

Leaving Lexington



ABOVE: From *Seuss on the Loose*: The Lorax

By Barbara Rizza Mellin

From Dinosaurs to Dr. Seuss, from courtly art to basketball courts—when it comes to museums, Springfield, Massachusetts (about an hour and a half from Lexington) literally does have something for everyone. Theodore Seuss Geisel, know as Dr. Seuss, was born in Springfield in 1904, and to honor that fact, the Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden has been created containing large bronze sculptures of some of his most popular creations. There's the 14-foot tall elephant, Horton (who hears a Who), Thing One and Thing Two, and other lovable figures— even a sculpture of Dr. Seuss himself, sitting at his drawing table, with the Cat in the Hat standing behind him. A large open book with an empty chair in front allows you to sit for a photo and become part of the magical Seuss world. The sculptures, created by Dr. Seuss' stepdaughter, Lark Grey Dimond-

Cates, reside on the grassy courtyard in front of a complex of museums, known collectively at the Springfield Museums at the Quadrangle.

Each of the four museums offers exhibitions that will fascinate adults and engage children. There is a science museum with a life-size model of Tyrannosaurus Rex and the oldest operating planetarium in the country, the museum of the History of the Connecticut River Valley with a toy soldier exhibit, a Fine Art Museum with a world-class collection and an Asian Art Museum containing one of the largest collection of Chinese cloisonné outside of China. Beyond the quadrangle, Springfield also hosts the Basketball Hall of Fame (remember Basketball was invented in Springfield, Massachusetts by James Naismith).

The Science Museum, founded in

1859 as the Springfield Ethnological and Natural History Museum, contains a variety of exhibits exploring diverse areas of science and anthropology. In addition to the 20-foot tall model of Tyrannosaurus Rex and a life-size replica of a Stegosaurus skeleton made from a cast of an actual skeleton at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the museum showcases preserved animals including a huge African elephant, a giraffe, two lions, an ostrich, a rhinoceros and others in the R. E. Phelon African Hall, live specimens such as fish, insects, reptiles and amphibians in the Solutia Live Animal Center, space rocks in the Astronomy Hall and dioramas of New England Indians in the Native American Hall, as well as the always fascinating Fulcrum Pendulum. The museum strives to make science approachable. The current exhibit, *Grossology: The (Impolite) Science of the Human Body* (through September 6th, 2009), based on a popular series of books by science teacher Sylvia Branzei, will especially interest children who are curious about the “stinky, slimy, noisy functions of their bodies.”

Another exhibit sure to capture the imagination of children (as well as adults) can be found next door at The Connecticut Valley Historical Museum. *Seuss on the Loose in Springfield* explores the author's connection with the city in photos and memorabilia, from the Kalmbach & Geisel Brewery, the business founded by Dr. Seuss' grandfather in 1876 and the Seuss Bakery, where his mother worked, to other items and images from the area. The photos of local sites reveal that the eclectic architecture of Springfield gave Dr. Seuss much to draw upon for his fantasy illustrations. For example, across from his grandfather's brewery was the Howard Street Amory, which resembled a castle similar to some found in his books, while the four black chimneys of the Gasworks plant look strangely like those in *The Lorax*.

The current temporary exhibit at the Historical Museum features thousands of toy soldiers in 20 dioramas—the largest museum display in New England. *Toy Soldiers: History in Miniature* (through August 30th, 2009), with model soldiers from the Connecticut Valley Miniature Figure Collectors Club, illustrates battle throughout history from ancient Egypt to WWII.

Directly across the Sculpture Garden opposite the Science Museum is the

Michele & Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. In honor of that milestone, the museum's current exhibit *Traditions of Excellence* (through February 21st, 2010) has devoted several galleries to showcasing its very impressive collection, which contains works by such artists as Jacob van Ruisdael, considered by many historians to be the finest landscape painter of the Northern Renaissance; American masters including Copley and Stuart; Impressionists Degas,



ABOVE:
from *Seuss on the Loose*:
Top, Horton the elephant
Bottom, Theodor Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss with the Cat in the Hat

Something Special in Springfield



LEFT:
Life-size model of Tyrannosaurus Rex
Dinosaur Hall
Springfield Science Museum



RIGHT:
"Preparing for Market"
Nathaniel Currier
Hand-colored lithograph, 1856
Gift of Lenore B. and Sidney A. Alpert, supplemented by Museum Collections Funds
Michele & Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts



FAR RIGHT:
Cloisonné Champion Vase
Chinese, late-18th-century
Designed as a double vessel in the shape of a quiver.
On the front, a falcon with spread wings subdues a monster, and on the back a dragon unifies the two cylinders.

George Walter Vincent ent. Along with Greek busts and Egyptian artifacts, the *Ancient Treasures* exhibit is currently displaying a burial suit of linked-jade pieces seen for the first time in over 2200 years. "KidQuest" labels help to engage children in the museum experience. The over 500 items in the *Arms and*

Armor exhibit include six full Daimyo (Samurai) armor suits and an ornate Shinto wheel shrine. Although he never visited China, Mr. Smith amassed 150 examples of Chinese cloisonné, including works from the Ming (1368-1644) and the Ching (1644-1912) dynasties. These beautiful enameled pieces, with their intricate tracteries of wire filled with colorful enamel are a definite "must see." At one time, many museums displayed casts of famous sculptures taken from molds of the originals. The Smith museum is one of only a few that continues the practice. Here, you can see such classics as *Venus of Melos*, *Laocoön*, and Michelangelo's *David*.

One admissions ticket allows you access to all four museums at the quadrangle, plus the Dr. Seuss Sculpture Garden. (A new museum, The Museum of Springfield History, opens October 10, 2009.) If you have any time or energy left, you may also want to visit the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame on West Columbus Avenue. (There

are several restaurants on site.) The Class of 2009— David Robinson, Jerry Sloan, John Stockton, C. Vivian Stringer, and superstar Michael Jordan—will be enshrined here during festivities in Springfield, September 10-12, 2009. A related exhibit, *Michael Jordan: The Experience* opens on August first.

Each of the Springfield museums is a worthy destination in its own right. However, in this case, the whole is certainly greater than the sum of its parts. Having all of these great museums available in one city makes Springfield a perfect summer daytrip.

If you go...

Springfield Museums and Dr. Seuss Sculpture Garden

21 Edwards Street
Springfield, MA 01103
413-263-6800 or 800-625-7738
www.springfieldmuseums.org
www.catinthehat.org
Free parking is available in the lots on Edwards Street.

HOURS

Springfield Science Museum,
Monday – Saturday: 10am – 5pm
Sunday: 11am – 5pm
D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts,
Daily: 11am – 4pm
GWV Smith Art Museum,
Daily: 11am – 4pm

Connecticut Valley Historical Museum

Daily: 11am – 4pm
Museum Store
Monday – Saturday: 10am – 5pm
Sunday: 11am – 5pm

Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden

Daily: 9am-5pm

General Admission (one admission for all four museums)

Adult – \$10
Seniors – \$7
College Students with ID – \$7
Children 3-17 – \$5
Children 2 and Under – Free
Seymour Planetarium Shows
Adults-\$3
Children-\$2

Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame

1000 West Columbus Avenue
Springfield, Massachusetts 01105
413-781-6500 or 877-4HOOPLA
www.hoophall.com

Admission Prices:

Adults - \$16.99
Seniors (Age 65 & Up) - \$13.99
Youth (Ages 5 - 15) - \$11.99
Children (Age 4 & Under) - FREE

Hours through August 23
Sunday - Thursday, 10AM-5PM
Friday & Saturday, 10AM - 7PM
(The Hall of Fame hosts many special events, which can close parts of the Museum.)

Renoir and Monet; and such modern masters as Picasso and Chihuly. Art from the Springfield collection is prized around the world and has been loaned to many museums for their exhibitions. A large map pinpoints the places where objects from the museum's collection have been shown. The museum also houses the country's only permanent collection of Currier and Ives prints. *Feathers and Fur: Animal Companions in Currier & Ives Prints* is the current exhibit, running through September 2010.

The last of the four museums at the Quadrangle, the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, is my personal favorite and a true treasure chest of art. This hidden gem offers permanent exhibits of ancient art from Egypt, China, Greece and Rome; Japanese Arms & Armor; Chinese Cloisonné; and sculpture casts of some of the worlds most-famous statues. The museum is based around the personal collection of Mr. Smith, who, in the tradition of Victorians-era gentlemen of his time, was fascinated with discovering new worlds, past and pres-