

From odd to off-the-wall: Specialty museums offer side trips to the unusual

By Howard Reich

Fine Arts Research and Holographic Center Museum, 114 W. Washington Blvd., 25-1987. For a penetrating look at laser art, the Holographic Center is the hotspot around town. The museum exhibits more than 40 holograms, a three-dimensional picture illusion created via laser technology and photo art. The holograms create images of depth and shadow on a flat surface, and the current show features holographic art from around the world.

For those who are mystified, a short film explaining the nuts and bolts of holography is shown throughout museum hours.

There's also a holograph gift shop where laser art pendants and desk mounts are sold.

The museum is open from 12:30 to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays. Admission is \$1.

Cantigny Museums, 1 S. 151 Winfield Rd., Wheaton, 606-4381. Housed on the country estate of Col. Robert R. McCormick, late publisher of The Tribune, the Cantigny museums offer a novelty journey into America's military and architectural past.

Cantigny's 1st Division Museum is not so much a collection of artifacts as a narrative showcase. Through push-button dioramas and intricate sound-and-light demonstrations, the museum traces the history of the United States' 1st Division in World War I, World War II, and the Viet Nam War. McCormick fought in the 1st Division during World War I, and the Memorial Hall of the museum houses an open-to-public library on both the division and U.S. military history.

Cantigny's Robert R. McCormick Museum is the Georgian mansion that McCormick's grandfather, Joseph Medill, built in 1896. Tours of the home are conducted during museum hours. The McCormick Museum Library has a free chamber concert series at 3 p.m. every Saturday; phone reservations are required.

The 1st Division Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays; the Robert R. McCormick Museum is open from noon to 4 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays.

Most of these spots have a small-scale budget, and therefore could never compete with the mammoth downtown museums when it comes to glittery exhibits or opulent surroundings. What they do offer is a potpourri of novelty displays, oftentimes exploring strange and inviting disciplines.

HERE'S A GUIDE to some of Chicago-land's most intriguing unusual museums. Because several spots also keep unusual schedules, we've detailed the hours of operation for each location. Nevertheless, it's a good idea to phone before leaving home.

Svoboda's Nickelodeon Tavern, U.S. Hwy. 29 and Glenwood Dyer Road, Lynwood (three miles west of Chicago Heights), 755-0260. Back in the days when the jukebox wasn't even on the drawing board, the nickelodeon reigned supreme in the big-city saloons. Music-lovers would drop their nickels into the slot, the machine would slowly crank up, and the music would joyously ring out like a swinging Dixieland band at a lively town dance.

All the sonorities were there — the horns, the drums, the cymbals, the sax, and a cacophony of extras that included violins, accordions, and flutes. All that in addition to the heart of the nickelodeon, the keyboard — a traditional set of 88 programmed to play ragtime, fox trots, waltzes, tangos, and other vintage dance steps. The mechanized orchestra often towered more than 14 feet and it became a vivid trademark of the Roaring '20s.

Eventually, more sophisticated brands of musical reproduction put the nickelodeons out of business, but the happy-hour moods they inspired live on in Svoboda's Nickelodeon Tavern.

Established as a museum in 1994, Svoboda's has built up an ear-catching collection of 40 nickelodeons. All the machines still play the nostalgic tunes of generations ago, and museum visitors can hear three-minute selections for a price ranging from 5 to 50 cents. Rounding out the nickelodeon display is a



An illustration of an ancient surgeon and his patient at the International Museum of Surgical Sciences and Hall of Fame (above), and fishing lessons and lore at the AFIMA International Sport Fishing Museum.

collection of antique music boxes, some of which play twinkling arrangements of standard tunes of the '20s and '30s. Throughout the museum, visitors can ogle other Americana, including vintage toys, beer mugs, Tiffany shades, and a panorama movie viewer where 16 mm. films of the big bands can be seen for 50 cents.

It's all housed in a tavern-restaurant decorated for family audiences. The spot serves food, and a Dixieland jazz band performs at 9:30 p.m. every Saturday.

Svoboda's is open from noon to 1 a.m. daily. Admission for adults is \$1 Fridays; \$2 Saturdays; free all other days; children under 16 years are free at all times.

Royal London Wax Museum, 1419 N. Wells St., 237-7786. Over in one corner, Burt Reynolds smiles coyly (without the benefit of wardrobe), in his famed centerfold pose. Down the corridor, Bugs Moran's gang lies slain at the bloody site of the St. Valentine's Day massacre. And around the bend, Pinocchio the puppet boy tells lies so big his nose is beginning to look like a broomstick.

It's a bizarre collection of personalities, and where else could they be found gathered in one place if not a wax museum? Here, some of the world's most elusive celebrities endure the uninhibited scrutiny of the public at large. The celebrity lookalikes are all chiseled with spine-tingling accuracy, and the realism of their settings can give any visitor a certain voyeuristic thrill.

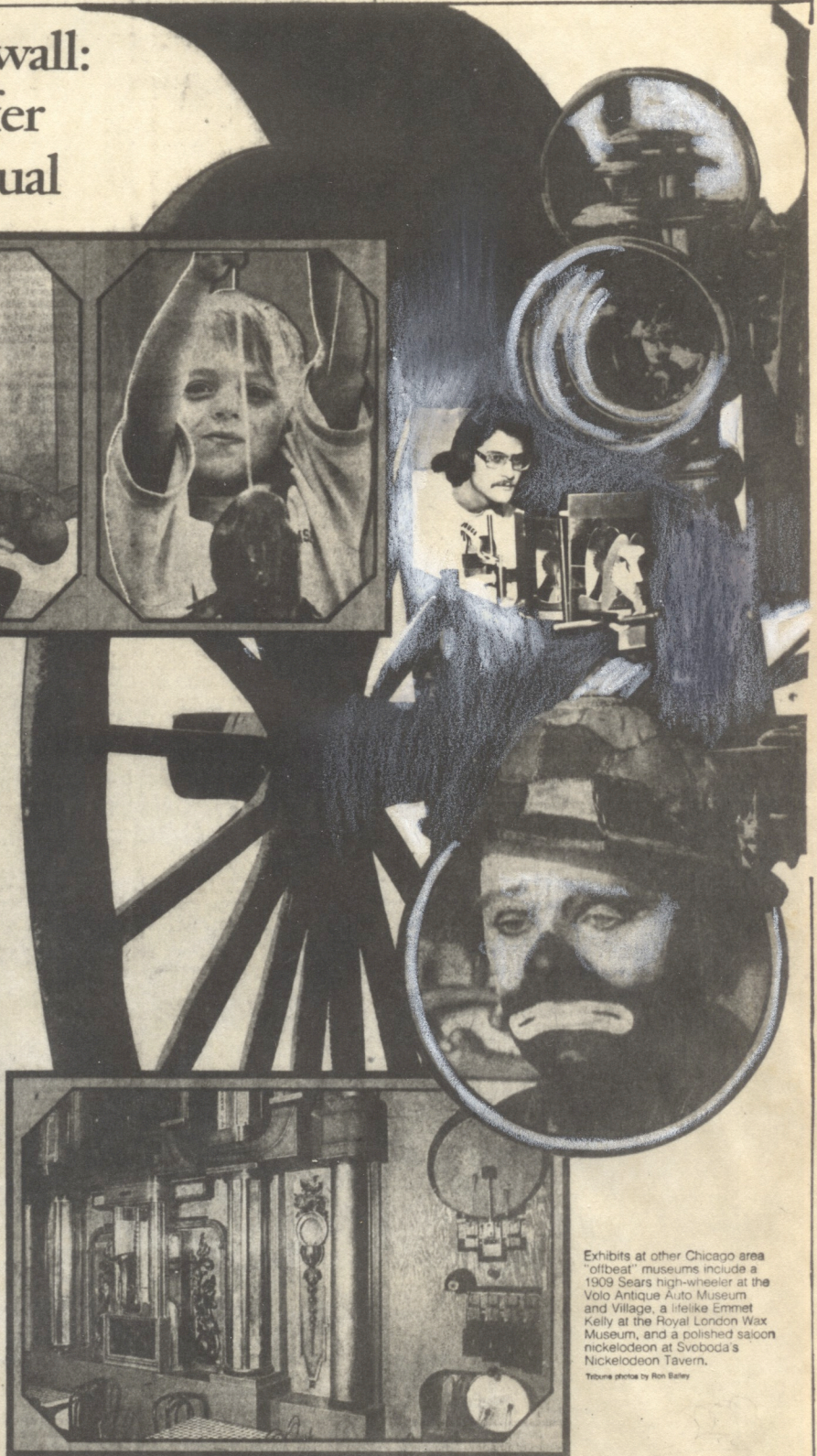
For chill-seekers, the Dungeon is a hideous cove where merciless monsters and deformed demons are seen in their sordid homes. Frankenstein, Dracula, Wolfman, and other creatures appear in a dimly lit chamber as an eerie musical sound track whispers in the background.

Celebrity bounds will find a fair share of famous faces, including Marilyn Monroe, Barbra Streisand, Hugh Hefner, Burt Reynolds, Mae West, and W.C. Fields.

For children who would prefer not to get scared out of their wits, the fantasy room spotlights Pinocchio, Cinderella, Rip Van Winkle, and Alice in Wonderland.

The museum is open from noon to 11 p.m. daily. Admission is \$2.50 adults; \$1.25 children under 12. Tours at no extra charge are available by phone reservation.

Ripley's Believe It Or Not Museum, 1500 N. Wells St., 337-6077. You don't believe that there ever was a two-headed calf? That the



Exhibits at other Chicago area "offbeat" museums include a 1909 Sears high-wheeler at the Volo Antique Auto Museum and Village, a lifelike Emmet Kelly at the Royal London Wax Museum, and a polished saigon nickelodeon at Svoboda's Nickelodeon Tavern.

Tribune photo by Ron Bailey

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