

## THE MUSEUM

**Karen L. Wilson**

On April 1, 1996, the galleries of the Oriental Institute Museum officially closed to the public for an anticipated two years. Although the construction phase of the building renovation and expansion had not yet begun, we needed to protect and, in some cases move, monumental reliefs, tear down walls, and accomplish a variety of other tasks before groundbreaking in August 1996. The final shutting down of the museum in April was less dramatic than it might have been, however, because we actually had been closing the museum galleries gradually one-by-one in order to dismantle the exhibits and pack up their contents.

Our first good-bye was to the Egyptian Gallery, which closed in February. During the renovation and expansion we will store our collections in that gallery, away from the dangers of construction. The collections will remain there until the new wing is finished and its climate control system is up and running. Then they will be relocated to the new wing and renovated portions of the present building so that the construction work necessary to climate control the former Egyptian Gallery and the basement spaces below it can be done. Therefore, we needed to empty the gallery of artifacts and cases, tear down the alcove walls, and begin filling the space nearly solid with shelves and cabinets of boxed and crated artifacts.

As of this writing, most of the material both from the galleries and from general storage in the basement has been packed and stored on shelves in the former Egyptian Gallery under the supervision of registrar Raymond Tindel. Most of the cabinets in the basement and all of the display cases are now empty. Every box and crate that has been packed has been inventoried, weighed, and logged into the computer, where its storage location is recorded. Ray and his dedicated crew of assistants have, at this point, packed 3,555 boxes and crates weighing a total of 95,915 lb. (The boxes are being weighed so that we can distribute the weight on the shelves in a manner that does not exceed the load-bearing capabilities of the floor.) Particularly fragile or vulnerable material has been stored in the basement organics and metals rooms, which will continue to provide environments with stable temperatures and relative humidities for these items until they can be relocated to climate controlled spaces in the new wing.

All this has been accomplished by the combined efforts of many staff members and volunteers—chief among them Ray, without whose constant supervision, good humored cajoling, and endless hours of overtime none of this could even have been imagined, let alone accomplished. In addition, Assistant Curator Emily Teeter has packed great quantities of Egyptian and Nubian pottery and other artifacts for many long hours over the last two years. Conservators Laura D'Alessandro and Barbara Hamann have handled the storage of much of the delicate material—metals, organics, and fragile stone pieces—and Preparators Joseph Searcy and Randolph Olive have built numerous



*The first inscription discovered on the back of OIM A7365. The wall has been removed from the back of the relief, exposing the metal L-shaped ties that held the stone pieces to it. At periodic intervals, bricks of the plinth beneath the relief have been removed to allow the insertion of metal plates that will be used to lift the relief. Until the relief is lifted, wooden shingles inserted in the holes provide support for the stone above*

crates, assembled endless banks of shelving, and done a great deal of heavy lifting. Special thanks are due to Robin Kasson, Assistant to the Registrar, whom everyone on the museum staff will miss in the forthcoming year. Robin graduated with her BA from the College this spring and is going on to other things. She worked in the Registry for the past three years, during which time—in addition to her other duties—she packed 1,647 boxes weighing more than 38,000 lb!

Registration and collections management have always depended heavily on volunteers, and it is a tribute to Ray that he has always been able to attract and keep the very best—Joan Barghusen, Peggy Grant, Janet Helman, Georgie Maynard, Roy Miller, Lillian Schwartz, Kit Sumner, Dick Watson, and Peggy Wick. They have organized the files, registered objects, hauled boxes, dismantled cabinets, and carried on business as usual during a period of ever-increasing confusion.

The packing and relocation process also owes a great deal to the Museum Attendants, whose usual function it is to safeguard our exhibitions under the watchful eye of Head of Security Margaret Schröder. When the galleries closed, the attendants were drafted to haul and weigh boxes and put them on shelves, which they did with energy and good humor throughout. We are very grateful to Jacob Affolter, Victor Bayona, Heidi DuBien, Chisato Hara, Eutophia LaManna, Sinai Megibow, Peiying Peng, Geoff Sant, and Jenny Tsang.

As more and more of the collections became inaccessible, we could do less and less for visiting scholars; nevertheless, we still assisted more than thirty visitors, whose interests ranged from Amuq potsherds to Egyptian bronzes and Islamic textiles. And in the midst of all of this, we lent some casts for exhibit to the University's Gleacher Cen-

ter downtown and are currently in the process of lending objects for exhibitions at both the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City and the Cincinnati Art Museum.

As with Registration, most of Conservation's efforts have focused on aspects of the building project. Perhaps most of Laura and Barbara's time was taken up with researching the best methods for deinstalling, stabilizing, moving, and reinstalling our collection of fourteen monumental Khorsabad reliefs. During the summer of 1995 they continued photographing and sampling the extensive preserved pigments on the reliefs. In August, Laura joined representatives of the two firms that will be moving and constructing metal frames for the reliefs in New York. She, Richard Belding (of Belding, Walbridge, Inc.), and Roger Machin (of Methods and Materials) met at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with British Museum staff to examine the mounting devices for their reliefs and observe how they were handled. This led to final plans for modular frames for our reliefs. After the reliefs have been detached from the walls behind them, all original stone surfaces on the backs will be sealed with Acryloid B72 prior to the application of a new layer of cement. The reliefs will then be backed with aluminum honeycomb panels with fiberglass skins adhered to the cement with an epoxy resin. Then a metal frame will be constructed to hold each relief securely and to act as a permanent mount. This system of modular frames will allow each relief to be handled as a unit for movement and storage during construction, for final mounting after construction, and for any future reinstallations that might be desired.

During the spring, with the assistance of Eleanor Barbanes, Laura and Barbara washed the reliefs and covered their surfaces with 100% hemp tissue paper impregnated with methyl cellulose adhesive. The paper dries and forms a hard surface that will prevent the loss of any small pieces that might come loose on the surface of the stones while the reliefs are being moved.

In April crews from Belding, Walbridge, Inc. began working with museum staff to remove the walls behind six of the smaller Assyrian reliefs and partially detach these reliefs from their brick plinths. You can imagine our surprise when we discovered that nearly every one of these reliefs bore a long inscription on the back extolling the powers and accomplishments of King Sargon II, in whose palace they had stood! Although the inscriptions are a standard text that was already well-known, we were surprised that their existence had never been mentioned, and we are delighted to know about them now.

In addition to all this work on the Assyrian reliefs, Laura and Barbara also oversaw the conservation of the original registers of the Haskell Oriental Museum. Thanks to a generous gift from an anonymous donor, these eleven volumes of nineteenth and early twentieth century registers were deacidified and rebound. Laura also attended a (Polaroid) Photomicrography Workshop hosted by McCrone Laboratories, Barbara finished the repacking and transfer into new cabinets of the three-dimensional organic objects under a 1995 IMS Conservation Support Grant, and both finalized the design of the Conservation Laboratory in the new addition to the building.

Emily's goal for publicity of the museum over the last year—and for the future—is to try to maintain public awareness of the collections while the galleries are closed. In fact, the closing itself drew valuable media attention. A film crew from CNN spent the better part of a day in the museum and produced a spot that aired both nationally and internationally. A comprehensive press release about the renovation project resulted in in-depth coverage by the major Chicagoland print media, the campus publicity organs, and specialty academic and semi-academic publications.

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In consultation and cooperation with William Harms of the University's News and Information Office, Emily was able to develop a new strategy to increase awareness of



*Assistant Curator Emily Teeter opens a bottle of champagne to celebrate the packing of Temporary Storage Box #3000 while Assistant to the Registrar Robin Kasson looks on*

the museum, its collections and mission through television coverage that focused upon features other than the museum galleries. Emily's effort resulted in a number of major production companies filming educational programs in the Oriental Institute storage areas and offices for television programs on Hatshepsut, Egyptian temples, and a four part series on mummies, all pro-

duced by Greystone Productions; a segment for National Geographic Explorer on animal mummies; and a program on ancient Nubia featuring Bruce B. Williams.

In addition, the *University of Chicago Magazine* continues to express special interest in the activities of the museum, with two issues in the last year carrying major coverage of the renovation project. And we are pleased to announce that the series of informational posters produced *pro bono* by Mitch Gordon and Barton Landsman (see 1994/95 Annual Report) earned the prestigious "Pencil Award" for excellence in international advertising arts.

With the closure of the galleries, Emily and Karen began working with Richard Born, curator of the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art here on campus, to plan three exhibitions of Oriental Institute Museum masterpieces. The first of these, "Faces of Ancient Egypt" (a study of portraiture and idealizing art), will open on September 10, 1996. The other two exhibitions, one on Sumerian art and the other tentatively titled "Animals of the Ancient Near East," will take place in the spring of 1997 and the spring of 1998. These modest exhibits will give Karen and Emily the opportunity to experiment with different modes of presentation and, of course, to make sure that the highlights of the collection are accessible during the closure of our own facility.

In June 1995, Katherine Luchini moved up from the Preparation Shop in the basement to become the Museum Office manager. During the past year, she has ordered our supplies, paid our bills, summarized the university ledgers, and overseen the Photographic Services Program under the supervision of Museum Archivist John Larson. Kate has conscientiously and ably taken care of the necessary paperwork and processing for nearly 200 photographic image and permission requests that we have received during fiscal year 1995/96. Our new home page on the World-Wide Web has become an additional means of public contact for the Oriental Institute, especially important

during the renovation project, and in less than a year on-line, the web has become a major new source for photographic image and reproduction permission requests.

We would like to thank Dr. and Mrs. W. Benson Harer, Jr., for the generous gift of a vintage photograph album and some accompanying papers of Lansing C. Holden, Jr., donated in honor of Jill Carlotta Armagnac Maher. These record a 1925 trip to Egypt made by Mr. Holden when he was a Princeton student. Holden was a member of a travel party made up of Chicago McCormicks and their friends, who were guided in Egypt by Professor James Henry Breasted of the Oriental Institute. Breasted appears in a number of the photographs in the album.

For 1995/96, the roster of regular volunteers working in the Museum Archives included Hazel Cramer, Patricia Hume, Sandra Jacobsohn, Irving Mann, Helaine Staver, and Pamela Wickliffe. It is our happy obligation to acknowledge these dedicated volunteers and to thank them for their generous support of the Archives with their time and talents. Volunteer work enables us to undertake and complete many important long-term projects for which it would be difficult, if not impossible, to budget regular staff time. All these activities have been recorded on film by museum photographer Jean Grant. Jean hopes that long after the museum and environs have been renovated her photographs will give a clue to the hard work the museum staff and volunteers are doing now and will convey some of their frustrations and problems. Jean notes that it is hard sometimes to photograph their best sides because they are bending, but not bowing, to the tasks at hand. She would like to thank Irene Glasner for being a regular volunteer in the Photography Laboratory (that is when she's not in South America, Australia, or Europe) and to Maria Ählstrom—our volunteer who's been with us the longest and still checks in with us when she can.

As the photographs on the cover and sectional pages of this *Annual Report* testify, the past year has been one of great activity in the museum. Much of this work has been made possible by a General Operating Support Grant from the Institute of Museum Services, and the Assyrian Relief project has benefited from generous grants from the Elizabeth Morse Genius Charitable Trust and the National Endowment for the Arts. We would like to express our gratitude to these agencies and to all our other supporters. The level of activity in the museum can only intensify with groundbreaking, construction, and the eventual reopening of the museum galleries, and we are looking forward with anticipation to this time of exciting changes.

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