

REGISTRARS' REPORT

Vol. I

From the Editors: The Role of the Registrar

For several years, the desire on the part of museum registrars to be considered a professional group has been growing. If we are to be considered specialists, we must strive to adopt standard levels of job competence; we must also develop regular channels of communication through which we can learn more about our areas of responsibility. Our decisions often involve the expenditure of substantial amounts of money, or affect the care and handling of valuable objects. It is essential that we have as much information as possible upon which we can base our decisions.

REGISTRARS' REPORT grows out of an educational need. At present, there are only two other publications which deal exclusively with registration functions (see Bibliography). The most well known, Dudley and Wilkinson's MUSEUM REGISTRATION METHODS, has been re-edited twice over a period of nearly twenty years, and is a standard in the field. Registrars deal with numerous changing and developing businesses: records management, transportation, packing and insurance

to name a few. A single publication does not have the capacity, flexibility, or regularity of publication to keep abreast of these rapid changes. We intend this newspaper to provide regular, current and in-depth information to aid those who perform registration functions.

Each issue of REGISTRARS' REPORT will focus on a different topic. Our approach will be to establish a basic level of understanding and then build upon it. In an upcoming issue, for example, the movement of heavy stone objects will be examined. We will begin with a description of the formation of stone, leading to an examination of its inherent strengths and weaknesses, and then discuss appropriate approaches to handling and equipment. Our policy will be to consult with specialists in the areas we examine. Topic selection will be based upon our readers' expression of interest and need.

Our first issue deals with an old, but still pressing question: "What do registrars do?" In some situations, the

registrar is exclusively a file clerk, in others an administrator, in others anything in between. We sought a perspective on museum registrars, what they do, how they view themselves and how others view them. By logical extension, upcoming issues will define what registrars may be doing in the future. Knowledge of these issues is essential to growing expertise in the field.

We hope you will find REGISTRARS' REPORT useful and stimulating. Format and paper quality selections were based upon the intention that the newspaper will provide lasting information which you will want to keep in a notebook or file. We wish to maintain an open dialogue with our readers, covering topics relevant to your interests. In sharing REGISTRARS' REPORT, don't forget that many issues will be valuable to a number of people in your museum experience, and that an intangible part of professionalism depends upon how others in related fields perceive your work. ■

Views on Museum Registration

The editors surveyed a variety of professionals in the museum field to ascertain their perceptions of the museum registrar. Our questionnaire asked respondents to identify three role functions which they most associated with the registrar and to rank the registrarial role in relation to other professionals in the museum world in terms of prestige, influence, money and satisfaction. Those surveyed were also invited to pose questions related to registrars or to make additional comments.

WILLIAM T. ALDERSON has been the director of the American Association for State and Local History since 1964. He was a member of the American Association of Museums Accreditation Committee from 1968 to 1970 and served as the first chairman of the Accreditation Commission from 1970 to 1973.

Accessioning, registration and cataloguing were the role-functions Alderson associated with registrars. He ranked the registrarial role as moderate in prestige, influence and money, but stated that he believed satisfaction levels to be dependent upon the individual.

A specialist in fine arts insurance for museums, collectors and special exhibitions, CARL G. ALLEN has been an insurance broker in California since 1948. He is president of American Insurance Managers which is associated with Fred S. James & Company, a major international risk management firm.

Noting that the role functions of registrars vary among museums almost as much as the activities and professional characteristics of the museums themselves, Allen identified the major responsibilities of the registrar as supervision, maintenance and control of inventory records of the museum's collections; loan

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**An Interview with
IRMA BEZOLD WILKINSON**

CURRENTLY residing in Connecticut, Irma Bezold-Wilkinson is widely known for her co-authorship of the standard reference for registrars, MUSEUM REGISTRATION METHODS. Wilkinson's experience as a mu-

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Views on Museum Registration

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arrangements with lenders and borrowers, including condition reporting, transit arrangements and loss control; insurance valuations and costs; general management of the part of the museum's business related to record-keeping, valuation, safeguarding and insurance of the museum's collections and loans. In performing these management duties, he believes the registrar's office is, or should be, the nerve center of museum operations.

Allen also believes there is variation among different museums in the registrar's prestige, influence, compensation and job satisfaction. In general, he believes these factors are not as high as they should be, nor as high as they are going to be, especially as a result of increased inter-communication between registrars, and their exchange of ideas and methods to improve the mechanics with which registrars are concerned.

Mr. Allen asks: "How do the registrars themselves respond to these same questions?" "What support do registrars need to accomplish their recognized objectives?" He believes the key questions are not what registrars' prestige, influence, compensation and job satisfaction are now, but rather what are they going to be five years from now.

ARTHUR BEALE, the head conservator of the Center for Conservation and Technical Studies of the Fogg Art Museum, replied briefly and succinctly to our inquiry: "I cannot answer these questions in the abstract. I believe the individual abilities and experience of the museum registrar, like any museum professional, are key factors in his or her prestige, influence and salary. The range of the registrar's functions is in large part a matter of the size of the museum, and again a matter of ability and experience."

HUNTINGTON T. BLOCK, president of Huntington T. Block Insurance, has specialized in fine arts insurance for the past 17 years. Block is currently a member of the American Association of Museums' Shipping, Packing and Insurance Committee.

Like several other respondents, Block chose to reply to our questions with a letter: "Your questions are not easy to answer — 'record keeping' immediately comes to mind as a role function, and so does 'coordinating exhibitions'. But then a myriad of other role function ideas come to mind — like communicating with lenders and borrowers, acting as go-between in sometimes difficult inter-museum departmental problems, putting out a never-ending array of brush fires, negotiating the best possible arrangements for shipping and insurance, helping in the adjustment of losses, being able to talk to truck drivers and trillionaires all in the same day and in their own special language, learning to influence important decisions when authority is sometimes limited, being able to spend all day in an unheated warehouse yet show up at a museum opening that evening looking shower fresh, enduring the frustration of having an orderly mind in an environment not devoid of people with special sensibilities and their own way of doing things, caring enough about your job to be generally overworked and often underpaid . . . My answers to your second question would have to be 'medium' in the overall, although I can think of exceptions in every category. If I were checking on a registrar, I would want to know where and under whom he or she received their training."

A nationally known art historian and educator, RUTH BOWMAN is currently museum consultant and visiting curator at the Newark Museum. Bowman was director of education at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art from 1974 through 1975. She is vice-president and member of the Council of the American Association of Museums.

Keeping track of all the works in the museum as well as incoming and outgoing loans, keeping accurate records of all objects and attending to every detail of shipping and receiving of all museum property, loans and gifts were the role functions Bowman associated with the registrar. In her experience, registrars had medium prestige, influence and pay; satisfaction was ranked high to medium. She posed four questions: "Are there any new areas of training opening up for registrars (conservation, statistics, computers) subsidized by NEH, NEA, Smithsonian?" "What are the major problems for registrars?" "What is the ideal training for registrars?" "What are the hazards and liabilities (professionally) for registrars?"

PETER C. BUNNELL is the director of the Art Museum, Princeton University, in Princeton, New Jersey.

Bunnell stated that the registrar should be responsible for collections records and documentation, the handling of in/out loans, etc., and preliminary condition evaluation of works in the collections and those being received on loan. He rated the job as having medium prestige, high influence, high salary and

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REGISTRARS' REPORT

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IRMA BEZOLD WILKINSON

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seum professional began in 1929 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In answer to a growing need for a practical guide for registrars, she and Dorothy Dudley wrote MUSEUM REGISTRATION METHODS, published by the American Association of Museums in 1958. Wilkinson continued her work at the Metropolitan until 1963, and since then has maintained her connections with the museum field in a wide variety of areas.

As a key work, MUSEUM REGISTRATION METHODS has influenced the shape and content of the position of museum registrar. It seemed entirely appropriate for this issue to interview one of the authors to discover how she views her work and development as a registrar.

What was your background before becoming a registrar? How did you first get into museum registration?

I was a history major with an art history minor at the University of Wisconsin, where I did all my undergraduate work. After graduation with a Bachelor of Arts degree, I worked in a small college library for about eight months. Following this, I took a job at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in what was then called the lending collection, meaning slides, photographs, color prints and a small collection of objects.

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Readers' Exchange

Our advice column has been designed to accommodate specific reader questions. We may either solicit responses to the inquiry from informed sources and then print both the question and the response, or print the question alone to elicit general responses from the field. The responses will then appear in the issue following their receipt.

Can you suggest recent information on simple techniques for small collections?
S.C.

The registration procedure used at the Museum of the American China Trade in Milton, Massachusetts, although trimmed for the use of a relatively small collection, was structured upon that of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Our registration forms, our accessioning of objects, our files, and our cataloguing system were all modeled after those of the larger institution. All have been simplified and tailored to suit the peculiarities of our collection.

As Robert Chenhall points out in his book, *MUSEUM CATALOGUING IN THE COMPUTER AGE*, registration should not be confused with cataloguing, the former being the assignment of an object to an individual place in a list of items in the collection so that it is not confused with any other piece, and the latter involving the assignment of the object to one or more categories within a classification system whereby that object is associated with other objects similar or related to it. The registration of objects at the China Trade Museum is under one of two categories: GIFTS or LOANS. These are the only two registration listings and the only two labelling systems so that all exceptions are included under one or the other. Under GIFTS are included all purchases, bequests, etc., and under LOANS are all temporary loans for identification or photography purposes, for special exhibitions, as well as all "permanent" loans (objects to be given to the museum at a later date). The exceptions then, weren't sufficient enough to warrant a separate registration listing.

Therefore, for every file in the museum there are two separate sections: one for GIFTS and one for LOANS. These files include: 1) a master card file which contains all known information as well as "hearsay" about each object, 2) a location file which gives a location code for each object's present location, 3) a donor file listed alphabetically by the last name of the

donor including the objects given or lent to the museum in each year, and 4) a master folder file, one for GIFTS and one for LOANS, listed alphabetically by last name of the donor or lender which includes all receipt forms, insurance information, photographs, etc., on the objects given or lent.

In cataloguing objects, the simplest method is probably that of the "card catalogue," with a major category card and cross reference cards for each object in the collection. The smallest, simplest museum, like any library, needs as many cross reference cards as are necessary for any particular object. Thus a beaded dress may need a separate card for TEXTILES, CLOTHING and BEADWORK. With a small collection however, this card catalogue system with 3-4 cards per object is the simplest and can be done manually. Robert Chenhall also mentions using a file cabinet for small collections which contains complete documentation on each object, the card catalogue being considered as an index to it.

The China Trade Museum has developed its own methods of registration, those which are briefly described here. They are methods which have been found to be the easiest to work with and which have worked well in most completely registering and cataloguing the collection. However, each institution must develop techniques which complement its specific needs and most efficiently deal with its collection. The following is a selected bibliography of books and pamphlets on museum registration procedures and other related areas which would perhaps benefit the registrar in a small museum:

CHENHALL, ROBERT G., *MUSEUM CATALOGUING IN THE COMPUTER AGE*, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, Tennessee, 1975.

COLEMAN, LAURENCE VAIL, *THE MUSEUM IN AMERICA*, 3 vols., American Association of Museums, Washington, D.C., 1939.

DUDLEY - WILKINSON, *MUSEUM REGISTRATION METHODS*, American Association of Museums, Washington, D.C., 1968.

GUTHE, CARL E., *THE MANAGEMENT OF SMALL HISTORY MUSEUMS*, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, Tennessee, 1964.

HARRISON, RAYMOND O., *THE TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS OF SMALL MUSEUMS*.

MACBEATH, GEORGE AND GOODING, S. JAMES, *BASIC MUSEUM MANAGEMENT*, Canadian Museum Association, Ottawa, 1969.

NEAL, ARMINITA, *HELP FOR THE SMALL MUSEUM*, Nashville, American Association for State and Local History, 1969.

RATH, FREDERICK L. JR. AND O'CONNELL, MERRILYN R., *GUIDE TO HISTORIC PRESERVATION, HISTORICAL AGENCIES AND MUSEUM PRACTICES: A SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY*, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, 1975.

THE ORGANIZATION OF MUSEUMS, Practical Advice, UNESCO, published by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1960

The following technical leaflets published through the American Association for State and Local History, 1315 Eighth Avenue So., Nashville, Tennessee 37203/Telephone: 242-5583.

COLLECTING HISTORICAL ARTIFACTS: AN AID FOR SMALL MUSEUMS by Eugene F. Kramer

DOCUMENTING COLLECTIONS: MUSEUM REGISTRATION AND RECORDS by Carl E. Guthe

KARREN KORDER
Registrar
Museum of the American China Trade

Is an organization for museum registrars already in operation?
J. M.

During the June 1976 meeting of the American Association of Museums in Washington, D. C., the initial foundation was laid for the formation of an AAM standing professional committee of registrars. At that meeting, a chairperson, Kay Paris of the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, and vice chairpersons, Ellen M. Myette of the Renwick Gallery and David Parrish of the Wadsworth Atheneum, were elected. These three selected regional chairpersons. The committee was formed to encourage professionalism and educational programs within the registration field.

For further information, contact your regional chairperson. Regional chairpeople are as follows: Joan Friedland of the Connecticut Historical Society (New England), L. Carol Murray of the Baltimore Museum of Art (Northeast), Charles Mo of the New Orleans Museum of Art (Southeast), Mary-Edgar Patton of the St. Louis Art Museum (Midwest), Kay Morris of the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center (Mountain-Plains), and Patricia Nauert of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (West). ■

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IRMA BEZOLD WILKINSON

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I stayed there about eight years and took various courses at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. I was then promoted to be in charge of the central catalogue.

As the term "central catalogue" is sometimes misunderstood, I shall explain that this was, and still is, the central records department for the entire Metropolitan Museum collections. After about six years as the head of this department, Francis Henry Taylor asked me to combine the central catalogue and the registrar's department, as it was thought by the business executives that there was a duplication of effort.

It seemed impossible to explain that the registrar's record is quite different from the record of a fully catalogued object. Also, some curators never liked the idea of cataloguing being done in the central catalogue. I must state here, however, that no cataloguing was ever done without the cooperation of the curatorial department concerned. The object, and what was recorded about it, was at all times the full responsibility of the curatorial departments. In a sense, the girls in the central catalogue gathered up all available information from the registration record and from the curatorial department and shaped it into a system which applied to all objects and presented the work to the curator for his approval.

What were your primary duties? Did they change over time?

My primary duties as registrar consisted pretty much as those described in our book *MUSEUM REGISTRATION METHODS* (Dudley and Bezold-Wilkinson). This book has been out of print and the American Association of Museums is now publishing the third edition.

The basic responsibility of the registrar was the recording of all objects that entered and left the museum, for their safe handling and storage while they were being recorded, for their unpacking and packing, and transportation in this country as well as abroad, including custom clearance. This also included keeping track of their movements at all times.

The question of storage after registration had been accomplished was not the responsibility of the registrar at the Metropolitan Museum, but rather that of the curatorial departments. In smaller museums it often is the registrar's entire responsibility.

The taking of condition notes on incoming and outgoing objects also depends on how a museum is set up. When I became registrar at the Met,

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Museum Profile:

The Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona

A DELIGHTFUL Spanish Colonial building in the midst of busy metropolitan Phoenix--this is the Heard Museum of Anthropology and Primitive Art, centered around a sun-splashed patio planted with fragrant orange trees and flowers, first glimpsed through hand-crafted wrought iron gates. Visitors find the charm and intimacy reminiscent of fine old Southwestern homes. The museum was designed to create and capture just this ambience of warmth and tradition.

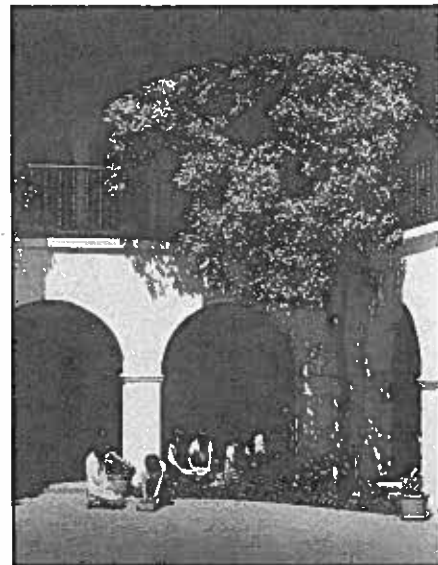
It was founded in 1929 by Dwight and Maie Bartlett Heard, who decided they had to either stop collecting or establish a permanent place for storage and exhibition. Since their collections and interests were not confined to one area but encompassed all native arts and crafts, the museum's emphasis seemed naturally to focus on the anthropological and primitive, especially on the Indians of the Southwest and their crafts.

An active exhibition schedule is maintained by the Heard Museum, incorporating both traveling exhibitions and those formed from the museum's own collections. Solo and group exhibitions featuring established and emerging talents are a very important part of the program. These are held in two large galleries on the first floor of the museum.

The second floor of the Heard features several semi-permanent exhibitions of rugs, baskets and pottery--such as Navajo textiles, California baskets and Pueblo pottery. Also of interest is the authentic *hagan* made of logs and earth and furnished as one would find it today on the reservation.

The Uplands Gallery, through a series of dioramas, illuminates the story of prehistoric peoples who once occupied the area's high country, the Anasazi and Hohokam. The exhibit has an ecological slant with introductory explanations of basketry and pottery processes.

In the Pueblo Gallery, Kachina dolls from the museum's collection and the Barry Goldwater Collection are displayed within the context of their religious and calendar use. This is one of the most popular galleries for visitors anxious to explore the meaning and significance of the Kachina figures.



The Heard Museum has more than doubled in physical size since its founding. And its collections now number well over 100,000 artifacts, the bulk of which centers on native American examples. Among its more important collections is the Goldwater Kachina doll collection of several hundred figures. These are the subject of a new museum publication entitled *KACHINAS: THE BARRY GOLDWATER COLLECTION AT THE HEARD MUSEUM*.

One of the highlights of the Heard's activities is its annual spring all-Indian Fair. Demonstrators of pottery, basketry, rugweaving, sandpainting and silversmithing techniques display their skills. Several Indian groups perform traditional dances to the accompaniment of chanters and beating drums. Indian women cook and sell their delicious foods such as Apache corn soup, Pima popovers and paper-thin Hopi piki bread.

A gift shop offering quality Indian pottery, baskets, rugs and jewelry, along with books, slides and sandpaintings is on the premises.

The Heard Museum is located at 22 East Monte Vista Road in Phoenix, Arizona 85004. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday. It is closed on major holidays. Suggested donations are \$1.00 for adults and 50c for children; members are admitted free.

JEAN MICUDA
Editor/Public Relations

A Survey: Registrars Identify Their Responsibilities

Webster defines professional as "characteristic of or conforming to the standards of a profession." Those who perform registration duties consider themselves professionals. We wondered if standards actually existed. Are there duties which are always the responsibility of the registrar? Is there now a basic level of expertise which is expected? With these questions in mind, the editors of REGISTRARS' REPORT decided to ask registrars themselves what duties they performed.

An initial mailing of 70 survey forms occurred nine months ago to people who had participated in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art seminar on registration held in September 1974. A second mailing of 30 forms went to selected registrars throughout the country. All 100 forms were returned.

In tallying the results, we encountered several problems. It became apparent that some respondents handled registration duties in addition to other tasks. In order to achieve meaningful results, the survey tabulations of those with titles other than registrar (approximately one-third of the respondents) were differentiated from the responses of those having the title of registrar.

We found too that in a majority of cases responsibilities are shared by several staff members. When partial or shared responsibility was indicated, the task was tabulated as a registration duty. In like manner, supervisory tasks, such as supervision of packers or photographers, were counted as direct registration responsibilities.

A failure of the survey was its inability to differentiate according to museum size. We were unable to solve this problem, although we are aware that museum size has a direct link to the amount of responsibilities placed on the registrar's shoulders.

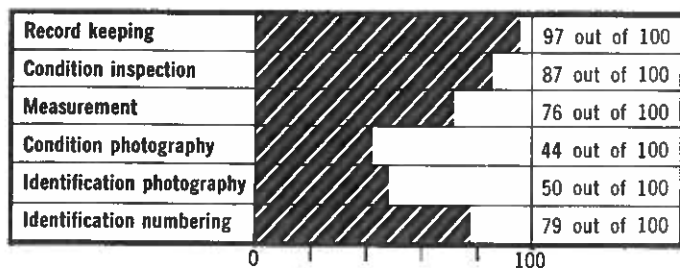
Despite such problems, we found the results both fascinating and illuminating, a succinct means of discovering what registrars do.

The results of this survey offer, we think, a representative picture of what a registrar actually does. In order to develop this picture, we included all tasks which more than half the respondents (51%) indicated as a responsibility.

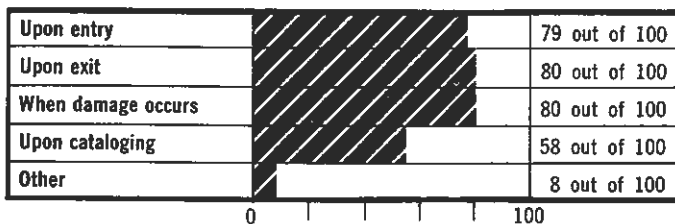
We found that the average registrar keeps the records; performs condition inspections; writes condition reports upon entry, exit, cataloguing of and damage to the object; measures; supplies identification numbering; determines strengths and weaknesses of objects relative to handling; determines handling methods; initiates object conservation; plans shipping; determines packing procedures; selects packing materials; physically packs objects; is responsible for physical and environmental security of the objects, for insurance forms and claims and for general housekeeping; selects storage locations and devices; labels storage areas and containers; is responsible for general storage maintenance and evaluation of object safety in installation.

The registrar, in other words, performs tasks vital to the museum's operation.

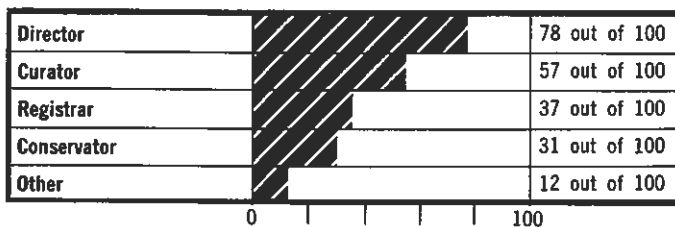
1. The registrar performs the routine of



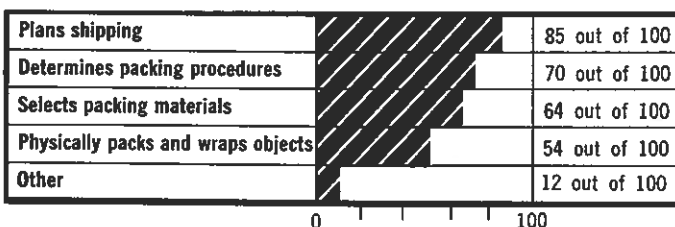
2. During the life of an object within an institution, condition reports are written



3. The following are involved in deciding whether an object may leave the museum



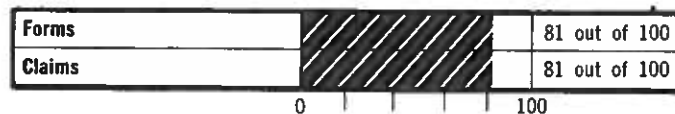
4. With respect to object transport, the registrar



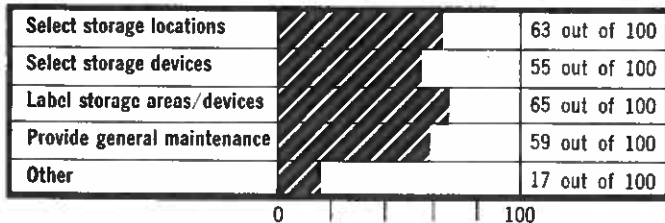
5. With respect to the care of the objects, the registrar is responsible for determining



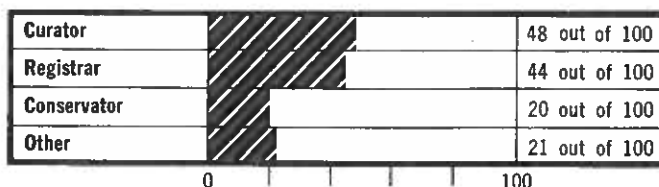
6. The registrar is responsible for object insurance



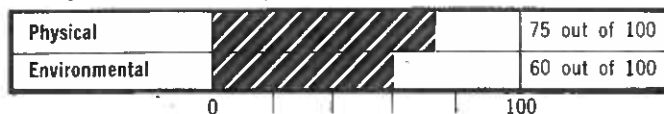
7. In storing objects, it is the registrar's duty to



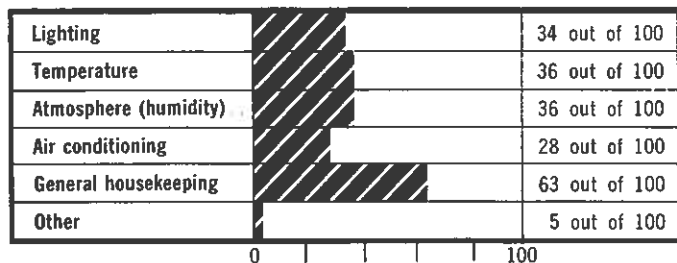
8. Routine inspections of the collection are performed by



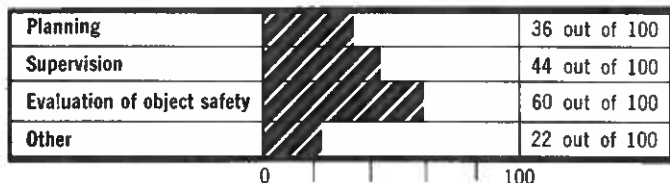
9. The registrar has responsibility for object security



10. The registrar monitors the following environmental factors



11. When objects are installed, the registrar is involved in



GENERAL COMMENTS:

"An assumed, rather than specific, responsibility. The entire staff shares a sense of responsibility."

"When an art object is affected by any diverse condition, it is a problem of this office, especially temporary exhibits."

"Any or all of the answers are applicable if a special loan request exists. I work with the conservator to plan and improve and monitor storage."

"Though not an assigned responsibility, I do watch all of these matters."

"I am expected to be aware of these and report a condition or problem to the proper person."

"Depending upon the type of installation this can be extensive or nonexistent."

"I work with the staff involved in planning the schedule and help with label information."

"None."

"The registrar schedules the work of art crew and supervises the crew; the curator supervises placement. The work of art crew and the curator attempts to get together as to the possibility of placement through the registrar."

"I make it responsibility, sometimes over the objection of the installation staff — always if an item was a condition of a loan."

"I feel this responsibility but my comments are not always welcome. If I feel something is insecure, an 'aesthetics over security' policy is hard to fight."

"I wash the white gloves."

"Actually, since is rather a large museum, each department functions separately — yet in harmony — with the registrar always being somehow involved, i.e., curatorial, preparation, conservation."

"One area that this questionnaire does not touch on is personal responsibility to the museum. Although I am not responsible for determining storage, security, handling procedures, or insurance, I do handle and store objects and arrange for insurance coverage when objects leave the museum. I consider it my personal responsibility to do everything possible to protect any object I work with."

"Most of these answers could be expanded almost *ad infinitum*."

"The last line in the job description is 'Other duties as necessary,' so we conduct tours, participate in docent training, select and install exhibits, etc. . . ."

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Views on Museum Registration

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medium to low job satisfaction; his comments were qualified: "I really have no idea about how others feel, I can only record my own feelings and observations."

President of Joseph M. Chapman, Inc.. JOSEPH CHAPMAN is an experienced consultant in the area of museum security. Chapman is co-author of A PRIMER ON MUSEUM SECURITY, published by the New York State Historical Society.

Chapman identified the registrar as the keeper of the keys to art storage, the uncompromising setter of professional standards and a keeper of accurate records of art objects on a scholarly level. He felt that the registrar should rank with the conservator, but, in reality, experienced medium prestige, medium influence, medium satisfaction and low pay. Chapman had several comments: "Why do some registrars not insist on a true level of professional training, responsibility, recognition and position?" "Why does the profession of museum registrar accept in its ranks bookkeepers, clerks and sweepers lacking training?" "A museum should be advised against appointing an available person as registrar until an internship of training has been completed under the instruction of a professional."

Previously director of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, JAMES ELLIOTT last summer assumed directorship of the University Art Museum in Berkeley, California.

Elliott connected maintenance of collection records, location and movement of works in the museum and transportation and insurance with the role of the registrar. Within the professional museum world, he placed registrars at a medium level in terms of prestige, influence, salary and satisfaction. He commented, "This is where I perceive them to be, not where they could or should be."

MARTHA KAUFMAN is the curator of the Armand Hammer Collection. She has coordinated major exhibitions of the collection in Venezuela, Peru, Japan, France, Mexico and the United States.

For Kaufman, chief functions of the registrar include physically cataloguing all collections, handling all incoming and outgoing exhibitions and handling information on the condition of all works of art in the collection. In relation to other museum professionals, she ranked registrars at medium prestige, but felt they have low influence, salary and satisfaction. She expressed concern for the skills and background of the individual as it relates to the job and felt an important question might be "Does the individual have the facility for handling many projects at one time?"

Since 1958, SHERMAN E. LEE has been the director of the Cleveland Museum of Art. He was vice-chairman of the National Council for the Humanities and is a trustee of the J. D. R. III Fund. Lee is also the editor of the recent volume, ON UNDERSTANDING ART MUSEUMS.

Record keeping, transportation and insurance and storage control are the role functions Lee most associates with the registrar. He sees the registrar as ranking high in prestige, pay and satisfaction, and medium in influence. He asks registrars, "How is it possible for one to maintain cordial relations and good disposition when dealing with so many different characters?"

As chief curator at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, CHARLES W. MILLARD has been closely involved with the establishment of museum procedures and staff inter-relationships.

Millard responded to our questions with a most interesting letter: "If I had to isolate major registrarial functions, I suppose I'd name cataloguing, in the sense of knowing at every moment where every work of art is located, shipping and insurance — the logistical control of the movement of works of art — and general record keeping. These stand out at once in my mind, which is not to say that there aren't an unlimited number of other functions. As to what questions I'd ask, I guess I'd always want to know how efficiently and carefully — compulsively might not be too strong a word — a registrar does his or her job. In ranking registrars in the categories you list, I'd probably give them a 'medium' in each category. As you may know, I'm persuaded that, in a very real sense, registrars run museums. Theirs is the most pressured and demanding job, requiring accuracy and scrupulousness in the face of a pace of work not common elsewhere in such institutions. The registrar's office is the nerve center of any museum. For all of that, it seems to me that they are often insufficiently recognized, too easily mentally relegated to some vague service staff of the museum rather than associated with its professional staff. This seems to me particularly so in terms of your categories 'prestige' and 'influence'. I'm uncertain about 'money', since I don't know the general level of registrarial pay. My sus-

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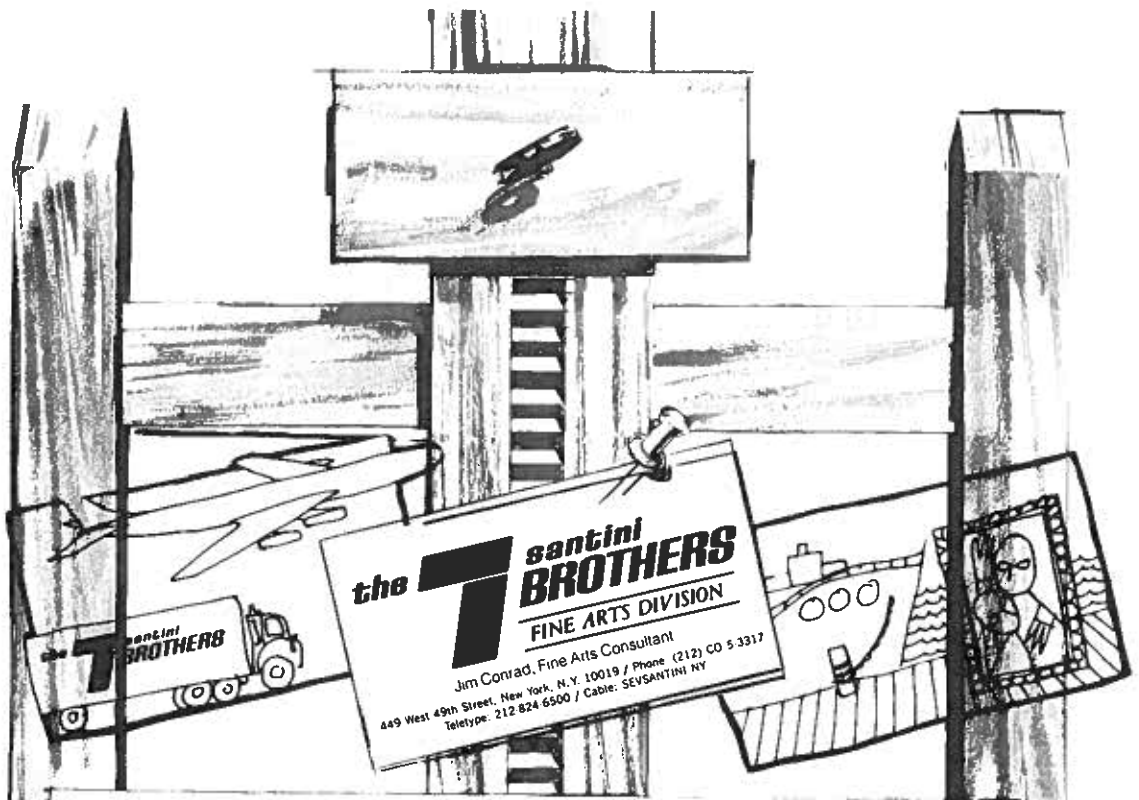
the conservation department was very new and it was thought then that all work on the condition of an object should be undertaken by that department. Actually, the conservation department was very anxious to do this work, as they were in the process of building up their new department. I was very happy with this arrangement and things went along very well until the conservation department decided they were too busy and tried to hand it back to the registrar. I fought this as I believed the more a person knew about the condition of an object, the better he would be at the job of recording condition. We arrived at an agreement, but it was always the curator who had to be informed and who made the decision along with the conservator as to the treatment of the object.

From time to time there were new suggestions by the staff — some good and others a complete waste of time and money. There were outside companies who called themselves efficiency experts who came and studied the workings of the museum and were supposed to come up with ways to expedite one's work and save money for the museum. Volume after volume appeared, out of which not one concrete idea ever came that was helpful to my department. Doubtless, the reason was that these people had no real understanding of how a museum functioned or should function. I am sure it was the first time some of these men were ever inside a museum—and also the last.

From where you are now, what changes do you see in the profession today?

Some of the changes that I shall mention are in quite a few museums that I know of today. To put it briefly, a lot of the work concerning the function of a registrar's department has been taken away from the receiving end of the museum and placed along "Executive Row". This naturally means new executive jobs with assistants and secretaries who in turn need typists, etc. In other words, Parkinson's Law works very well. My personal theory why this has happened is, I believe, that sometime ago Harvard Business School and maybe lots of other business schools had the same idea, and graduated their people with one goal in mind: to go out and spread the word that they — only those with business training — could administer ANYTHING. There is no question about the value of a good business background, but from my particular point of view, the big mistake made by many of these administrative executives was in not having any knowledge of the function,

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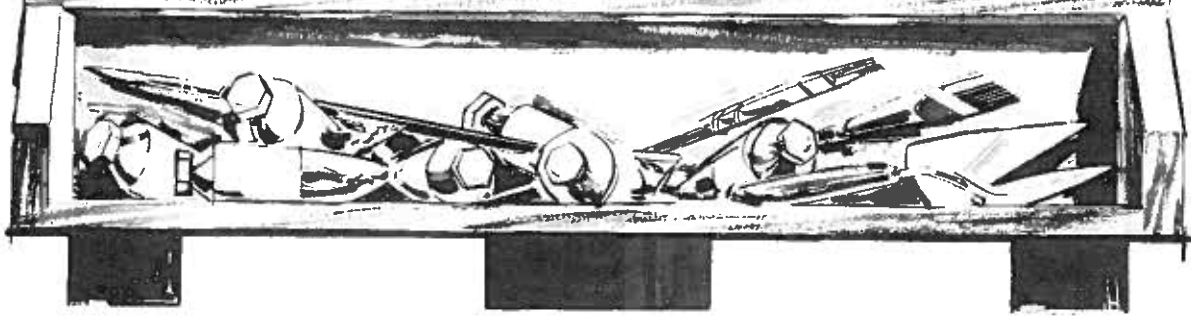


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Views on Museum Registration

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picion is that it tends to be on the low side in relation to duties performed. 'Satisfaction' is much too personal a category for me to judge. I'd hope that the work of any decent registrar corresponded to a set of personal needs and desires in such a way that he or she liked his or her work and found it productive and satisfying."

PETER OLLENDORFF is vice-president of Ollendorff Fine Arts, a major fine arts packing and shipping company, where he has worked since 1966.

Ollendorff expects the registrar's primary duties to be keeping records and inventory, making condition reports and making arrangements for travelling shows and shipments. He ranked registrars as high in prestige, influence and job satisfaction.

IRVING PFEFFER is the director of the Museum Insurance Survey Project for the Association of Art Museum Directors. A professor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Pfeffer has written numerous articles and books on the subject of insurance.

In responding to our survey, Pfeffer associated the functions of collection control and management, librarian for objects and exhibition manager with the registrar. He felt that registrars enjoyed medium levels of prestige, influence and satisfaction, and low salaries. He asked, "What can be done to insure that the registrar has sufficient authority within the museum to perform the assigned responsibilities in a professionally competent manner?" Along the same lines, Pfeffer commented, "The registrar must be perceived within the museum as a line manager with potential for rising to the top of the organization. Managerial skills must be systematically developed. The registrar must become both business manager and art historian — if that is possible."

Accessions, loans and cataloguing of objects and arranging for the maintenance staff and volunteers to receive training in handling works of art were the main functions listed by LISA TAYLOR. Taylor is the director of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in New York. She rated the registrar's position as high in prestige and medium in influence, money and satisfaction.

HENRY TRUBNER is the associate director of the Seattle Art Museum in Seattle, Washington. Trubner listed maintenance of all museum records pertaining to the permanent collection and all loans, including the recording of all incoming and outgoing shipments and condition reporting and checking of all shipments, as the role functions he associated with the registrar. In his experience, he saw the registrar's work as high in prestige and satisfaction and medium in influence and pay. He asked of registrars: "How do you maintain museum records (accessions, loans, etc.)?" He felt that registrar's duties also include preparation of exhibition budgets (shipping, insurance).

Deputy director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, STEPHEN E. WEIL is also co-author of *ART WORKS: LAW, POLICY, PRACTICE*. He is considered an important authority on museum policy and legal procedure.

Weil defined three areas of responsibility for the registrar: recording and maintaining collection records, controlling internal and external movement of art works and safeguarding the collection and loans to the collection through the establishment of proper handling procedures, the making of condition reports, etc. He ranked the registrar's prestige as high, and influence, money and satisfaction as medium. Weil identified two problems for registrars: "how best to train new entrants into the field and give ongoing training once into it."

ROBERT A. WHYTE, supervisor of the Education Department at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, prefaced his responses with a short letter: "Enclosed you will find your very intriguing questionnaire. I found the first two questions fairly easy to answer. The two super-long boxes requesting questions stumped me — and made me realize that I do not often think about the registrar's position and never thought that it would be a job I would want to do (or, interestingly enough, would do with any degree of efficiency). I also became aware that probably there is a need to inform people more about the profession and to raise the general level of esteem. By the way, museum educators suffer the same problems!"

In responding to the questionnaire, Whyte associated condition reports, responsibility for the safety of objects, insurance and transportation with the functions of the registrar. He had very precise rankings for the registrar in relation to other professionals in the museum world: high medium prestige, influence and job satisfaction and medium medium salary. He asked, "What can be done to make the jobs more interesting (satisfying)?" and "How can registrars cause the lines in the four boxes above (registrarial role rankings) to move up to HIGH?" ■

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purpose, or history of these institutions they so successfully were allowed to invade and wield so much power.

When you think back on your experience as a registrar, what stands out?

I think I can say without question one of my greatest pleasures was to work with people of all sorts who were interested in doing a good job for the museum as a whole. I liked to have a good staff of bright young people and train them in a way which I thought served the museum best. This meant for them to know what their jobs consisted of and learning to get along with many types of people: private collectors and dealers bringing objects, truck drivers, custodians and other helpers and the curators. I would like to point out here that *all* objects had to be registered and receipted in the registrar's office upon arrival at all times.

In order to make a department function as I have described above, the registrar must have the full backing and cooperation of his director, which I had in Francis Henry Taylor. We often had differences of opinion, but through it all we were able to solve our problems with a feeling of respect and friendship.

The years directly after the Second World War were very exciting ones when F. H. Taylor was able to bring to this country European museum collections for the first time. This was a unique experience. The collections traveled in this country while their bombed-out museums were being rebuilt or restored. Some of these collections were the Vienna collection, Berlin paintings, French tapestries, etc.

As we all know now, works of art began to travel at this time as never before, and here I would like to refer to the initial work that was done by Robert F. Sugden, the former registrar at the Metropolitan, and the excellent packers with whom he worked out such careful handling and packing instructions for shipping all sorts of works of art all over the world.

There also is a great satisfaction in knowing that some of the young people who started their careers as assistants in the registrar and catalogue department have become good registrars and curatorial staff. Several museum directors have often told me how helpful it was to them to learn about museum work from the receiving gate at the Metropolitan. Be that as it may, we all worked hard, but we also had a lot of fun. ■

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A general handbook for history museums, containing chapters devoted to "Handling Museum Collections," "The Problem of Specimen Records," etc. Not an in-depth reference for registrars, but basic suggestions are offered.

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A small pamphlet describing the duties of the registrar in a major museum.

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