



COLLECTION MANAGERS COMMITTEE

SPRING 1993 NEWSLETTER

TAM \* WACO \* ANNUAL MEETING \* WACO \* TAM

The 1993 Texas Association of Museums Annual Meeting will take place in Waco to the theme, "Museums Unbound." The Collection Managers Committee is sponsoring several sessions this year and a pre-conference workshop featuring Mary Case, Director of the Office of the Registrar at the Smithsonian Institution. Ms. Case will present a four-hour workshop on museum management titled, "My Way or Your Way: When Managers Collide." Mary Case has presented several workshops designed to aid mid-career professionals with responsibility for museum collections in clarifying management problems associated with collections-related projects. Look for an overview of the workshop in this newsletter. The CMC contributed \$1000 to TAM to make Ms. Case's participation in the Annual Meeting possible.

Other sessions of interest to members are "What to Do? What to Do? Do I Pack and Ship or Do You?," and "Disaster Here? It Only Has to Happen Once."

The Collection Managers Committee Annual Meeting Breakfast will be held on Saturday, April 3rd at 8:00 a.m. Pre-registration is required for the breakfast, so remember to include it on your registration form.

The annual OPEN project, Orienting Professionals and Establishing Networks, will continue this year at TAM. Both newcomers and old-timers to TAM meetings are encouraged to participate in this project that is designed to further the development of personal and business networks among Texas museum professionals.

The Collection Managers Committee will award a \$300 scholarship to attend the TAM Annual Meeting in Waco. The scholarship is intended to enable professionals new to Texas or new to the field to attend the state meeting.

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## NEWS AND BUSINESS

Bob Child, Head of Conservation for the National Museum of Wales, will be teaching at the University of Texas in September 1993. This is a trial course to launch Texas Memorial Museum and the University of Texas at Austin as a permanent site for offering formal short courses from the Institute of Archaeology in London. A tentative date for the formal course is September 27 - October 1, 1993. Information on course fees and registration applications will be provided at the TAM Annual Meeting in Waco. For more information, please contact Sally Shelton, Texas Memorial Museum, at 512-471-4515.

Planning for the Collection Managers Committee 1993-94 workshops is in progress. Mr. Child has agreed to provide a 1-day workshop on collections care and conservation the first weekend in October. The summer workshop is still under discussion, and anyone with ideas or suggestions call the CMC workshop coordinator, Rick Casagrande, at 210-820-3535.

Look for your 1993 ballots and remember to return them as soon as possible. If you are a paid member for 1993, and do not receive a ballot, call Lisa Rebori at 713-639-4670, or Kim Peel at 210-820-2132.

Sally Shelton was elected a Council Member-at-Large recently for the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections. At the June SPNHC, George Baumgardner from Texas A&M, Steve Williams from Texas Tech, Sally Shelton and others will be presenting a block of papers on the recent disastrous flood including the short- and long-term recovery of the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection at Texas A&M.

### MY WAY OR YOUR WAY: WHEN MANAGERS COLLIDE AN OVERVIEW BY MARY CASE

Computers reduce information to zeros and ones. Sublime simplicity. Humans, on the other hand, receive, process, store, retrieve, and use information in quirky, unstructured, delightfully surprising ways. The human propensity to use information creatively both inspires and aggravates museum practitioners attempting to mount exhibitions, provide collections accountability, survive and even flourish in the confusing environment of changing times.

The first segment of this workshop will allow participants to discover the ways in which they individually receive and process information, and how personal learning styles affect the work accomplished. Overlaid upon learning style theory, a brief introduction to brain functions will be presented.

Building on an understanding of learning theory, which translates into leadership styles, participants will analyze work methods to encourage intellectual discipline and



develop the process of cooperative decision making.

Cooperative:	Engaged in joint economic activity.
Decision:	The passing of judgement on an issue under consideration.
Process:	A continuous action or series of changes taking place in a definite manner.

Individual decision making techniques and strategies do not always mesh seamlessly when we are required to apply them in the work place. People are different. They think differently. The effective processes developed by one individual to deal with the vagaries of life are not the same for all other (or maybe any other) individuals. When people come to the work place with dissimilar values, the decisions they make can be very different. Different choices can be easily misunderstood and misinterpreted by their colleagues. Much unproductive conflict occurs among museum teams because the process of decision making is sub rosa. Introducing and developing the discipline to use a cooperative decision process (CDP) can dramatically improve implementation of museum projects.

(Mary Case will present the pre-conference workshop, "My Way or Your Way: When Managers Collide," on Wednesday, March 31st from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. Registration is \$25.00.

## CONSERVATION UPDATE

by Jessica S. Johnson

There have been some questions raised recently about the stability and safety of using polyethylene foam (Dow Ethafoam, Astropolyfoam, Sentinal Foam Products). These materials are often used for padding shelves, making mounts, etc. in the museum.

I have spoken to two people about the question of the safety of the polyethylene foam for use with museum objects: Douglas Wilson, Product Steward for Dow Ethafoam and Jean Tetreault, a conservation scientist with the Canadian Conservation Institute. It should be noted that this information applies only to Dow Ethafoam products, not to materials made by any other company, which may have other production methods.

According to Douglas Wilson, early in 1990 the blowing agent for Ethafoam was changed from CFC 114 to HCFC 142B because of the government requirements assigning stricter controls on ozone damaging chemicals. The blowing agent is what creates the bubbles in the foam. Because of differences in the properties of the blowing agents an additive was used in their new production that could penetrate the structure of the foam. In regular blocks of the white foam this additive is a material called stearyl stearamide. In the pink anti-static foam the additive is glycerol monstearate. What is important to understand, however, is that stearyl stearamide has always been used a "slip agent" in foam production to help roll out thin foams (often used as a padding on shelves) or when large blocks are cut out in the factory.

So should we worry about stearyl stearamide; is it acid, is it stable, will it affect our artifacts? According to Jean Tetreault, stearyl stearamide is a solid, waxy material with a melting point of 88-92 degrees C. It should not off-gas or migrate easily to the surface of the foam. It has a hydrocarbon-like structure that is not acidic, should not tend to react with objects, or stain. It is only used at about 1% in the Ethafoam.

Douglas Wilson had done a surface pH test that he reported to Milly Walker at the Dr. Pepper Museum, according to Jean Tetreault this is not an accurate measure of the pH of the foam.

So, basically, if you have not worried about the stability or effects of Ethafoam before, there is little reason to worry about it now. There is no direct experimental evidence showing that the newly produced Ethafoam will not harm objects. However, Jean Tetreault's understanding of the chemistry strongly suggests that Ethafoam is safe for use with museum objects.

#### **SPRING CALENDAR**

**March 19** Institute of Museum Services, Professional Services Program, application deadline, 202-786-0438.

**April 2** Institute of Museum Services, Conservation Project Support, application deadline, 202-786-0536.

**April 30** Institute of Museum Services, Museum Assessment Program I, application deadline, contact AAM, 202-289-1818.

**April 30** Visioning the Future: Planning for Preservation workshop hosted by the Graduate School of Library & Information Science at U.T. Austin, contact Mr. David Terry, 512-471-8806.

**May 1** National Endowment for the Humanities, Challenge Grants, application deadline, 202-786-0438.

**May 6-8** Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives, annual conference, Long Branch, New Jersey, 908-222-5993.

**May 13-15** Midwest Archives, annual conference, Chicago, Illinois, 708-998-2981.

**May 16-20** American Association of Museums, annual conference, Fort Worth, Texas, 202-289-1818.

**May 28-30** International Institute for Conservation-Canadian Group, 19th annual conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 902-426-7448.

**June 1-6** American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 21st annual meeting, Denver, Colorado, 202-232-6636.



## Managing Your Environment

### Collection Managers Committee Winter Workshop by Leah Lewis

The Winter Workshop of the Collection Managers Committee was held at the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio, January 30, 1993. Workshop participants were welcomed by Kim Peel, Chairperson of the CMC. Ms. Peel then introduced Carl Patterson, Conservator from the Denver Museum of Art. Through the use of slides, Carl guided the group in a detailed look at the way macro-environments affect museum collections. Starting with the great outdoors, he showed various locations and spoke of how their climates differ: Alaska with its horizon-level sun and 100-plus inches of rainfall; Colorado with its high-altitude, thin air, and very cold temperatures; and Texas with its hot humidity and urban environments.

After discussing the geographical location, he moved to the building itself, whether built as a museum or for some other purpose and adapted as a museum. He showed slides of small historic structures never intended as museums and lacking insulation, HVAC systems, or even windows. One such ranch museum is plagued by flies. Many museums even store or display collections outdoors. Mr. Patterson then turned to elements all museums have in common; starting with the roof and moving to the basement. Water is one of the most basic threats to collections, whether through a roof leak, "rising damp" from a basement, or an overflowing toilet. Another commonly overlooked problem is lack of maintenance; letting vines and plants grow on or next to a building, overhanging trees, clogged drains and downspouts. Lack of dedicated spaces for loading, storage, catering, and office functions can also lead to damage.

With a variety of slides he showed examples of things that can harm collections: vibration from floors, dust, heat and humidity, and light. The common denominator being that these things were all overlooked until he did his inspections with a set of "new eyes". Health and safety issues were also addressed, which impact workers as well as collections. Mr. Patterson was able to offer practical solutions to many of the problems he had uncovered in his inspections.

After Mr. Patterson's presentation, Sally Shelton of Texas Memorial Museum spoke on the subject of pest control which she sub-titled, "Sex, Drugs, and Rock and Roll." After defining pests as anything that competes with you for the collection, she emphasized that attempted eradication of pests with poisons doesn't work because a new breed of toxin-resistant pest often results. Rather, pest control is an ongoing process of determining how they get in and what they are after. The most common attractions for pests is protein and moisture, and both are found in dust. Even dead pests attract living pests which feed on the remains. The integrated pest management approach in a nutshell is: don't let them in, don't feed them, and don't give them a place to live. Sally brought along a selection of recent publications concerning pest control in museums and historic houses which the participants could order free of charge.

At the end of the workshop many of the participants agreed that they would return to their various museum environments with a set of "new eyes."