

# MUSEUM ARCHIVIST

Newsletter of the Museum Archives Roundtable, Society of American Archivists August 1987

## ROUNDTABLE MEETING PLANS FINALIZED

Remember the Roundtable! The Museum Archives Roundtable is meeting September 3 from 11:15 A.M. to 12:45 P.M. at this year's SAA meeting in New York. All Roundtable members and those interested in joining the group are encouraged to attend.

The meeting will include short presentations by members of the archival community. Laurie Baty, a Records Program staff member at the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), will talk about the Commission's past and present funding efforts on behalf of museum archival programs. J. Gordon Read, Keeper of Archives at the Liverpool Museum in Great Britain, will offer meeting attendees an international view of museum archives. Other presentations by Roundtable members will be made, but details were unavailable at press time.

Coordinator Arthur Breton will report on this year's activities and will chair the meeting. Newsletter Editor Kathleen Robinson will report on the Museum Archivist during its first year. Both Breton and Robinson encourage input from all members and will emphasize the need for more hands-on participation in directing the group's interests. In particular, volunteers will be sought for positions as regional editors of the newsletter. Editors will help gather news and prepare copy for each issue of the newsletter. A proposal to charge a nominal fee for the publication will also be discussed.

Roundtable members should come prepared to nominate and vote for fellow members to serve during 1987-88 as Coordinator and Newsletter Editor. Each position is voted for annually. Please remember that only Roundtable members who are also members of SAA may vote.

See you all in New York!

## ANNUAL MEETING 1987: SESSIONS REVIEW

Listed below are a few of the sessions being held at this year's annual meeting which may be of interest to members of the museum archival community. Please see the program booklet for further information or contact SAA, 600 S. Federal, Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60605.

#9P - *Guide to Natural History Manuscript Resources in North America:*  
A poster presentation on a proposed guide to such sources, presented by Michael T. Stieber of Carnegie-Mellon University.

#12 - *Building an Archives:*  
Discusses the issues involved in renovating or adapting existing areas or buildings for archival use, moderated by Richard Cameron of the Minnesota Historical Society.

#52S - *Managing a Processing Program:*  
A limited enrollment seminar on planning and setting priorities for archivists responsible for managing processing activities, led by Virginia Cain of Emory University and Donna Webber of MIT.

#59 - *Changes on the Land: Documents for Historic Landscape Preservation:*  
A work-in-progress session which looks at how archivists can assist landscape architects in preserving documentation on historic and contemporary landscape designs, with moderator Bonnie Hardwick of the Bancroft Library, University of California.

#74 - *The Pragmatic Archivist: Marketing an Archives to the Parent Institution:*  
Explores how archival holdings have been used in fund-raising efforts by parent bodies, and some of the benefits and

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

This is to correct an error which appeared in the description of the James Thrall Soby Papers on page one of the April 1987 issue of *Museum Archivist*.

Mr. Soby was Director of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art from October 27, 1943 through January 1, 1945. Although he was Chairman of that Department on an interim basis in 1947 and in 1957, his principal roles at the Museum were as Trustee and as advisor to its Committees on the Museum Collections, 1940-67 (of which he was Chairman, 1944-45, 1950-67; and Vice Chairman, 1946-50).

Sincerely,

Rona Roob  
Archivist  
Museum of Modern Art, New York

To our Readers:

The editor apologizes for the error and sincerely thanks Rona for her correction.

To whom it may concern:

I am 15 years old and I would like some information on the field of a Museum Archivist. I'm sort of interested in this field, if it's not too much trouble could you send me some information as soon as possible?

Sincerely,

Shawn Kimball  
7132 Allegan Drive  
Davison, Michigan 48423

To our Readers:

Roundtable Coordinator Breton received this letter and responded in kind. Ms. Kimball is currently an honorary member of the Roundtable. She has kindly permitted us to reproduce her letter for this issue.

## MISCELLANEOUS

The Wynadotte County Historical Society and Museum is looking for other museums that are using DBase III+ in their artifact and archival cataloging or any other museum activity. Please contact Rebecca Barber, Wynadotte County Historical Society and Museum, 631 N. 126th St., Bonner Springs, KS 66012-9024.

## SESSIONS REVIEW continued

pitfalls to the archives in being involved in capital fund-raising efforts, chaired by Raimund Goerler of Ohio State University.

#80 - *Institutional Archives: Their Nature and Their Current and Future Role:* Examines the nature and current state of institutional archives and compares them with manuscript repositories on various levels, chaired by Steven Wheeler of the New York Stock Exchange.

#89 - *Archives, Libraries and Museums: Partners or Protagonists?* Examines cooperative programming in organizations which contain archives, libraries and museums, led by chair Edwin Bridges of the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

MAXWELL MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
ESTABLISHES PHOTO ARCHIVES

The Maxwell Museum of Anthropology of the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM has established a Photo Archives, with funding from the National Science Foundation. The project involves consolidation and sorting of present holdings, catalogue development by way of computerization, conservation, and, eventually, research on special collections. Collections include visual images from all over the world with particular emphasis on Southwestern Indian cultures and archaeological investigations. For more information contact Natalie Pattison, Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131.

*Museum Archivist* is issued twice a year by the Museum Archives Roundtable of SAA. News items, letters to the editor, and comments from the archival community are welcome. Contact Kathleen Robinson, Editor, *Museum Archivist*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, P.O. Box 6826, Houston, TX 77265 (713) 526-1361.

Contributors to this special issue are:  
Arthur Breton, *Archives of American Art*  
Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, *Syracuse University*  
Natalie Pattison, *Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico*  
Rona Roob, *Museum of Modern Art, New York*  
Nancy Sahli, *National Historical Publications and Records Commission*  
Sandra Sandiford, *Museum of AfroAmerican History, Boston*  
Ron Vasile, *Chicago Academy of Sciences*

SYRACUSE PROFESSOR STUDYING  
GOLDEN AGE OF NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, professor of history at Syracuse University, is writing a history of museums. Her study begins with both early proprietary museums like that of Charles Willson Peale and the initially focused and eventually more systematic collections of urban learned societies. The book will cover the golden age of museum development, to about 1900.

Natural history museums, writes Kohlstedt, are only in recent years getting the attention which their records and their historic role in both science and education would warrant. Centennials and other important milestones have led to such individual histories as that of Nancy Lurie on the Milwaukee Public Museum. Individual histories, however, tend to deal with local incentives and it is important to put them in the context of the larger cultural impulses that created the demand and opportunities for museum development.

*Archival Research Extensive*

Kohlstedt's work has led her to selected museums and other archives across the United States, the scope of her inquiry. In many instances she has had to rely on museum staff in determining exactly what records have been saved, when there is no archivist or librarian available. The manuscripts saved are most often administrative and accession records. It is more difficult for an historian to determine precisely what was displayed and in what format, especially for the period before about 1860, than to develop a rough chronology of staff appointments and architectural renovation. Aside from the portrait of Peale and a working sketch by his son Titian Peale and a few sketches from the somewhat fanciful guidebooks to popular museums, there seem to be no realistic views of museum interiors. She would welcome such information.

*Nature Study Movement Examined*

Kohlstedt's interest in using objects for education has led her to study the Nature Study movement which took place from approximately 1890 to 1930. Often teachers made extensive use of local museums in conjunction with such science teaching. She is looking for the diaries or other records which will detail just how teachers used both indoor and outdoor specimens.

Those having information on interior pictures (especially pre 1860), diaries and other local accounts of Nature Study teaching, or ephemeral histories of local

museums may contact her at the History Department, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13210.

GRANTS AWARDED

*Adirondack Museum*

\$25,000 from the New York State Library Conservation Program to microfilm the papers of the Witherbee, Sherman Company, dating from 1853-1935.

*Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*

Awarded up to \$54,240 to develop a museum archives, granted by NHPRC at its June meeting.

*Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society*

Granted \$34,00 for two years to preserve the Society's collection of negatives which document the maritime history of the Puget Sound area. Awarded by NHPRC at its June meeting.

*Utah Museum of Natural History*

Awarded an NHPRC grant of \$5,570 for one year to preserve the Museum's collection of negatives documenting the University of Utah's archaeological field work.

*Wyoming State Museum*

Received a 2-year grant of \$31,126 from NHPRC to preserve its collection of historical photographs.

In addition, the following proposals were endorsed by NHPRC at its June meeting. Endorsement signifies that the Commission approves these proposals, but has no funds available to assist them:

*Brucemore*

Commission approves the establishment of an archives program at this historic house museum located in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

*John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*

Endorsed its proposal to arrange and describe the Museum's collection of circus materials and the personal papers of the Ringlings.

*Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History*

Approved the Museum's plan to arrange and describe its manuscripts collections and some of its archival holdings.

*Southwest Museum*

Endorsed the Museum's proposal to computerize its catalogue of photographic holdings. The Museum is located in Los Angeles.

## FIRE PREVENTION IN MUSEUM ARCHIVES

CHICAGO EXHIBIT FEATURES ARCHIVES  
ON SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITIONS

I have had the pleasure of visiting several museum archives during the past year and I must admit to being amazed at the naivete some people have when it comes to the subject of fire prevention and suppression. One museum expressed something akin to pride over the fact that it had no sprinkler system in the large space where it stored its records and manuscript collections. "We have an alarm system connected to the fire house which is just down the street," I was told. Another museum had a sprinkler system in its archives but the museum authorities had shut it off "so there would be no danger of water getting on the records," they explained.

Those who avow this line of reasoning are failing to consider what will happen if a fire occurs in their archival storage space. When firemen arrive, the area will be filled with smoke. The firemen will not be able to see where the fire is located and will stand at the doorway with as many hoses as are available and will pour water streams into the room at a pressure of easily 100 ft. pounds per square inch, more than enough to clear the shelves and blast open whatever boxes they hit. The alternative is a modern sprinkler system in which one sprinkler head opens, puts out the fire, and then shuts itself off.

For an outstanding article on this subject see the book *Museum, Archives and Library Security*, edited by Lawrence J. Fennelly (Buttersworth, Boston) and refer to the article "Fire Protection Systems and Fire Prevention Techniques" by Stephen W. Weldon, who is in charge of fire protection at Winterthur Museum. Every museum archivist should be familiar with the information in this article.

In the "good news" department we note with pleasure that the New York Historical Society has transferred its archives from an unprotected area to a building in which a halogen protection system has been installed, a system which also serves to protect the Society's manuscript collection.

Arthur J. Breton  
Coordinator, Museum Archives Roundtable of  
the Society of American Archivists

The Chicago Academy of Sciences has on display through December 1 an exhibition featuring the explorations and accomplishments of Academy directors and curators during the Museum's first 100 years (1857-1957). *Great Expeditions: Early Academy Explorers* uses archival holdings such as photographs, journals and manuscripts to recall Academy explorations into such areas as the Alaskan wilderness, the Arizona desert, and the Florida coast. According to exhibit curator Ron Vasile, the exhibit returns visitors to the vanguard of scientific inquiry in early America and lends insight into the lives and dedication of several distinguished naturalists such as Robert Kennicott, William Stimpson, and Elizabeth Atwater. Some items in *Great Expeditions* are on loan from The Smithsonian Institution, Newberry Library, and The Grove. For more details contact collections coordinator Ron Vasile, Chicago Academy of Sciences, 2001 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60614 (312) 549-0606.

## MEETING CALENDAR

*American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)*

Annual meeting to be held in Raleigh, NC October 4-7, 1987. Sessions of interest to museum archivists include "Copyright Law for Museums and Historical Organizations", "To Use or Not: Archival Records in Museum Exhibitions", and "The Preservation Hierarchy: Cooperative Library, Archival, and Museum Preservation Programs in South Carolina".

For more information and registration forms contact the Annual Meeting Coordinator, AASLH, 172 Second Avenue North, Suite 102, Nashville, TN 37201 (615) 255-2971.

## SAA 1987 MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Society of American Archivists wants you as a member! We rely on the input of new members to keep SAA vital, dynamic, and in tune with the needs of the archival community.

Individual membership dues are graduated based on salary. Institutional memberships are available for \$65 per year. Non archivists interested in associate membership are also welcome. For more information on any of these membership options contact SAA, 600 S. Federal, Suited 504, Chicago, IL 60605.

PUT THE NAME OF THE EDITOR OF THE  
MUSEUM ARCHIVIST ON YOUR MAILING  
LIST TODAY!