The Museum of Navaho Ceremonial Art, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, suffered a robbery during the weekend of 25-26 August. When the museum was opened at 2:00 o’clock on Sunday, broken glass strewn on the floor in front of a display case gave testimony that all was not well. A glance showed that burglary had occurred.

The police were informed immediately and were at the museum within minutes. Since then police and detectives have been investigating intensively.

Captain Alfred Lucero, director of the Santa Fe Police Investigation Bureau, said detectives have determined the burglar apparently hid inside the museum when it closed on Saturday. He said it appeared the burglar remained in the museum, opened several glass display cases, and removed the valuable silver and turquoise jewelry. Police said some of the display cases were carefully pried open but others were smashed.

Lucero said the burglar apparently carried the objects from the lower level display rooms to a rear door where the alarm system was manipulated and a key used to open the door.

Police speculated the jewelry and other art objects will be difficult to sell or dispose of in the Capital City because they are easy to identify. They speculated the objects have probably been moved out of state for resale. They indicated the New Mexico State Police have been notified of the burglary and been informed to be alert for the stolen jewelry and art objects.

Numerous objects missing were from an educational exhibit portraying how metal jewelry is manufactured. Blow torch, sandstone cast, anvil and dies, bellows, and the like were undisturbed; the jewelry shown with them was taken. From other cases downstairs the few items of jewelry and medicine pouches being shown were taken. Each specimen that is missing is fully cataloged, illustrated and described in the museum records so that identification could be made readily. Duplicate data have been placed in the hands of the detectives assigned to this case.

In the upper gallery of the museum, the thievery appears to have been particularly daring. All of the life-size figures of Navaho people were divested of their jewelry. Care was displayed in taking silver buttons and collar ornaments from velveteen blouses, and in removing necklaces, belts, bracelets, buckles, bowguards and earrings, all of which were sewed, wired, or otherwise secured to the garments.

Also, two large woven rugs were taken, according to Dr. Bertha P. Dutton, Museum Director. “The main value of these is intrinsic. They were woven by the ‘medicine man’, or Navaho singer, for whom the Museum of Navaho Ceremonial Art was founded and built by Miss Mary Cabot Wheelwright in 1937. The patterns are unique. Because of international reputation of the Hosteen Klah rugs, their description has been disseminated worldwide to obviate resale.”

Although all of the specimens stolen have current monetary value, their true worth lies in their historical and cultural significance. This is impossible to establish.
A Reward Is Offered

Friends of the Museum of Navaho Ceremonial Art are offering a $2,000 reward for information leading to the recovery of all of the articles stolen from the Museum of Navaho Ceremonial Art on August 26, and to the arrest and conviction of those individuals responsible for this act.

You can help!

1) If you see any of the items shown in these photographs please report them to your local police.

2) Dr. Dutton and the Board of Trustees ask your financial support for the reward fund. The Museum of Navaho Ceremonial Art has existed for almost forty years to collect and preserve objects and data that reflect and interpret the arts and crafts, daily and ceremonial life of the Navaho, for the Navaho themselves and for those who appreciate their great contributions to world culture.

All donations are tax deductible.

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