



COLLECTION MANAGERS COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER SUMMER, 1990

CMC JUNE ARCHIVES WORKSHOP A SUCCESS!

Members of the Collection Managers Committee met in session with the Permian Basin Museums Institute and the Northwest Texas Museums Association for an "Archives: Organization and Care Workshop" in Midland, on Saturday, June 23, 1990. The program was attended by nearly thirty museum professionals from throughout West Texas. The workshop began at 9:30 a.m. in the Hall of Fame of the Petroleum Museum with a pre-program coffee hosted by the museum's staff. Morning sessions started at 10:00 a.m. with presentations by Dr. David Murrah, Associate Director for Libraries and Director of the Southwest Collection at Texas Tech University, and Betty Orbeck, Archivist at the Petroleum Museum. Dr. Murrah addressed current archival issues and the management of historical materials at Texas Tech. Ms. Orbeck gave a tour of the Petroleum Museum's archives and discussed conservation and organization problems.

Following the morning sessions, a no-host luncheon was held at THE BAR, a popular local eatery. The group reconvened at the Haley Memorial Library and Research Center for afternoon sessions, which featured presentations by the Haley staff including Richard Mason, Director, and Beth Schneider, Librarian. Richard and Beth also provided a tour of the extensive renovation and expansion work at the Haley Library. The program adjourned at 3:30 p.m. The strong attendance and thought-provoking sessions provided further evidence for the on-going need for programs on archival issues as well as curatorial concerns.

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COLLECTIONS CARE HOTLINE

The National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property has established the Collection Care Information Service with a toll-free number. Museums and historic houses with small-to-medium sized budgets will particularly benefit from the service. A database containing more than 1,500 bibliographic entries and citations on preventative conservation and maintenance of collections forms the foundation of the hotline service.

Users outside of Washington, D.C. can dial 1-800-241-1381 Monday through Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. E.S.T. to access published information about collections care on the following topics: General Information; Collection Management: Law, Ethics and Policies; Disaster Preparedness; Environmental Control: Pest Management; Environmental Control: Illumination; Environmental Control: Pollution and Pollution Control; Environmental Control: Temperature and Relative Humidity; Exhibitions and Packing for Shipment; Architectural Conservation; Natural Science Collections; Safety and Health; Collections Storage; and Informatics: Documentation and Computerization.

The Collections Care Information Service is funded in part by the Institute of Museum Services and the Bay Foundation. This is a pilot project and is scheduled to run through January, 1991. An extension of the service will be based upon an evaluation of the pilot.

## Can I See Grandma's Wedding Dress?

by M. and J. Ziegler

Can I see grandma's wedding dress? Can I dig around in your collections and see what you have? I am doing scholarly research. May I study your butterfly collection? These are some common questions heard daily by museum professionals. However, the burden of honoring these requests usually falls on registrars, collection managers, or curators. All three of these questions involve access to collections, and the answers can be easily found with a well-written policy in place.

Theoretically, the general public may have access to museum collections as suggested by AAM (1978): "...the public must have reasonable access to the collections..." (p. 14). However, the safety and physical integrity of the collections must also be maintained (AAM, 1978). To reach a balance between these ethical considerations, a controlled access policy should be adopted.

There are several considerations that need to be addressed when formulating an access policy. Malaro (1985) suggests that such a policy should include: (a) "Who has access to the collections and collection-related material?", and (b) "When can access be denied and by whom?" (p. 51). Malaro (1985) also points out that before an access policy is finalized "...any freedom of information and/or 'privacy' laws in effect in the locality should be reviewed" (p. 51).

In response to Malaro's questions, access to collections should be controlled on two levels: (a) in-house staff, which consists of the professional museum staff, and (b) the general public, which includes researchers, visitors, and donors. In-house staff access is controlled by job descriptions. In turn, general public access is controlled by the in-house staff. This is achieved through formal written request and staff monitoring to insure the security of the collections. The formal request process may appease the casual visitor during on the spot demands.

Conclusions drawn from the above suggestions are based upon the ethical balance between access to the collection and the collection's security. An access policy will increase the probability of reaching this ethical equilibrium. There will be more discussion on access to the collections at the 1991 TAM meeting in Corpus Christi.

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American Association of Museums (1978). Museum Ethics: A Report to the American Association of Museums by its Committee on Ethics. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums.

Malaro, M. (1985). A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections. Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Melinda and John Ziegler are graduates of the Texas Tech Museum Science Program. Currently, Melinda is the Assistant Registrar with the San Antonio Museum Association. She will chair the Access to the Collections session at TAM in 1991.

MEMBERS' SPOTLIGHT: CAROLYN SPEARS

Carolyn Spears is the Curator of the Stone Fort Museum in Nacogdoches, Texas. The Stone Fort Museum is a regional history museum housed in a Centennial replica of the stone house built by Don Antonio Gil Y'Barbo circa 1780. The museum operated from 1936 until 1980 as a community attic, with the entire collection on display at all times. There exists very little original documentation of source or provenance for the artifacts, and a majority of the collection is abandoned loans. Interpretation prior to 1980 presented myth as fact, and usually represented the building as a frontier fort. Faced with these difficulties, the administration began renovations in 1980.

Carolyn's undergraduate degree is in Anthropology and Art, and she is a fall 1985 Winedale Museum Seminar graduate. Carolyn began work at the Stone Fort Museum in 1984 with an employment background in archeology, drafting and studio arts. As Curator, Carolyn is responsible for all museum operations, and has worked to continue the efforts that began in 1980 to implement professional standards.

In the past years, Carolyn has worked primarily to improve the museum's documentation, interpretation and conservation procedures. In 1980, museum staff began documenting and preserving the collection. Carolyn completed the installation of a registration system in 1987, and plans are to computerize the collection this summer. Preservation efforts have focused on environmental controls, placing much of the collection in storage, and stabilizing the textile collection. Carolyn developed an all-level teacher handbook in 1989 designed to dispel the myths surrounding the "stone fort". The book will be updated in 1990 to include ESL teachers.

The museum is scheduled for physical improvements this year to stabilize the aging structure. The improvements will include an addition on the rear of the building, replicating the lean-to found on the original stone house, to provide storage and office space. While the museum is closed for construction, Carolyn plans to continue research for opening exhibits.

As a member of CMC, Carolyn compiled an initial mailing list, and worked with two Stone Fort Museum interns to design the CMC logo, and CMC promotional brochure. Carolyn is also the treasurer of the Southeast Texas Museums Association.

Carolyn is married to Gary Parker, an artist working in painting and sculpture. They care for abandoned animals, with a current collection of eight dogs and sixteen cats. Carolyn's interests include reading, opera, birding, and textile arts.

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NEW BABY ANNOUNCEMENT!

Announcing the arrival of our very first CMC baby! On June 4, 1990, our very own Katie Johnson, chair of CMC's membership sub-committee, gave birth to Molly Jean Johnson. Molly Jean was born at 8:29 a.m., weighed 6 pounds and 14 ounces and was 19 1/2 inches long. Congratulations Katie and Gary!

TO DEACCESSION OR NOT TO DEACCESSION

A WORKSHOP PRESENTED BY THE

COLLECTION MANAGERS COMMITTEE OF TAM

SPEAKERS: Lisa Rebori, Registrar, Houston Museum of Natural Science  
Rebecca Martin, Registrar, Old Cow Town Museum, Wichita, Kansas  
Richard Casagrande, Consultant, San Antonio Museum Association

DATE: August 25, 1990

TIME: Registration - 9:00 a.m.

Workshop - 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

LOCATION: Fort Worth Museum of Science and History  
1501 Montgomery Street, Fort Worth, Texas 76113

The workshop will begin with a review of the controversy which surrounded the deaccessioning of the Thomas Eakins painting, "The Swimming Hole". Richard Casagrande, Consultant on Deaccessioning to the San Antonio Museum Association will then discuss some of the pros and cons of deaccessioning and outline the procedures followed at SAMA. Rebecca Martin from the Old Cow Town Museum in Wichita, Kansas who has overseen the deaccessioning of 2,500 objects from the Museum's collection will discuss the procedures followed by her institution and the restrictions posed by abandoned property laws. Ms. Martin will also outline the decision-making process with regards to determining relevance of collection items to historic sites.

After an "on your own" lunch, Lisa Rebori of the Houston Museum of Natural History will cover the specific problems posed by deaccessioning and disposal of Natural History collections. She will also outline the Texas State abandoned property laws. After a discussion period, representatives from major auction houses will be available to visit with workshop participants on an individual basis and to discuss services offered by their firms. Handouts of deaccessioning policies and forms as well as articles on the subject will be made available to the participants.

For more information, phone Rick Casagrande at 512/226-5544, ext. 228.

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RESISTRATION FORM

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Name Title

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Address Phone

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Institution

Make Checks Payable to: Collection Managers Committee  
Mail to: Richard Casagrande, San Antonio Museum Association,  
P.O. Box 2601, San Antonio, TX 78299  
\$15 for CMC and MPMA-RC members, \$20 for non-members.