁰ and in 1927 it invited Sir Henry Miers¹¹ to compile a report on British Museums.

³ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, 1932.

⁴ H.A. Miers, Address by the President, *The Museums Journal* 32(4), p. 141.

⁵ As this research is historical in character, some terms that may now be regarded as pejorative or having racist connotations are used purely as they appear in the original text.

⁶ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. 1.

⁷ Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) was born in Scotland, but moved to the United States in 1848. He worked as a bobbin boy, messenger boy, telegraph operator and railway superintendent, and eventually became the organizer of the Keystone Bridge Company in 1865 and developed the iron and steel production in Pittsburgh. He was a philanthropist and devoted himself to the distribution of his fortune in various trusts, agencies and enterprises, gifts and grants. R.M. Lester, *Forty years of Carnegie giving* (New York, 1941), p. 5.

⁸ *The Museums Journal* 28, July 1928 – June 1929, pp. 123-124.

⁹ R.M. Lester, *Forty years of Carnegie giving*, pp. 65-66.

¹⁰ *The Museums Journal* 30, July 1930 – March 1931, p. 34.

¹¹ Sir Henry Miers (1858-1942) was Principal of the University of London from 1908 to 1915, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester from 1915 to 1926 and President of

The report was published in 1928.¹² When it was discussed by the Museums Association, Miers revealed that the Carnegie Trust had not yet adopted a policy on museums, because they first had to ascertain the facts before doing so.¹³ In July 1929 an amount of £1 500, spread over three years, was granted by the trustees to the Association, but as the workload increased, the grant was increased.¹⁴ The following year a policy for the development of museums was instigated; this involved the formation of an annual training school, grants-in-aid and the extension of museum facilities in rural areas.¹⁵ An amount of £10 000 to put these plans into effect was allocated in the period 1931-1935.¹⁶ According to the secretary of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, their aim was “to create status, and to show the public that a museum is not a collection of fanciful oddments from old houses, but a specific function of the city, to enable students to see actual things and not to have to rely on books”.¹⁷

Miers, president of the Museums Association since 1929, and S.F. Markham,¹⁸ the secretary, were involved in all these activities. They were both members of the Joint Committee of the Association and the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust and knew about the aims and activities of the organization, as well as those of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. At the Museums Association conference held in July 1931 in Plymouth, it was suggested that a survey of museums throughout the British Empire should be undertaken. In this way all the outstanding information on overseas museums could be obtained and published in a separate volume, thus completing the museum directory. It was decided that the assistance of the Carnegie Corporation in New York would be sought.¹⁹

the Museums Association from 1929-1933. He was also a trustee of the British Museum and a member of the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries. During the many years that he served the museum profession, he was an acknowledged expert in all museum work. He was also well-known for his book *Mineralogy*, which was called his *magnum opus*. *The Museums Journal* 42, April 1942 – March 1943, pp. 240, 272-273 and 285-287.

¹² H. Miers, Report on public museums of the British Isles other than the national museums, *The Museums Journal* 28, July 1928 – June 1929, p. 76.

¹³ *The Museums Journal* 28, July 1928 – June 1929, p. 252.

¹⁴ *The Museums Journal* 29, July 1929 – June 1930, p. 15; *The Museums Journal* 31, April 1931 – March 1932, p. 489.

¹⁵ *The Museums Journal* 29, July 1929 – June 1930, pp. 333-334; *The Museums Journal* 31, p. 174.

¹⁶ *The Museums Journal* 30, July 1930 – March 1931, pp. 38-40 & 125-128.

¹⁷ *The Museums Journal* 31, April 1931 – March 1932, p. 494.

¹⁸ Sydney Frank Markham was the secretary of the Museums Association from 1 December 1929. He completed his B.A. degree at Oxford in 1922, and later also a diploma in economics, B.Litt and M.A. In 1929 he was elected Member of Parliament for Rochester. *The Museums Journal* 29, July 1929 – June 1930, pp. 177-178.

¹⁹ *The Museums Journal* 31, April 1931 – March 1932, p. 219.

Funds for expenditure within the British Empire were readily available from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and Miers lost no time in proposing the above project. It was similar to the one financed by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust in Britain, of which Miers already had experience. A report then had to be compiled for submission to the Carnegie Trust; it had to be based on personal visits and enquiries. Such a report would alert the Corporation to the areas that needed attention and even to a recommended policy. The Carnegie Corporation approved the proposal that the museum surveys, directories and reports should be undertaken by the Museums Association and granted \$5 000.00 for the overseas surveys.²⁰

The Survey

Miers and Markham undertook the first survey in Canada in 1931 and in November of the same year, with South Africa scheduled to be next on the list, Markham explained the dual aim of their proposed visit to South Africa. He informed the High Commissioner of the Union of South Africa that they would be compiling a survey on museums and a directory for the Carnegie Corporation in New York. The Secretary for the Interior, under whom several museums resorted, was contacted as were several museum directors.²¹ Miers and Markham left England for Cape Town on 5 February 1932, and on their arrival began their investigation. They visited Kimberley, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, East London, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria, and then went to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). They also visited locations on the east coast such as Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi, and flew from Victoria Nyanza to Egypt before returning home.

The Report

At the meeting of the General Purposes Committee of the Museums Association held on 20 January 1933 it was announced that the reports and directories of surveys held in Canada and Africa had been published.²² These were distributed to museums in South Africa and in 1938 an additional number of copies were made available to other interested institutions in South Africa.²³

²⁰ *The Museums Journal* 32, April 1932 – March 1933, p. 152.

²¹ C.K. Brain & M.C. Erasmus, *The making of the museum professions in Southern Africa* (Transvaal Museums Association, Pretoria, 1986), p. 3.

²² *The Museums Journal* 32, April 1932 – March 1933, p. 473.

²³ *SAMAB* 8(1), June 1938, p. 206.

According to Miers and Markham, a museum was any collection of objects of art, history, science or industry, that is accessible to the public for study purposes. This definition excluded libraries, aquariums, botanical gardens and archaeological monuments which do not relate specifically to museums.²⁴

The contents of the Report

Although academic research and celebratory publications since the 1960s have elicited information on the history and development of museums in South Africa, very little contemporary museum literature (other than research papers on traditional museum disciplines and pamphlets, guides and brochures for visitors), was published in the first 40 years of the twentieth century. The Carnegie Report and the Directory therefore provided important details on museums in the 1930s. They are particularly useful to the museum historian. For this reason this section provides a summary of the contents of the Report, highlighting issues regarded as significant to museums at the time.

The geographical range, political diversity and, in particular, the population distribution were used as points of reference for the investigation by Miers and Markham. The authors concluded that in no other part of the world was there such a baffling array of races and degrees of civilization existed as in Africa. For the purposes of the Report, the Union of South Africa was regarded as a predominantly white area. It was reported that museums were only likely to thrive where there was a large white or other literate population, and commendably, every centre with a white population of over 10 000, except those in the Witwatersrand area, had a museum or art gallery that was open to the public. Miers and Markham also summarised the history of museum development in South Africa, using articles that appeared in the mouthpiece of the Association, *The Museums Journal*, from 1901 to 1928.

The survey reported broadly on the administration of museums and mentioned a sad lack of funds. Staff matters were also dealt with: only six museums had full-time directors and only a third of the museums and art galleries had full-time, paid and qualified curators. The latter were described as “well-selected and efficient men and women.”²⁵ The part-time curators also held other positions, such as librarians, professors or archivists, and it was difficult to assess what proportion of their salaries or time was spent on museum work.

²⁴ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. iii.

²⁵ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. 13.

Miers and Markham noted that several museums and art galleries were housed in some of the most aesthetically pleasing buildings in South Africa; others were in historic buildings and some – such as the Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria – in modern buildings which compared favourably with those used by museums overseas. Singled out as having the worst accommodation were the Kaffrarian Museum in King William’s Town and the Geological Museum in Johannesburg. It was recommended that the South African Museum in Cape Town, the Art Gallery in Grahamstown, the Kaffrarian Museum in King William’s Town, the Port Elizabeth Municipal Museum, the Geological Museum in Johannesburg and the Historical Museum in Pretoria should be housed in new buildings.

The approximate insurance value of those museums that insured their collections provides an interesting sidelight on the monetary value, if not the significance, of the collections. The collections of the Transvaal Museum (the Old and New Museums) were insured for £100 000 – the highest amount – and that of the Geological Museum in Johannesburg for the lowest, only £1 000.

The museum displays were adjudged to be of various standards, ranging from excellent, with good labelling (as in the South African Museum in Cape Town), to overcrowded, lacking the proper labels and habitat cases. These poor exhibitions, wrote Miers and Markham, would “repel the average visitor by their sameness and drabness”.²⁶ The most popular museum, the South African Museum in Cape Town, had an average of 137 000 visitors per annum over the previous four years. Although other museums attracted 70 000 visitors annually, many museums, even the larger ones, attracted fewer than 100 visitors per day. Miers and Markham ascribed this to the favourable South African climate, but also to a lack of advertising and unattractive museums.

Five museums in South Africa issued guides or manuals. The Durban Museum’s guide (priced at 6d) was considered the best. Seven institutions provided catalogues; the one produced by the Durban Art Gallery was highly recommended, as it included information on the origin of the collection and the history of the methods used by the artists. The East London Museum made a special effort to attract the local black people to the museum by issuing special leaflets (**Figure 1**).

²⁶ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. 20.

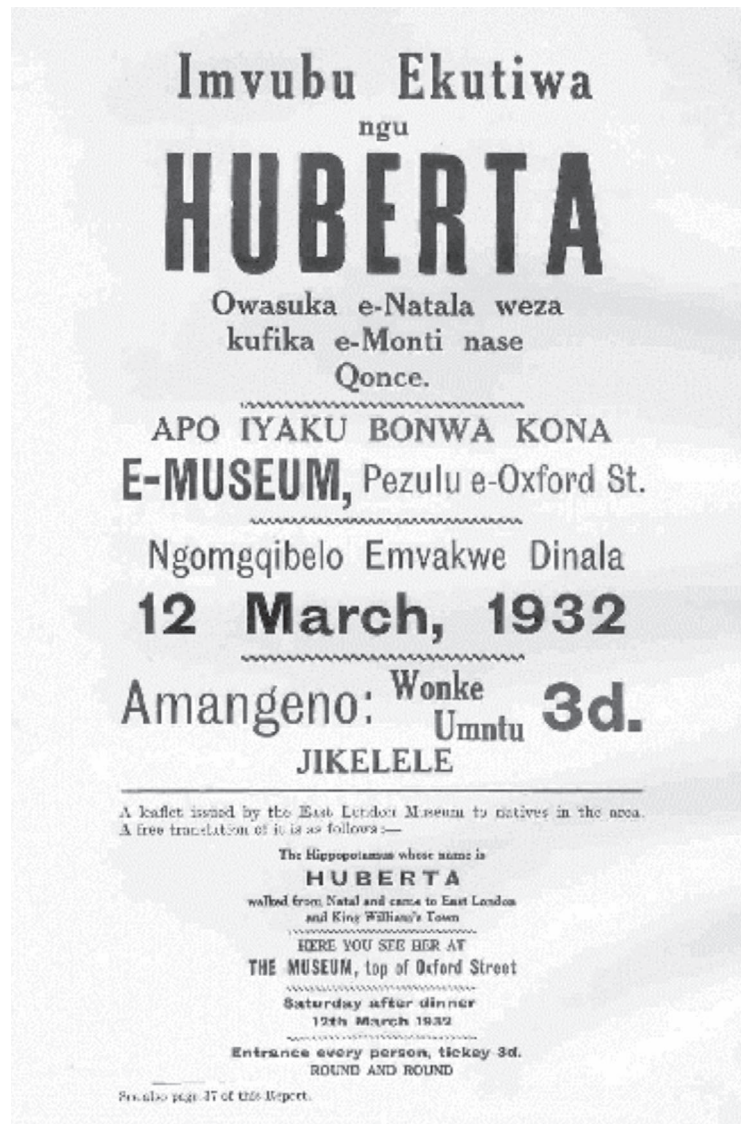


Figure 1: Leaflet issued by the East London Museum to invite black people to the Museum

(H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association Survey of Empire Museums*, (Edinburgh, 1932), p. 31)

One of the most important aspects of museum work at the time was taxidermy, because many South African museums had bird and mammal collections. Taxidermy in South Africa had no benchmark at the time and Miers and Markham identified a number of poorly mounted specimens. The South African Museum in Cape Town and the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria had full-time qualified taxidermists. However, in other museums taxidermists had to undertake a variety of tasks. Quite apart from the familiar financial problems, the South African climate is detrimental to mounted specimens, and it was strongly recommended that an up-to-date manual on taxidermy be produced for sub-tropical regions. Information on museum pests was also deemed imperative.

Educational activities were offered in almost all the museums, either in the form of talks and lectures, or in the circulation of museum specimens to schools. However, there were no museums at any South African school. Miers and Markham came to the conclusion that curators were well aware of the need to improve educational work in museums, but that the process was hampered by lack of funds and lukewarm cooperation from the educational authorities.

Miers and Markham particularly went into the matter of research and publications undertaken by museum staff. The many undocumented fields of natural history were used as the point of departure. One of the most striking aspects of museums throughout the African continent was the seemingly inexhaustible possibility for scientific research. It was asserted that even in 1932 there were new and important discoveries to be made on archaeological material, new genera and species in the whole range of natural history, and African communities to study. Almost everywhere, except in the areas immediately surrounding the large towns, there was a dire need for detailed surveys, careful expeditions and the publication of the results. The challenge ahead was a daunting one because there was so much that needed doing. Miers and Markham encouraged museums to specialize in local material, and to focus on aspects such as natural history, history and handicrafts. On the other hand, it was felt that national museums should become the main institutions in the preservation of valuable research material, type specimens and unique treasures; expeditions were regarded a necessity.

One of the most important aspects of the South African museum situation was cooperation between museums. Miers and Markham found that, regarding exchanges and loans, the cooperation between various museums and between museums and individuals, was very good. Otherwise practically no cooperation existed, although there were two official attempts to increase it.

Recommendations by Miers and Markham

Three requirements for the advancement of museums in South African were emphasized. Museums should strive towards stronger financial security, some form of co-operation between museums and the development of educational work.²⁷ Miers and Markham indicated that financial matters were primarily the responsibility of the government, provincial and local authorities. They also recommended the appointment of a government commission of enquiry into museum matters and the compilation of a policy for museums, with special attention to financial matters.

The assistance of an outside body, such as the Research Grant Board, was recommended. This body would then handle funds, acquired under the grant scheme of the Carnegie Corporation, or by any other means, for the preparation and publication of a text-book to highlight curatorial problems in the sub-tropics, and for visits by curators or senior museum staff to overseas institutions. Regarding cooperation between museums, this body would administer the funds that could be obtained for the establishment of a museums association. They argued that the establishment of an organization to advance the cause of museums was a necessity, and proposed several options, such as the setting up of an African Section of the (British) Museums Association; a museums section of the South African Library Association or a museums section of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science.

The development of educational activities in museums was regarded as imperative. These should ideally include organized school visits, museum cases that could be circulated or lent to schools, lectures and personal guidance, and comprehensible labels. Grants for these schemes should only be made available on condition that the local municipality or council was also involved.

In conclusion, Miers and Markham stressed that they had been very impressed by the work done by the museums within their small budgets. They were convinced that, with cooperation between the museums and the educational authorities, South Africa would be able to explore and exhibit the enormous scientific treasures available. It was possible that a museum service could be developed that was worthy of international admiration. In short, the survey highlighted many achievements and skills by staff in South African museums, and at the same time, identified defects in the system. The absence of a uniform administration system for South African museums and the fact that many of these received very little official support were regarded as a negative tendency.

²⁷ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. 44.

The Directory

Before publication Miers remarked that the Directory would contain information about museums that was not known to the authorities in their own country, even, perhaps, not to the Statistical Departments.²⁸ The *Directory of Museums and Art Galleries*²⁹ was published in 1933. Entries were arranged in alphabetical order according to the town or city, and in the case of South Africa, the relevant province was also given. Population figures (for whites and coloured people) were indicated. The first entry was Bloemfontein, with its two museums and a herbarium; the last was Tulbagh, followed by Windhoek in South West Africa (now Namibia). In almost all cases, the entry included the visiting hours, entrance fee, a general description and the scope of the museum collections, including the publications, educational activities, staff and finances.

The results of the Report

The establishment of a South African museums association

The establishment of a museums association was not a new idea. The Union government took the initiative, and in October 1926 the Department of the Interior proposed a meeting between the four so-called Union museums, namely those in Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Pietermaritzburg and Pretoria.³⁰ Several meetings took place, but no agreement was reached.³¹ The second effort was a conference of curators organized by the Cape provincial government, which led to the increase of annual provincial grants. Other matters under discussion were unproductive.³²

However, the visit by Miers and Markham led directly to the establishment, by the Secretary of the Interior, of a Standing Committee on State-Aided institutions. A letter dated 3 April 1935 was circulated to all South African museums and art galleries, advising them of this committee. At their first meeting it was decided that a South African museums association should be founded and that annual conferences, organized by the association, would promote cooperation between museums. The inaugural meeting was to be held in 1935 during the July session of the South African

²⁸ *The Museums Journal* 32, April 1932 – March 1933, p. 141.

²⁹ The Museums Association (compl.), *Directory of museums and art galleries in British Africa and in Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar*, 1933.

³⁰ National Cultural History Museum Archives (hereafter NCHMA), Management Committee of the Transvaal Museum, minutes, meeting 1926-10-08.

³¹ C.J. Swierstra, Introductory remarks by the chairman, *SAMAB* 1(1), September 1936, p. 1.

³² H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. 35.

Association for the Advancement of Science. However, the proposed association did not materialize as there were too few museum representatives at the meeting.³³

The Secretary for the Interior requested the director of the Transvaal Museum, C.J. Swierstra, because he had shown an active interest in the endeavour, to act as convenor for a meeting to form a museums association as soon as possible. The Carnegie Corporation, in the guise of the Carnegie Advisory Board in South Africa, again stepped in to promote this issue. It agreed to pay the rail fare and a subsistence allowance of £1 a day for two days for one representative from each museum.³⁴

The inaugural meeting of the Southern Africa Museums Association (SAMA), chaired by Swierstra, was held in Kimberley on 23 April 1936 and was attended by 21 representatives from 19 institutions with one person attending in his private capacity. Swierstra was elected as the first President of SAMA for 1936 and 1937. The inaugural speech was delivered by E.C. Chubb, the curator of the Durban Museum and Art Gallery, who particularly thanked the Carnegie Corporation for their generosity and interest in museums in South Africa.³⁵ At the end of the meeting, as proposed by Chubb, it was resolved that “thanks be expressed to the Carnegie Grants Advisory Board for South Africa for granting the financial assistance which had made this meeting possible; and to the Carnegie Corporation for their generous grant for the benefit of the Museums of the Union of South Africa”.³⁶

In his address Chubb referred to the Miers and Markham Report, proposing that an individual representing the museums should be asked to study this Report in detail. Chubb indicated that he was favourably impressed by the recommendations of the Report, and made particular mention of the public promotion of museums, the role museums can play in advancing education, as well as the design of museums and galleries, display cases and storage to suit the South African climate. He also appealed for the appointment of a taxidermist of the highest rank and with a suitable salary.³⁷

The proposal to form a Southern African Museums Association was carried unanimously. The draft constitution submitted by the Secretary for the Interior had been perused by Markham in his capacity as secretary of the Museum Association of

³³ C.J. Swierstra, Introductory remarks by the chairman, p. 1; C.K. Brain & M.C. Erasmus, *The making of the museum professions in Southern Africa*, p. 3.

³⁴ C.K. Brain & M.C. Erasmus, *The making of the museum professions in Southern Africa*, p. 3.

³⁵ E.C. Chubb, The advantages of forming a South African Museums Association, *SAMAB* 1(1), September 1936, p. 2.

³⁶ *SAMAB* 1(1), September 1936, p. 10.

³⁷ E.C. Chubb, The advantages of forming a South African Museums Association, p. 5.

Britain and also by the Secretary of the American Association of Museums. It was adopted with alterations.³⁸ The following aims were set down:

- to improve and extend the museum service in South Africa;
- to encourage helpful relations amongst museums of all kinds, and to increase and diffuse knowledge of all museum matters and to apply such knowledge to South African conditions.³⁹

At the first annual general meeting of SAMA, held on 30 March 1937 in King William's Town, letters from Markham and Keppel, the president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, were read. Both expressed interest in the formation of SAMA. A grant of £300 per annum for a period of three years by the Carnegie Advisory Board in South Africa, on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Museums, was also announced.⁴⁰

Discussion of the Report

Although the establishment of SAMA was to a great extent due to the benevolence of the Carnegie Corporation and the Miers Report, the latter was only discussed in detail at the first annual meeting in 1937. The debate was led by Chubb, who stressed the following points:

- the establishment of an agricultural museum and museums in national parks
- the need for the improvement of taxidermy
- the dissemination of information on insect pests, and
- museum staff visiting museums abroad.

The first point provoked almost no discussion, but several representatives expressed their views on taxidermy and the possibility of using a Carnegie grant to send a South African taxidermist to America for training. In the end the matter was referred to Council for a decision. The *Southern Africa Museums Association Bulletin (SAMAB)* (see below) was identified as the most suitable means of publishing information about insect pests and their control. Staff members of the Durban Museum and the Albany Museum had already applied for Carnegie grants to visit overseas museums,⁴¹ and a proposal that SAMA should support the applications was accepted.⁴²

³⁹ R.M. Tietz (compl.), *South African Museums Association: A brief history* (SAMA, 2001), p. 1.

⁴⁰ *SAMAB* 4(1), June 1937, p. 80.

⁴¹ The Carnegie Corporation Visitors' Grants Committee was situated in Pretoria, *SAMAB* 1(1), September 1936, p. 9.

⁴² *SAMAB* 1(4), June 1937, pp. 85-87.

Publications

Another serious concern of museums in South Africa was the lack of information on contemporary museum techniques and methods. In the Report the compilation and publication of a curatorial manual on problems in the sub-tropics was recommended.⁴³ Miers was also of the opinion that *The Museums Journal* should publish matters of a wider interest rather than local news.⁴⁴

The issue of a journal by SAMA was accelerated by a grant of £300 from the Carnegie Corporation in New York. It was allocated by the Government Advisory Committee on Museums from the fund provided by the Corporation for the benefit of South African museums and art galleries. The importance of a museum publication had already been recognized at the SAMA inaugural meeting. On receipt of the money SAMA Council decided to publish a quarterly journal,⁴⁵ entitled *Southern Africa Museums Association Bulletin (SAMAB)*, with the intention of devoting it to topics that might be to the advantage of museum work. In the first issue of *SAMAB* at least five articles focused on technical matters such as the renovation of gold picture frames and a method for relaxing large insects.⁴⁶ This remained the pattern for *SAMAB* in the years to come and when SAMA celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1986, the journal had already carried 1 271 articles on museological topics.⁴⁷

The publication in 1934 of a book on the mammals of South West Africa by the director of the Kaffrarian Museum, King William's Town, Captain G.C. Shortridge,⁴⁸ was also made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Miers and Markham felt that this book would fill a particular void in natural history literature.⁴⁹ In 1936 the Carnegie Corporation provided funds for Mollie N. Morrison to publish a book, *The Silversmiths and Goldsmiths of the Cape of Good Hope 1652 – 1850*. This provided useful information for museums, in particular about the identification and evaluation of objects for the benefit of the public. It was regarded as a comprehensive reference work.⁵⁰

⁴³ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ *The Museums Journal* 32, April 1932 – March 1933, p. 141.

⁴⁵ *SAMAB* 4(1), June 1937, p. 82.

⁴⁶ *SAMAB* 1(1), September 1936, pp. 15-16 and 21.

⁴⁷ C.K. Brain & M.C. Erasmus, *The making of the museum professions in Southern Africa*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ G.C. Shortridge, *The mammals of South West Africa. A biological account of the forms occurring in that region I & II* (London, 1934).

⁴⁹ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. 33.

⁵⁰ *SAMAB* 2(1), September 1939, p. 48.

Committees of enquiry on museum matters

It was only in 1948 that a Commission of enquiry on museum matters, as recommended by Miers and Markham, was appointed by the Governor-General of the Union of South Africa. The Commission, under the chairmanship of P.J. du Toit, was given nine directives on the functioning of state-aided institutions.⁵¹ Its report was submitted to the House of Assembly on 20 June 1950,⁵² but few of the recommendations made by the Du Toit Commission were ever implemented. The Du Toit Commission was followed by the Cilliers Committee (1960), Booysen Committee (1961-1962), the De Villiers Committee (1968), and the Niemand Commission (1975).⁵³

Educational schemes

One of the most important recommendations in the survey was the promotion of educational schemes in selected areas in the Cape Province. These included travelling collections, lecture room equipment and display cases. Several museums benefited from the block grant made by the Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1935.⁵⁴ The trustees of the Albany Museum in Grahamstown decided to use their Carnegie grant for a school services programme. The grant provided for display cases (**Figure 2**) and taxidermy. The Museum provided the specimens.⁵⁵

The South African Museum in Cape Town received £300. Between 1935 and 1936 it prepared travelling cases for instructional displays to make available on loan to schools that could not visit Cape Town.⁵⁶ The Kaffrarian Museum received a grant of £100 in 1935 and large cabinets with glass tops were purchased.⁵⁷ At the Durban Natural History Museum Chubb used the grant of £300 to acquire the services of a guide-lecturer. The appointment was such a success that the grant was used for the full duration of the three-year contract.⁵⁸

⁵¹ NCHMA, *Verlag van die Kommissie van Ondersoek na sekere staatsondersteunde inrigtings*, p. 1.

⁵² H. Oberholzer, Administrasie van nasionale museums in die Republiek van Suid-Afrika, in *Memoirs van die Nasionale Museum Bloemfontein* 17, June 1982, p. 35.

⁵³ For details see H. Oberholzer, Administrasie van nasionale museums in die Republiek van Suid-Afrika, pp. 40-62 & H. Oberholzer, *Skeletons by the roadside. The sad saga of bodies of enquiry and advice about museum matters in South Africa* (Durban, 1993).

⁵⁴ R.F.H. Summers, *A history of the South African Museum 1825-1975* (Cape Town, 1975), p. 149.

⁵⁵ J. Hewitt, The Albany Museum school service, *SAMAB* 2(1), December 1936, pp. 25-28.

⁵⁶ R.F.H. Summers, *A history of the South African Museum 1825-1975*, p. 149; *SAMAB* 2(1), p. 45.

⁵⁷ B.M. Randles, *A history of the Kaffrarian Museum* (King William's Town, 1984), p. 48.

⁵⁸ C. Quickelberge, *Collections and recollections. The Durban Natural History Museum, 1887-1987* (Durban, 1988), pp. 44 & 46.

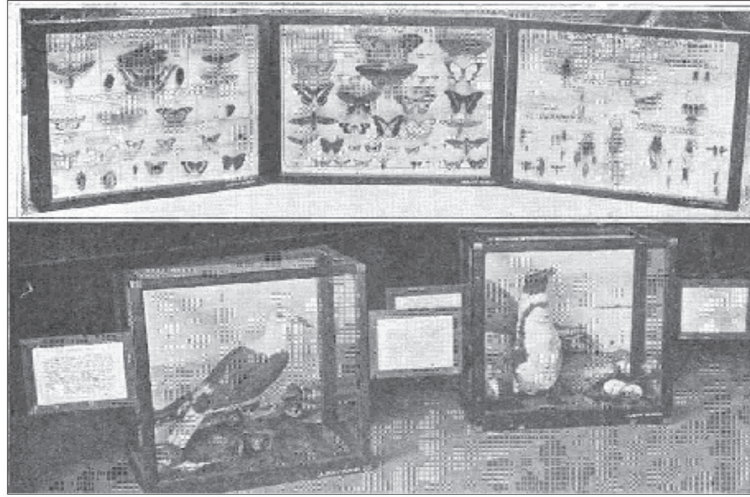


Figure 2: Examples of school cases used in the Albany Museum Service
(SAMAB 1(2), December 1936, p. 27)

The Carnegie Corporation Visitors' Grant Committee approved the application by the educational officer from the Albany Museum, A. Rothmann, to visit the United States of America to study the school services provided at American museums.⁵⁹ It was fortunate that she was accompanied by her mother, the Afrikaans author, M.E. Rothmann (M.E.R.), who also visited the United States on a Carnegie grant. M.E.R. was a member of the team that had surveyed and prepared the Carnegie Report on the Poor White problem in South Africa. She had been responsible for the section on "The mother and daughter in the poor family" in part V, *Sociological Report*, of the Report on the poor white problem. This linked the involvement of the Carnegie Corporation in two divergent research projects in South Africa in the 1930s. .

The two women sailed from South Africa in April 1938 and then travelled from New York to Washington and from Washington to Kentucky. M.E.R.'s objective was to ascertain whether conditions elsewhere that were similar to those in South Africa, had given rise to the poor white problem. Her daughter left for Chicago, where she completed her research on the school services provided by museums. An amount of £150 was allocated to both mother and daughter for their visit.⁶⁰ In March 1939 it was

⁵⁹ SAMAB 7(1), March 1938, p. 175.

⁶⁰ J.C. Steyn, *Die 100 jaar van M.E.R.* (Cape Town, 2004), pp. 365-373.

reported that the school service collection at the Albany Museum had grown to such an extent – probably due to Rothmann’s input – that additional storage accommodation was needed for use during school holidays.⁶¹

Conclusion

The British Museums Association has had a long relationship with South African museums. In the very first issue of *The Museums Journal* (volume I, July 1901 to June 1902) there are three references to South African museums. The *Annals of the South African Museum* were highly recommended as the model to choose for the publication of papers; two pages were devoted to a short history of the Transvaal Museum (called the Transvaal State Museum) and the first ever evaluation of South African Museums appeared in an article by E.W. Swanton, “Some South African Museums”. The summary in the Report and these articles probably constitute the earliest attempts to trace the history of museum development in South Africa.

After the conclusion of the Anglo-Boer War a laconic announcement was made with regard to the Transvaal Museum:

“PRETORIA MUSEUM. – Dr. Gunning, the director of the Pretoria Museum under the late Boer Government, will retain that position under the British Government.”⁶²

In the same volume the opening of the new building of the Albany Museum in Grahamstown is described in detail. By 1932 no less than seven South African museums were institutional members of the Museums Association: the Durban Museum and Art Gallery had joined first, in 1920, and the Transvaal Museum in 1922.⁶³

The tone of the alliance between the Museums Association and the South African (and other overseas) museums was, from the Association’s side, however, slightly patronising. The fact was that the urgency of the overseas mission required that the surveys be undertaken at a critical time for the Association and despite urgent in-house museum matters. Miers argued that the first duty of the Association was to those museums within the Empire.⁶⁴ It was important to make personal visits,

⁶¹ *SAMAB* 12(1), June 1939, p. 304.

⁶² *The Museums Journal* II, July 1902 – June 1903, p. 32.

⁶³ *The Museums Journal* II, July 1902 – June 1903, pp. 188-192.

⁶⁴ In his presidential address at the Birmingham Conference, held in June – July 1932, Miers stressed and motivated the six-months visit to Canada and Africa by the Association’s president and secretary. *The Museums Journal* 32, April 1932 – March 1933, pp. 137-144.

because the Association wanted to know all about the overseas museums; they wanted them to know about the Association; in this way the Association and the museums may rely upon each other for sympathy and support in the Association's endeavours to increase the value of their service.⁶⁵

Miers also stressed that the Association was not an exclusively British society, but was open to all interested parties in the British Dominions, colonies as well as foreign countries. Curators and people interested in museums often subscribed to *The Museums Journal* and attended the conferences; in this way bonds were forged that were strengthened by personal contact. Miers asserted that they had been welcomed cordially everywhere and had encountered no antagonism. There were no complaints of interference into local museum matters by English representatives, financed from New York.⁶⁶ Miers felt that this was clear evidence that the Association had extended its influence throughout the Empire; in addition it was hoped that the initiative would "stimulate a closer and more intimate brotherhood among us all."⁶⁷ The overseas museums operated in isolation because great distances separated them. There were also no museums associations. Although Miers and Markham proposed in the Report that an organization of this kind should be established in South Africa, they were categorical that the British Association should be regarded as the recognised authority and centre for museum interests throughout the Empire, and even throughout the world.⁶⁸

The above arguments reflect not only the complacent self-confidence of Miers and Markham in the superiority of the Museums Association, but particularly their belief in the British Empire. At the time the Association, and also Miers and Markham, were imbued with an imperialistic fervour. In the Report their point of reference is the British African Colonial Empire, which, according to the introduction to the Report, comprised a third of Africa. There were, said the authors, a bewildering variety of races and degrees of civilization, as in no other part on earth. Towns had a high intellectual standard, comparable to the best in Europe and North America, but "a few hours from any of these towns one may come across native races no further advanced than were the ancient Britons".⁶⁹ Museums in their view would only thrive where there was a large white or other literate population, such as in the Union of South Africa. This is borne out by the concentration of museums in the extreme north and

⁶⁵ *The Museums Journal* 32, April 1932 – March 1933, p. 137.

⁶⁶ *The Museums Journal* 32, April 1932 – March 1933, p. 139.

⁶⁷ *The Museums Journal* 32, April 1932 – March 1933, p. 140.

⁶⁸ *The Museums Journal* 32, April 1932 – March 1933, pp. 140-142.

⁶⁹ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. vii.

south of the continent. (Of the 60 museums in Africa, 17 were located in the Cape Province.)⁷⁰

During the last decades of the twentieth century museums in Africa, and other countries with a colonial past, have been scrutinized zealously because they have been blamed for shaping – by collecting certain objects and displaying them in a certain manner – only one cultural heritage to the detriment of the diversity of other social groups in their particular country. According to U.S. Küsel, former director of the National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria, “museums in Africa were remnants of a colonial past that had not really adapted to African values and needs”.⁷¹ Although Miers and Markham did not recommend any changes in collections or displays to accommodate their values or special needs, they did in fact report on the attendance of the indigenous people and touched upon the matter of discrimination. They found that, with two exceptions, all the museums were open to black people, although few black people ever visited museums. There was never any discrimination in the Cape Province. No fewer than 65 000 coloureds and 7 500 blacks visited the South African Museum in 1930 and 1931. But in the other provinces, Miers and Markham stated with some restraint, there was not quite the same attitude. In one museum, black people could only visit on Thursday, and only if they were wearing boots or shoes.

Miers and Markham felt that it was remarkable that so many museums had been established in South Africa in such a brief period in a country where adverse conditions prevailed. They described these as pioneer conditions where there was no firmly-established population and no leisured class. They asserted that the word “Museum” was still unknown to an overwhelming population of barely civilized or uncivilized indigenous people. Added to this, the early white settlers were mainly farmers, who had few intellectual interests other than exploring their local environs.⁷² They even devoted a page on what they termed the effect of political ideals on museum development in South Africa, and they do this by quoting from a speech by Patrick Duncan, previously Minister of the Interior, Public Health and Education in South Africa:

The present Nationalist Party came into existence ... as a sort of protest against the predominance of English culture, English habits of thought, the English language, and English institutions. The feeling which gave rise to it was that what is sometimes called in rather loose language “the soul of the

⁷⁰ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. vii.

⁷¹ U.S. Küsel, Negotiating new histories in a new South Africa, in D. McIntyre & K. Wehner (eds), *National Museums Negotiating Conference proceedings* (Canberra, 2001), p. 34.

⁷² H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. 40.

*people” was in need of being revived by reviving the Afrikaans language, by giving more attention to the Afrikaans culture and education and sentiment, and by escaping from this threat of predominance on the part of the English influences in the country’*⁷³

However, according to Miers and Markham, politics played but a small role, because the museum field appeals to the “best instincts” of the Dutch (Afrikaners) and the British, and in general it is true to say that there had been in most places the happiest combination of the two groups.⁷⁴ At the time, however, there were few Afrikaners working on a professional level in South African museums. Museum management was to a very large extent modelled on the British example. There was, as yet, no cultural history museums devoted to the depiction of the South African (white) lifestyle. The evaluation of the South African museums by Miers and Markham should be seen in this light.

Miers and Markham visited South Africa at a crucial time: not only was there political turmoil, but the country was experiencing the worst drought in its history. The depression also took its toll and unemployment reached new heights as people moved to the cities. The future looked bleak. Although the Miers and Markham Report reflects none of this, the Carnegie Corporation Report on the poor white question did. The involvement of the Corporation in South Africa, however, predates Miers and Markham’s visit to South Africa. In 1927 the president, F.P. Keppel, and the corporation’s secretary, James Bertram, visited South Africa to explore the possibilities of awarding grants to worthy causes. During their stay they visited major cities in all four provinces in the Union of South Africa. Various bodies, including the Dutch Reformed Church, requested a survey on the poor white question, and after preliminary negotiations, the Corporation financed the majority of the costs of the investigation, the printing of the Report and the visit to South Africa by two American sociologists.⁷⁵ Andrew Carnegie had already made substantial financial contributions to towns such as Vryheid and Harrismith, where libraries had been built. Keppel also recommended to the board of trustees that education grants to the value of \$500 000 should be made to East, Central and South Africa. The largest portion of the money went to the Union of South Africa.⁷⁶

⁷³ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, p. 42.

⁷⁴ H.A. Miers & S.F. Markham, *The Museums Association survey of Empire museums*, pp. 42-43.

⁷⁵ F.W. Grosskopf, *The poor white problem in South Africa I*, p. i.

⁷⁶ M. Golden, Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A difficult past leads to a commitment to change, *Carnegie Results*, Winter 2004, <http://www.carnegie.org/results/04/index.html>, 2005-05-13.

It is also significant that the recommendations in the Museum Association's Report could only be implemented to a large extent through the Corporation's funding. The encouragement of the Carnegie Corporation in the formation of SAMA and its continued interest in other museum-related matters played a significant role in the development of museums in the 1930s. Furthermore the funds provided by the Carnegie Corporation filled a need that could not have been met by the museums themselves – one of their struggles at the time was the lack of adequate funding. Today's museum fraternity should recognize the role played by the British Museums Association and Carnegie Corporation in the 1930s and pay tribute to their vital contribution to museum matters in those early days.