The idea of establishing a health museum was mooted during 1883 in Dresden's Society for Nature and Medicine, and was taken up by factory owner Karl August Lingner, who, in 1911, together with like-minded industrialists, scientists, technicians and artists, organized an international hygiene exhibition in the city. The exhibition, in which 30 countries participated, took place at a time of rapid industrial development and extraordinary growth in scientific knowledge. There were epoch-making discoveries in the field of bacteriology by Pasteur, Koch and others, as well as important advances in medical diagnostics and therapeutics. Various scientific congresses and sports events were held in conjunction with the exhibition.

In drawing up the programme for the exhibition, Lingner wished to ensure that visitors would be presented with a vivid picture of the human body and the functioning of its organs. A person who did not know himself or herself in the widest sense would, he believed, never be able to take appropriate protective action against many kinds of ill-health. Furthermore, he wished to demonstrate the risks threatening the body as well as their prevention, and to explain how to preserve and improve one's health and strength. He wished to enlighten the population in such matters while presenting a clear display of major achievements in the field of hygiene. Hygienists were to be made aware of the latest research findings, and administrators were to be familiarized with theoretical and practical achievements in hygiene. The attractiveness and effectiveness of the exhibition was partly attributable to its division into scientific, historical, popular, sports, and industrial sections.

The centrepiece was the popular section, with material on demography, nutrition, hygiene, clothing, housing, diseases, the human body as a work of art, and other subjects. The historical section showed the history of hygiene from antiquity to modern times, while the scientific section depicted the achievements of modern hygiene. Industry was represented by 1475 exhibitors.

When the exhibition closed over five and a half million people had taken this opportunity to expand their knowledge of the biological and social aspects of hygiene.
From temporary to permanent

The exhibition having made a substantial profit, and there being a widespread feeling that its more valuable elements should be preserved, Lingner produced a detailed plan for a national hygiene museum in Dresden.

The museum devotes itself mainly to motivating and enabling people to preserve, promote and restore their own health and fitness.

Rather than display curiosities of interest to only a few specialists, it would show objects of practical significance which the public at large would readily comprehend. He proposed that the valuable teaching and demonstration materials manufactured in Germany should be kept together, preserved and permanently updated in accordance with scientific advances. The museum would be a place where everybody could acquire knowledge that would allow them to adopt healthy life-styles. Popular lectures on health care and personal and public hygiene would be given periodically. The museum would be developed as a centre of continuing education where physicians, administrators, engineers, architects, teachers and others would be able to extend their knowledge of hygiene. Lingner also formulated proposals relating to the legal status, financial framework, and other matters vital to the setting up of such an institution.

Because no suitable building was immediately available, the most valuable exhibits were housed in rented rooms. The first workshops of the museum were established, along with a small display room. In 1913 the association that had been founded to organize the hygiene exhibition became the Chartered Association for the National Hygiene Museum.

The First World War and subsequent inflation delayed the implementation of the project. Lingner died in 1916, but dedicated colleagues helped the institution to survive. It was decided that the museum should establish its own manufacturing enterprise and publishing house, and this initiative prevented the complete breakdown of the venture. Copies of the exhibits were produced for sale all over the world, creating a solid base for the existence of the museum. Its activities in health education continued to expand, and many exhibitions were held at home and abroad. A new name, the German Hygiene Museum, was adopted on 30 April 1920. Apart from the displays making up the museum proper, activities included lectures, slide shows and training courses on healthy living, baby care, and other subjects.

The first developmental stage of the museum was completed with the inauguration of a new building on 6 May 1930. A day later the Second International Hygiene Exhibition was opened in Dresden. It occupied not only the museum but also many other buildings and had a total floor area of approximately 470 000 square metres.

A new start

The museum was almost completely destroyed during the Second World War. Reconstruction began in 1945, and the museum became a state institution for the propagation of knowledge on hygiene and medicine. The spread of typhoid fever, dysentery, tuberculosis, gonorrhoea, syphilis and other infectious diseases in the aftermath of the war called for rapid educational work. Travelling exhibitions and
printed information materials were the tools most widely used.

Subsequently, the emphasis shifted to comprehensive prophylaxis and healthy living. The museum, which resumed the manufacture of teaching aids in 1948, was asked to undertake the following tasks:

- research into the most effective methods of health education for different sectors of the population;
- assessment of the effectiveness of educational activities;
- establishment and cultivation of contacts with similar institutions in other countries;
- formulation of methodological instructions for institutions and persons engaged in health education;
- deployment and guidance of full-time officers for health education in counties and districts;
- organization of training courses in the field of health education for physicians, undergraduates, middle-level health workers, and educators;
- expansion of the range of teaching aids for different target groups.

The German Hygiene Museum today

The museum is now the German Democratic Republic’s leading centre for information and research in health education and the development of health-promoting life-styles. Directly responsible to the Ministry of Health, it devotes itself mainly to motivating and enabling people to preserve, promote and restore their own health and fitness. In addition, it is the country’s only manufacturer of health exhibitions and of teaching aids and demonstration materials in human biology.

The permanent exhibitions occupy more than 5000 square metres. Fifteen rooms are used to give an insight into the structure and functioning of the human body, the field of molecular biology and genetics, and all the major aspects of healthy living. Information is displayed on the activities of the country’s health service and on certain aspects of medical history. There are special exhibitions on topical issues and on the interrelationship between medicine and the arts. The internationally renowned “glass woman” (Fig. 1), with a taped lecture in more than 20 languages, and a great number

Fig. 1. The “glass woman”, made of plastics with a transparent skin, showing the skeleton, organs and major blood vessels and nerves.
of medical models relating to human biology, are particular attractions. “Health for all—all for health” is the title of a permanent exhibition opened in 1988. Developed in close cooperation with the World Health Organization, it is an overview of the global activities of the agency.

The displays are designed to interest and stimulate, many of them encouraging the visitor to “learn by playing”. The museum has long and wide-ranging experience in the development, manufacture and use of exhibitions. Since 1949 it has taken part in 86 prestigious exhibitions in the German Democratic Republic and other countries throughout the world, as well as in 78 international fairs. In recent years the museum has held a number of special events for Dresdeners and their guests, including talks for expectant mothers, puppet theatre for children aged six to ten years, and counselling on healthy diets.

Exports

The museum has expertise in model-making, the processing of plastics, the graphic arts, the creation of exhibitions, and other related fields, and has exported its products to more than 70 countries (Fig. 2). The range includes life-size figures and models showing muscles, internal organs, and skeletal structure. They are made of plastic and are washable, unbreakable, and resistant to tropical conditions. A great contribution to the international renown of the museum has undoubtedly been made by the “glass figures” it produces. These models, actually consisting of plastics, are first-rate demonstration materials. Recent developments in this field include models of an expectant mother and an extra-large model of a human cell. The museum is one of the few centres still making anatomical wax models showing signs and symptoms of diseases. It also develops, manufactures and installs equipment for stationary health exhibitions and museums tailored to meet the requirements of customers in other countries. The manufacturing range is constantly being updated and expanded by the museum’s own experts in the light of advice from outside sources on the latest developments in the fields of medicine and teaching and in accordance with users’ requirements.

Health education

The museum is a centre for research,
information and training. It holds symposia, information meetings, and workshops and is involved in the organization of national conferences for health education. It assists health service personnel, particularly in respect of counselling in primary health care. The museum’s postgraduate training courses, information materials, and methodological recommendations enhance the knowledge and skills of groups shouldering special responsibility for health, notably physicians, educators, managerial staffs, and journalists. The museum produces and distributes leaflets, posters, children’s calendars, slides and other items dealing with healthy life-styles, and, with a view to informing the public about its activities, cooperates with the press, radio, television, and film studios. Special attention is given to health education for children and youth. Puppet shows and animated cartoons for children are especially popular.

International cooperation

The museum is a member of the International Union for Health Education and the World Association of Manufacturers of Teaching Aids, is represented on the International Council of Museums, and is a WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Education. On behalf of WHO, the museum organizes and coordinates health educational activities internationally. Materials were developed for the International Year of Youth (1985), and on this occasion a study entitled “Healthy life-styles of youth” was published in German, English, French and Russian. Since 1984 the museum’s Institute for Health Education has strongly supported the WHO campaign against smoking. A questionnaire on national approaches to the promotion of nonsmoking was elaborated, and replies from 17 European countries were analysed. In 1985 a WHO meeting on this topic took place in Dresden.

In its role as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Education, the museum has organized international summer seminars on health exhibitions (1986), life-styles conducive to health with particular reference to tobacco (1987), the promotion of healthy nutrition (1988), and mental health and well-being in relation to health promotion (1989). Long-standing links exist with institutes for health education in other countries. Over the past few years, the exchange of information, experience and materials with these institutes has been expanded. A number of scientific themes are now the subjects of bilateral and multilateral cooperation.