

NEW MUSEUM WILL HOUSE SACRED ABORIGINAL OBJECTS

Sacred Aboriginal churingas scattered over hundreds of square miles of Central Australia are being collected by the Wailbri tribe for a new museum at the Yuendumu Government settlement, 180 miles north-west of Alice Springs, says an article in *Northern Territory Affairs*.

The museum project was conceived some time ago by tribal elders who originally thought of it as a meeting place for the settlement's Aboriginal Council.

After the idea was first mooted it was decided to change the project to one of a museum to house the art and artefacts of the Wailbri and Pintubi tribes.

A UNIQUE PROJECT

The museum is a unique project in the Northern Territory and is to be followed by another even more unusual: a museum for ceremonial objects worn by Aboriginal women.

The Superintendent at Yuendumu, Mr. Chris Clare, said: "A museum for women is quite unheard of. We were flabbergasted by the idea although we knew the women had a small amount of ceremonial life. Strangely enough, the proposal came from the men."

The proposal came as a considerable surprise to the Europeans at Yuendumu because most of the ceremonial life of Aboriginal tribes is kept secret from women.

Objects at the men's museum will include headbands made from human hair plastered with ochre, armbands, beads, shields, kidachi boots, stone knives and axes, various weapons such as boomerangs of many types, hunting and fighting spears and woomeras, coolamons, water carriers, wooden shovels and wall and ground mosaics.

The churingas now being collected are oval or circular-shaped objects of wood or stone which have designs telling of the mythology of the Aboriginal people and linking them with the Dreamtime.

SECRET CORROBOREES

One of the objects of the museum is that the retaining of implements, sacred objects and artefacts in one place will help preserve the cultural life of the Aborigines. Secret cor-

roborees will be performed in the museum's centre enclosed area and films of ceremonial life shown.

Parts of the museum will be open to tourists and Aborigines will act as guides, explaining the use and significance of the collection.

All takings will go to the Yuendumu Museum Society Incorporated, the executive of which comprises two of the top men of each of the eight skin groups at Yuendumu. All are over 40 years of age and are the settlement's Aboriginal leaders.

The Society's President (the settlement's Superintendent), Vice-President and Secretary are Europeans, but all decisions are made by the executive of 16.

Building of the museum has cost \$14,000 of which \$7,000 was a grant from the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund. The remaining \$7,000 was raised by the Aboriginal people themselves.

MOSAICS REPRESENT A SACRED DREAMING

Galleries on both sides of the earthen centre area of the museum are each divided into four sections, representing the eight skin groups. Mosaics on each section represent a sacred dreaming of the skin groups. (Dreaming, a complete mythological story of the Aboriginal people, is given this term because it is said to have taken place in the Dream-time or pre-existence of the people.)

The big centre mosaic has been made from wild cotton, ochre and human blood (for adhesion). Cotton, ochre and blood were also used to construct the other mosaics, the intention being, of course, to have the museum's collection as authentic as it is possible to get.

Yuendumu is on one of the main road routes to Western Australia and with a bitumised road in prospect the number of tourists visiting the settlement is expected to increase.

At present a busload of tourists arrives each week at Yuendumu and in the interests of the Aborigines is strictly controlled—they are not allowed to take pictures in the camp, for example, because in the words of Mr. Clare, "Aborigines are entitled to the same protection from photographers as Europeans."

Yuendumu has also extended its recreation hall by a third, making it very large, even by town or city standards. The work has cost \$54,000 with a grant of \$25,000 coming from the Aboriginal Benefit Trust Fund and the remainder from the settlement's Social Club.

The hall's library is open several nights a week and at any one time 40 to 50 children and young men and women may

be there reading comics, children's story books and magazines.

The hall itself can seat 900 (about the settlement's population) and is used extensively for games, films and concerts. Proceeds from frequent film evenings are running at \$3,000 a year and go to the settlement school for the purchase of equipment.—**EDITOR.**