

RC - WR

REGISTRARS COMMITTEE - WESTERN REGION

AUGUST, 1987

newsletter

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NEW FACES IN
NEW PLACES

Susan Buchel, formerly Curator at Scotty's Castle, Death Valley National Monument, CA, is the new Registrar for the Museum Collections Repository, Western Archaeological and Conservation Center, National Park Service, Tucson, Arizona.

Claudia Scoville, former Collection Manager at the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, is now the Registrar at the Arizona State Museum.

The Museum Association of Arizona has honored Steve Rogers for "Outstanding Personal Service" to the Arizona Museum Community. As reported in the past RC-WR Newsletter, Steve resigned as Registrar of the Arizona State Museum and is now a Curator at the Wheelwright Museum in Sante Fe. The award acknowledged his active participation in the Museum Association of Arizona, especially involving the passage of legislation related to unclaimed property as well as work on the MAA Newsletter.

HELP!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum has opened the following positions in the Collections Management Department:

Collections Associate - 3 year position to assist with registration activities while opening a new building and initiation of computer-aided collections management system. Pay range is \$15,000-\$18,000, plus benefits. Preferred starting date is August 1, 1987.

3 Collections Assistants - 1 year position with possibility of month-to-month extensions to aid the department. Among duties are: numbering artifacts, assisting with photography, object handling, packing artifacts, assisting with installation, etc. Pay range is \$10,000-\$14,500. Available Sept. 1, Oct. 1 and Nov. 1.

2 Collection Management Interns - Twelve month duration with possibility of month-to-month extensions. Intern will participate in all activities of the department in order to supplement course work with practical experience. Requires completion of course work for a graduate degree in museum studies or similar graduate degree. Stipend: \$700 - \$900 per month.

To apply for these positions send resume, cover letter and 2 professional references to Mary Ellen Hennessey Nottage, Collections Manager, Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum, P.O. Box 710, Los Angeles, CA 90078.

SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA
WORKSHOP

On Thursday, May 21, 1987, Southern California Registrars held a workshop/seminar entitled "Importing and Exporting Procedures and Documentation" at the Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza Hotel at the Los Angeles Airport. This workshop was conducted to provide registrars with the opportunity to meet the LAX U.S. Customs staff as well as customs brokers from around the country. The participants included: Jan Franck, Sr. Imports Specialist, U.S. Customs; Jack Brady, V.P. Bill White Inc. and former District Director of U.S. Customs; Guy de Gramont, President, West Coast Keating, Inc and Bryan Cooke, President, Cooke's Crating, Inc.

The workshop addressed and described standard procedures of customs documents and licenses for museum objects before and when a shipment arrives or departs - with special focus on the implementation of the new federal user's fee; the role of customs brokers and the advantages of working with a competent broker.

Participants also discussed custom clearance of couriered or "hand-carried" shipments; the handling of the unexpected by couriers during the shipment of works of art; the proper selection and training of couriers before the shipment and the broker's need for complete and correct information from the registrar. It was also established that it is the registrar's responsibility to become familiar with different shipping terms and invoices used by customs brokers and shipping firms.

The workshop concluded with a guided walk through of three different air cargo terminals: Flying Tiger Air Cargo, Japan Air Line and Lufthansa Airlines. The tour was included to give attendees the opportunity to discuss problems of loading and unloading shipments at an air cargo terminal. This extremely useful workshop should be a model for similar workshops in each of our western region states.

.....submitted by Therese Chen-Huggins, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

THANKS!

TO THOSE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTORS TO THE RC-WR...THANK YOU!
We appreciate those members who give above and beyond the call of \$5 dues.

Guy de Gramont of West Coast Keating, Inc., L.A.
Deborah Cooper, Registrar at the Oakland Museum.
Susan Kikuchi from the Japanese American National Museum, Monterey Park, CA.

A A M SESSION SUMMARIES

Several of our members have submitted reports of some of the most pertinent sessions of the AAM Annual Meeting in San Francisco, June 3 - 11th, 1987. For those of you who could not attend OR to refresh the memories of those who did attend, we present the following synopses:



"Facilitating Innovation" by Andre L. Delbecq, Dean, Leavy School of Business and Administration, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California

The theme for the annual meetings, INNOVATION, was addressed by Delbecq in a manner that applies to all museum staff, at all levels. Multiple sources of funds are required at multiple levels to implement innovation, however funds must be made available at the department level.

Suggestions based on strategic review should be combined with experience-driven proposals. As only 40% of innovations are successful, according to Delbecq, pilot studies should precede program experiments. Future innovation requires shared ownership of innovation risks. A manager only taking credit for successes and blaming others for failures will lead nowhere. In short, innovation for an organization requires a commitment of resources and a willingness to take risks.
.....submitted by Phil Stoiber, Heard Museum



A Common Agenda for History Museums

This session was of special interest to staff members of historical institutions, museums and societies with large holdings of historical objects. Mr. Douglas Evelyn and Mr. Lonn Taylor from the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution organized a conference in February of 1987 inviting leading history museum professionals to meet in Washington D.C. to discuss the future of America's history museum collections. The meeting was prompted by the growing realization that these collections, in the aggregate, form a national library of objects that plays a crucial role in increasing public understanding of history and the humanities. The goal of the conference was to identify common problems, solutions and opportunities for collaborative action that would improve the nation's history museums and set new standards for the care and interpretation of their collections.

Basically, history museums have come of age during the past 20 years and the role of the National Endowment for the Humanities, with its emphasis on interpretive exhibits has played an important role in this process. Also, there is an increasing use of objects to interpret history and a new recognition of the power of artifacts in representing complex ideas.

Evelyn and Taylor were joined in a panel discussion by Mr. James Blackaby, Curator, Mercer Museum, Bucks County Historical Society and Mr. William Tramosch, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. The panel discussion communicated that four working groups had been formed: Interpretation, Common Data Base, Collecting Criteria & Approaches and Collaboration in Collecting and Exhibiting.

Eight areas of need emerged in the discussions of all 4 groups. These were:

- 1) The need to create commonly accessible data bases for artifacts within history museums,
- 2) The need to create closer ties between history museums and academics in a variety of fields,
- 3) The need to evaluate and revise academic museum training programs & in-service training programs,
- 4) The need to develop both collecting and exhibition collaboratives,
- 5) The need to develop critical standards of exhibit evaluation & methods for peer review of exhibits,
- 6) The need to develop collecting criteria that will insure focused, purposeful collecting,
- 7) The need to develop channels for more effective sharing of information among museums & funding agencies about collections priorities, research in progress and exhibit development,
- 8) The need to increase the public's awareness of the functions and potentialities of history museums as educational institutions.

The task force will be housed at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. and may be affiliated with the AASLH. AASLH Press will be publishing the final conference report in September of this year. It is the hope of the task force to have the concerns of the 4 working groups reach the regional, state & local levels as well as having annual reports & workshops at both AAM & AASLH Annual Meetings.

As a Registrar who began in art museums and now finds herself in the realm of "Aunt Minnie's Attic," I am excited about the potential for net-

working & sharing common goals & concerns on a national level. It is important for those of us working in historical institutions to support this attempt to bring history museums out of the dark ages and into the 20th century.

.....submitted by Martha Fulton-Stout,
Museum of History & Industry, Seattle



NOMENCLATURE REVISED: CHENHALL IN THE 80's

The primary focus of this session was to update museum professionals on the work of the ad hoc committee and their task of bringing Robert G. Chenhall's seminal work: Nomenclature for Museum Cataloguing: A System for Classifying Man-Made Objects into the 1980's. The session was chaired by Martha Fulton-Stout.

Nomenclature was developed between the years 1974 and 1978 under the direction of Robert Chenhall, then Director of Data Services at the Strong Museum in Rochester, New York. Chenhall was joined by members of the Strong Museum staff and a host of curators and registrars from 20 museums & historical organizations across the country. Their efforts resulted in the publication of Nomenclature by AASLH Press in 1978. The 4,000 copies of the 1st edition were sold out by the summer of 1984; the book went out of print and unused copies were a rarity. From the time of its publication comments & suggestions for change in this cataloguing system were received from its users. Those involved with the initial creation of Nomenclature realized that a revision was necessary.

The Strong Museum invited professionals from various geographic locations & museum types to come to Rochester for 2 days to review Nomenclature & work towards a revision that would meet the needs of the museum community they each represented. Among the nine who attended was Mr. James Blackaby, Curator, The Mercer Museum, Doylestown, PA. Mr. Blackaby has served as a revision co-editor with Jan Guldbeck & Pat Greenough of the Strong Museum since spring of 1985. Mr. Blackaby presented his ideas on revisions & sequels in hopes of making sense of the ad hoc revision committee's work. Mr. Blackaby presented the following points with characteristic wit and candor:

The revised edition of Nomenclature, or

"Rambo-clature Plus Version 2.0" is in the final phases of editing with a projected publication date of Spring, 1988, again by AASLH Press.

The revision committee has attempted to solve some of the basic problems with Chenhall's original system that have plagued many of its users. One change will be the addition of a 4th field, "object term." The original hierarchical system will remain with the addition of object term following the category and classification terms. This will allow the individual user to utilize unique names appropriate to their collections & allow unique names & genre words to be entered into the system.

Another change will be that ALL names will be inverted with the noun coming before the modifying adjective separated by a comma, i.e. glasses, mountaineering. In the original version the inversion of names was not consistent. TOOLS & EQUIPMENT will be split into five major categories & objects that are supplies, i.e. coal, lamp oil will also be placed in T&E. The book will be bound like the 1st edition with cut-in thumb tabs to facilitate easier access to specific portions of the text.

Above all, Mr. Blackaby reinforced the revision committee's point of view that Nomenclature as a system works and works well, but is not and will not be revised to the universal satisfaction of all users. It is meant to be a finding device to get you to that portion of your collection and allow the user to search within that more specific category for the object they are seeking.

We owe the revision committee much for their efforts in improving the basic system created by Chenhall and the Strong Museum ten years ago. Who knows, perhaps some of you will be involved in the revision efforts of "Rambo-Clature Version 3.0" in years to come.

.....submitted by Martha Fulton-Stout, Museum of History & Industry, Seattle



COLLECTION MANAGEMENT AND THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE REGISTRAR

The importance of the museum registrar has become recognized through the years by museum staff but we, as registrars, must further encourage the awareness of our role. Although the registrar has become a better understood and appreciated museum professional, there still exist

hazy notions about our role within museums. Therefore, I was looking forward to this session on the evolving role of the registrar. I felt that this session would not only serve as a morale boost for registrars but also provide an opportunity to reach an audience beyond that of registrars. This assumption was strengthened by the diverse composition of the panel, including a director, conservator, curator & registrar. This assortment, could surely provoke some controversy as well as new information. I came away disappointed.

"There is a great deal more involved than seems at first to meet the eye and the task of the registrar is one made up not only of clear thinking and accurate recording, but of infinite tact and patience....It is she who acts as mediator between the public and staff....It is she who must listen to many discussions of form and expression throughout the day without showing that she is impatient to continue her more routine work." Ted Greenberg, Registrar for Permanent Collections at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, opened this session with a quotation from a speech given in San Francisco during the AAM in 1939. The role of registrar was defined by Mrs. Alice Putnam Breuer, Assoc. Director of Mills College Art Gallery. Our responsibilities have expanded through the years, moving away from the notion that our sole responsibility is to maintain an official register. The role of registrar encompasses much more than that as confirmed by all four panelists.

Barbara Gibbs, Director at The Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, opened by explaining that she has gradually recognized the importance of the registrar within museums. The initiation process began at The Portland Art Museum under the tutelage of the registrar at that time, Kittu Gates. The importance of the registrar was once more confirmed at The Crocker Art Museum where their museum is preparing for accreditation. Because of the scrutiny they will undergo by the AAM, it was necessary to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their museum. As part of this introspection, their registrar, Paulette Henum, adopted a collection management policy. This policy defined collection management needs - i.e. procedures to follow, work habits to adopt, etc. This entire process emphasized to Barbara Gibbs that the registrar's role is that of both gate-keeper & risk manager. It is necessary for the registrar to be integrally involved with every

facet of the museum related to safeguarding & caring for the collection.

The second speaker, Elaine Grossbard, came to realize the importance of the registrar through her work as a freelance conservator. Working with many diverse types of museums, she noted that oftentimes the registrar was the first person to receive an object, catalogue an object, & track the movement of that object. In every one of these tasks, the registrar notes the condition of the object while taking necessary precautions to secure its safety. The conservator continues the process further by implementing necessary conservation treatment. Elaine Grossbard stated that there is a commitment shared by registrars & conservators to care for & preserve the collections. Both groups are involved in planning for & assuring the physical safety of the collection, therefore cooperation is a necessity. Working as a team requires that standard practices and policies be adopted and followed.

Donald Stover, Curator of American Decorative Arts at The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, defined the role of registrar as being an integral part of the collections management team made up of curator, registrar and conservator. He emphasized the need for museum directors to recognize that the registrar should be given equal standing & voice on matters of issue. Stover also made note of the growing usage of computer technology to assist in collection management needs. He cited the example of his own museum where registration is in the process of computerizing records. Stover stated that one should not forget the importance of the object file itself for primary primary documentation. Care should be taken to secure both the computer file and the manual, object file.

Virginia Mann, Executive Director, Museum Registration at The Art Institute of Chicago ended the session by tracing the beginnings of the profession itself. With the use of the slides, she defined the multi-faceted role of the registrar. It was made clear that the job encompasses many responsibilities. She viewed the primary role of the registrar as that of record keeper & information manager. She cited the importance of creating a collection management policy that meets the pressing obligations of museums, safeguarding and preserving the collection.

It is interesting to note that all four panelists defined the role of the registrar in much the same way. The registrar works closely with the curator & conservator. A line is not drawn identifying what can & cannot be done by the registrar. Rather, there should be a collaboration among directors, registrars, curators & conservators. Instead of working at cross-purposes, the team should work utilizing their own special skills to fully document and safeguard the collection.

Does this description really apply to most museums? Do these 4 panelists reflect the opinions of their peers or do they represent an idealized view rather than reality? The session was uplifting for registrars but to be truly valuable the audience should have been filled with directors, curators and other museum staff who would benefit from such a clear definition of the role of registrar within a museum.

.....submitted by Sonya Knudsen, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

OF NATIONAL INTEREST.....REGISTRARS' COMMITTEE - ANNUAL MEETING

- The National Registrars' Committee held its annual business meeting at AAM in San Francisco. Reports were given by the national officers as well as regional representatives. Renee Montgomery's report for the western region did us justice in terms of communicating how active and cohesive our region is.
- The National Registrars' publication, Registrar, is being resuscitated by co-editors Rebecca Buck of the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College and Jean Gilmore of the Brandywine River Museum. They hope to put out issues focusing on specific topics. The next issue will be devoted to computerizing collection records.
- A national task force is organizing in order to develop a standardized facility report form to be used by all U.S. museums. Lynn Berg of Art Services International in Arlington, Virginia is heading this task force.
- The 1988 AAM Annual Meeting will be held in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.
- The Nominations Committee has called for nominations for national officers. If you would like to nominate any individuals for specific offices please contact Virginia Mann at The Art Institute of Chicago.

Cassettes from ten sessions of the 1987 Annual Meeting of the American Association

of Museums held in San Francisco, CA from June 7 - 11, 1987 are available for borrowing by RC-WR members. The cassettes will be loaned for a period of two weeks to members for a two dollar postage and handling fee per tape or tape set.

Only one tape or tape set will be loaned at a time. Return postage will be the responsibility of the borrower. Requests and remittance should be sent to:

RC-WR, c/o Louis M. Goldich, Registrar, San Diego Museum of Art, P.O. Box 2107, San Diego, CA 92112-2107. Cassettes are available for the following sessions:

"The Roanoke Story"

"New Technologies in Security Alarms"

"Nomenclature Revised: Chenhall in the Eighties"

"Strategies for Documentation in Museum Registration Systems"

"Pollutants in Exhibition Environments"

"Computerizing Collections Management Information: Would Standards Help?"
(2-cassette set)

"Museum Storage" (2-cassette set)

"Collections Management and the Evolving Role of the Registrar"

For a complete list of all 101 cassettes available from the 1987 Annual Meeting of the A.A.M., contact: Vanguard Systems, Inc., 4210 Johnson Drive - Suite 100A, Shawnee Mission, Kansas 66205. Telephone: (913) 432-6520.

"Museum Storage"

Storage should be a focus of concern, since the number of objects on exhibition in many museums represents a small percentage of total collections. Panelists discuss basic choices in museum storage: different kinds of storerooms (their sizes and locations), wall and floor coverings and finishes, lighting and storage furniture. These matters are discussed in terms of their effects on preservation, accessibility, stability of climate, pest control, ease of inspection and security. Methods of building and using containers are described, and the special problems of plywood and wood as building materials are explained. The session stresses common sense, rather than high-technology, solutions to storage problems in a wide range of collections.

"Collections Management and the Evolving Role of the Registrar"

Four disciplines of the museum profession are represented as a director, curator, conservator, and registrar present a discussion on the changing role of the registrar in the 1980's. Panelists offer their perspectives of the registrar's role in the collections management of the museum.

.....from Louis Goldich, San Diego
Museum of Art

Continued...

"The Roanoke Story"

November 1985: heavy rains...and the Roanoke River carried the Virginia Museum of Transportation downstream. Destruction hit fragile documents as well as massive vehicles. Quick action and cool heads were required to salvage and preserve the collections. This episode and the way it was handled has reminded museum administrators around the country that disaster preparedness is a major concern that cannot be ignored. Plans for protecting and extending the message through exhibits are unfolded in this session.

"New Technologies in Security Alarms"

A review of the security-alarm market today - current technologies, matching alarm applications to alarm needs and cost effectiveness.

"Nomenclature Revised: Chenhall in the Eighties"

Chenhall's nomenclature system has undergone revisions by the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum. This update on the revisions addresses Chenhall as a standard and basis for nomenclature; its ability to deal with non-manmade objects; and its use as a basis for a standardized system of cataloguing and for computerization.

"Strategies for Documentation in Museum Registration Systems"

Many museums lack information about the provenance of the objects in their collections: the history, use, owners, users, and places where the object has been. How can museums establish quickly, accurately and completely the provenance of objects already in the permanent collection and those considered for accessioning? Panelists discuss strategies for documentation, successful methods, techniques to avoid and problems that arise. The effects of a good documentation strategy on museum accessioning and deaccessioning policy - and on the public - is discussed.

"Pollutants in Exhibition Environments"

Putting works of art on cases or crowded galleries creates unique environments. These environments have different problems presented by a wide variety of pollutants. Air pollution and HVAC issues as well as material emissions are discussed. This session explores the problems and their potential solutions, as well as current research. Case studies and solutions deal specifically with the issues of pollutants in the immediate object environment.

"Computerizing Collections Management Information: Would Standards Help?" (2-cassette set)

This session is designed for information managers who are about to computerize. Panelists cover all the problems that are likely to come up, and they discuss whether standardization is required before computerization. Also, current projects are discussed: Art and Architecture Thesaurus, use of the Machine Readable Cataloguing (MARC) format for art materials and Thesaurus Artis Universalis of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art.

Paulette Hennum from the Crocker Art Museum sends us a letter from 1902 describing a unique solution to problematic art shipments.....

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SAN FRANCISCO, CAL. Jany. 24, 1902

Friend Hill:-

I was delighted in the receipt of your favor of Jany. 22nd., and noted its contents very carefully. I am glad you have returned to God's own country, for with me always you are and will remain one of God's innocent children. Your art life has kept you so singularly free from rough contact with the world that the charming freshness and simplicity of your sympathies are constant sources of delight.

I will send the picture addressed to you at Wawona, and have ordered the tin can in which it is found to be carefully soldered, so that in the event it is carried by wagon from Raymond to Wawona and in the event the wagon should be caught in a rain-storm, which it is seriously to be hoped it will, the picture can by no possibility take harm. It is in fact a canned picture, just like canned peaches, and I trust you may receive it in good order.

I note that you are now at Hotel del Coronado, and I sincerely hope you will remain there as long as you feel that the place is promoting your health and prolonging your life.

With the most earnest good wishes, I am, as ever,
Yours sincerely,

Mr. Thos. Hill

... ATTEND THE WESTERN MUSEUMS CONFERENCE...SEPTEMBER 16 - 19, 1987....PORTLAND, OREGON.....

.....NEXT ISSUE OF NEWSLETTER WILL COME OUT IN OCTOBER.....CONTRIBUTE.....

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