Agreement Paves Way for Cooper Union Transfer

Decorative Arts Museum, Under SI Administration; To Remain in N.Y.

A four-year saga of effort by a group of spirited art lovers has culminated in the preservation of the Cooper Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration, and paved the way for transfer of the New York City cultural landmark to the Smithsonian.

An agreement was signed recently turning over the entirety of the Museum's collections and its related library, and the responsibility to maintain them, from the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art to the Smithsonian, effective upon approval by the New York State Supreme Court.

In 1963 the Museum was in danger of being discontinued by reason of a decision made by the trustees of Cooper Union that their primary responsibility and concern was for their formal education program, and that the Museum was not a necessary adjunct to that program.

That same year, a Committee to Save Cooper Union Museum was formed, under chairmanship of Henry F. duPont. The Committee obtained numerous pledges of support and later established a significant institution in New York to take on the responsibility of the Museum, and to vitalize its future.

Finally, the Committee turned to Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution to establish, under the chairmanship of Henry F. duPont and Mr. Blitzer, a group of supporters and submitted their detailed proposal to them, with a proviso that the Museum would be maintained in New York City.

Meanwhile, the American Association of Museums and the New York Council on the Arts also offered their good offices. A committee of the AAM under Charles Van Rensselaer served and endorsed the proposal to the Smithsonian.

Since its formation the Committee to Save the Cooper Union Museum has been working towards a goal of $800,000. Today, it is in a position, with a contribution of $300,000 from the trustees of Cooper Union, to help support the museum in its transition period over the next four years. The Committee has enlisted the support and friends and support for the collections.

The Cooper Union Museum, officially opened in May 1857, today comprises more than 85,000 objects devoted exclusively to the decorative arts, including enamels, and lace, wallpapers, drawings and prints, porcelain and glass, furniture, metalwork, and costume accessories, with the emphasis on design rather than function.

The Museum's history began in 1857 when an act of the New York State Legislature enabled manufacturer-philanthropist Peter Cooper to establish a "scientific institution" to be known as Cooper Union. The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. In the founder's letter accompanying the request, he stated the purpose of the institution to be known as "works of art, science and nature.

For many years, however, the resources of the Cooper Union were too limited to encourage the development of such a museum, with the exception of the establishment of the institution in the 1890's, Peter Cooper's Seamen's Fund, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science and Art to the Museum.

A former executive associate of the American Council of Learned Societies, Mr. Blitzer has been at the Smithsonian for two years. As director of the Office of Education and Training he has had charge of such new programs as the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum and the artist in residence.

Mr. Blitzer spent 11 years on the Yale University faculty, teaching in the department of political science from 1950 to 1961. He has written a number of books, including An Immortal Commonwealth, The Age of Power, and The Commonwealth of England.

While acting as Assistant Secretary, he would continue to direct the Institution's education programs.

Other items in the collection include more than 200 objects from the Cooper Union's cultural program, the first modern electronic digital computer, produced by Army-sponsored research during World War II, and two 6-inch disappearing guns of the sort which were an integral part of the U.S. coastal defense system during the early years of this century. Practically all of such guns have since been destroyed.

Bradley Ailing, Taylor Named To Stand In

Frank Taylor, director of the National Museum, has been named to act as Assistant Secretary until the return of James Brad­ ley, now well on the road to recovery following a heart attack last month.

At the same time Charles Blitzer, director of the Office of Education and Training, was appointed acting Assistant Secretary (History and Art), a position he has held since 1964 but not yet filled.

Mr. Bradley is expected to return to the Smithsonian after the first of next year. His office reports that he is doing well and already eager to get back to work. He is at Georgetown University Hospital.

Mr. Taylor has been with the Smith­ sonian since 1922 and has directed the National Museum for the last five years. A driving force behind the creation of the MHT, he assembled the data on the needs of the museum, wrote the Congressional appropriation bill, and secured funds for the new building, and acted as liaison with architects and build­ ers for its design and construction.

As chairman of the Smithsonian com­ mittee to explore the need for renovation exhibitions in the National Museum, Mr. Taylor wrote the report on which the program of renovation was initiated in 1954.

The history and art position was es­ tablished to provide the Secretary with assistance in strengthening and guiding the Institution's programs involving the arts and the humanities.

Mr. Blitzer will advise on the opera­ tions of the National Portrait Gallery, National Air and Space Museum, National Collection of Fine Arts, Freer Gal­ lery, Hirschhorn Museum, Cooper Union Museum of History and Technology. He will also be concerned with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the National Gallery of Art.

Another interesting and significant NABMA "object" is the Union moni­ toor USS Tecumseh, sunk by a Con­ federate mine during the Battle of Mobile Bay, August 5, 1864. Exploratory operations on the vessel are under way by a Navy salvage team, and in July the first artifacts including a 9-foot anchor were brought up.

Salvage operations, should the deci­ sion be to go ahead, would probably take several years according to Colonel John H. Magruder, director of NAB­ MA. If recovered, Tecumseh would also be displayed at the proposed mu­ seum park site.

Signatory Members of the Preservation and Restoration Division of the National Air and Space Museum's Department of History and Collections.

The park would be designed to illumi­ nate the contributions of the military service to national defense. It will receive the first artifacts including a 9-foot anchor of the most important disappearing guns of the sort which were an integral part of the U.S. coastal defense system during the early years of this century. Practically all of such guns have since been destroyed.

Bradley Ailing, Taylor Named To Stand In

James Bradley

Bill To Authorize Purchase Of Museum Site Introduced

Legislation which would authorize purchase of the site selected for a Na­tiona­l Museum of History and Technol­ogy has been introduced in the Senate and as­ signed to the Committee on Rules and Administration.

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Secretary Ripley has expressed his strong support for preservation of Albarda, a tiny, isolated atoll in the Indian Ocean endangered by man's intrusion. Reports from England indicate that the U.K. Ministry of Defence is considering converting the British-owned island into a strategic air base with a 3,000-yard runway, radio and tracking station, supply harbor, and 13 miles of roads.

Albarda, 250 miles north of Madagascar, is considered by biologists "the most interesting atoll in the world" because of its unique animal and plant life.

In a recent letter to Science and Nature, the Secretary calls for pressure from "scientists and public alike, on both sides of the Atlantic" to get British defence authorities to change their minds.

"The Smithsonian," he writes, "has been deeply concerned from the beginning over the possibility of military development on what is certainly the most scientifically interesting atoll in the world oceans.

"From my discussions with responsible officials in the Department of Defence, I am convinced that the American is well aware of the scientific values of Albarda. It is my strong impression that our Defense authorities have been willing to consider alternate sites. I am aware that our government has fully conveyed to the British the concerns of the American scientific community.

"This represents an exemplary attitude which we cannot but applaud. However, Albarda is sovereign British territory and the final decision must rest with the United Kingdom."

SAO SCIENTIST TRACES ORIGIN OF EARTH

An SAO scientist is working in the 3000-year-old kingdom of Ethiopia to discover the origin of Earth.

This activity is carried out in one of the world's important satellite tracking stations, hidden away in the hills of Debre Zeit, a little township 30 miles south of the capital city of Addis Ababa.

The Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory station is managed by Robert Citron, a 34-year-old engineer from California. The Ethiopian unit is one of a network of 12 stations set up in various areas, including India, Japan, Patagonia, Spain, Brazil and South Africa.

This network has three main functions: to measure the exact size and shape of the world, to measure the variations of atmospheric density, and to assess the changes in gravitational pull over different parts of the earth.

"In the next five years we will know the exact size and shape of the world down to 33 feet," Mr. Citron observes. "There is a widely accepted theory that the earth's land masses are drifting. In particular, the African continent is said to be drifting away from the Americas.

"Through the extremely accurate way of measuring distances with the use of geodetic satellites, we shall be able to prove if this is true, and if so, the actual extent of the drift.

"Mr. Citron adds that, apart from measuring of distances, assessments are also being made of the variations of the earth's gravitational pull by measuring the changing orbits of various satellites as they pass over different parts of the earth's surface.

"So in a wider field, we are studying the evolution of the solar system."

FARRAR GETS TOP TALKING POST

Richard Farrar, by his own admission, has a "big mouth."

And, while it doesn't seem to be the kind of orifice that, in size, would spark a dentist's imagination or, in volume, frighten a disagreeable mother-in-law, it has size, would spark a dentist's imagination or, in volume, frighten a disagreeable mother-in-law, it has caused a lot of discussion among Farrar's colleagues.

Even unexplained 18th century instruments in playing condition will not provide a true rendition. Most stringed instruments were altered in the 19th century to make them louder, and they must be returned to their original state.

To help preserve the instruments and keep them in tune, temperature and humidity in the storage areas are kept at a constant 74 degrees and 50 percent. When the instrument is put out on display, a humidity control in the air is regulated.

The time-consuming job of restoration might mean breaking down a keyboard instrument to its basic elements, replacing warped boards, filling in cracks, restrung with proper materials, and manufacturing missing parts using specifications. When all that is completed, the instrument is available for use in the division's concert programs.

Performance, organized by staff member Justin Weaver, are designed to do more than entertain. They aim to educate the audience to the original sounds of an instrument and to prevent those sounds on tape. An annual schedule of about eight indoor concerts, two outdoors, and weekly summer Tower Music programs promotes these aims. There is also a yearly seminar on the performance of music of a particular period, using instruments from the collections.

All of the division's instruments are of Western European or American origin, but not all are "highbrow." A collection of folk instruments contains such diverse items as Appalachian fiddles, Swiss alphorns, and African bones. For real variety there is a Theremin, a 1930's electronic machine whose pitch and loudness are controlled by hand movements around two antennae.

But these and the rare and valuable bass viola da gamba made by Barok Norman in 1714 are not enough, there are still a Sarrusophone, shawm, cornet, and more than 200 keyboard instruments to enlighten the serious music student.

SMOKE IN BED?

Home fire extinguishers at a reduced price are being offered by the Office of Safety Management to promote "off-the-job safety."

A dry chemical extinguisher may be ordered for $5. Phone 5465 or 5461.
Treasures From Cooper Union Museum

One of a pair of unusual lacquered doors designed by Seraphin Soudbinin and executed by Jean Dunand in Paris, 1925-26. The doors were part of the "Treasures of the Cooper Union" exhibit at the Smithsonian this summer. Given by Mrs. Solomon R. Guggenheim.

A mid-18th-century French silk panel with chinoiserie scenes, from the textile collection.

Donated by the Countess Constantini, this late-18th-century Italian side chair of carved, gessoed and painted wood was done in the style of Michelangelo Pergolesi.

Architectural design for a Gothic tower, executed in pen, ink and watercolors on white paper, by an unknown German artist in the latter part of the 15th century.

Textiles, Prints, Wallpaper in Collections

Textiles

The woven fabrics are of first importance both in historical scope and quality. The Spanish and early medieval weaves, for the most part gifts of J. P. Morgan, are unequalled anywhere. The lace collection surpasses that of any other museum in this country. The embroideries and costume accessories are small, but well-chosen and of extremely high quality.

Drawings

The Old Master and decorative design drawing collection is of excellent quality and because of its size, numbering over 30,000 items, is invaluable toward the study in depth of a particular artist, school or period. The collection comprises works, mostly by Italian and French artists, dating from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century. The American drawings, numbering about 8,000, include over 300 items by Winslow Homer—together with twenty-two of his oils—and nearly 2000 by the major Hudson River School artist, Frederic Church.

Prints

Although the particular effort has been made to specialize in ornament prints, the museum's holdings of Rembrandt are excelled only by those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Pierpont Morgan Library. The Albrecht Durer collection exceeds that of the latter. Other large blocks of master prints admirably complement the work of these artists. Supporting these holdings are architectural and ornamental prints that number more than 10,000 items.

Wallpaper

No other American museum supports a special department devoted to wallpaper. The museum's holdings are rivaled only by the Wallpaper Museum in Cassel, Germany. Supplementing this collection is one of more than 100 hat boxes, also constituting an important facet of Americana.
Mrs. Gibson's Hobbies Lead To Job in Conservation Lab

When everyone else has failed him, a man can always turn to his wife. Dr. Gordon H. Gibson did, and as a result, the National Museum of Anthropology's Restoration and Conservation Laboratory has an effi-
cient, enthusiastic worker.

Gathering specimens for exhibits in the newly renovated Halls of the Cultures of Africa and Asia, Dr. Gibson had the Nigerian loom that no one could fix. He turned it over to his wife, Bethune, and out-going lady with a number of craft-type hobbies.

Five weeks of work with glue and sawing

thread fixed the loom. Mrs. Gibson was so successful at that job that Dr. Gibson says another, a Congolese mat "that looked like a mess of hay. Only a husband could come up with something like that," she says with good-natured

resignation. A dental tool, two con

cans for man for material, and a real

deal of patience restored the mat's pat

ter.

In the meantime a group of George Washington University students was

hired to clean off the spot that had accu

mulated on the collections in the years before air-conditioning was installed in MNH. Mrs. Gibson joined in the clean-

up effort on a contract basis. When it was over and the cleanup job a full-time one, Civil

Service agreed she was the logical choice to

fill it.

Now the lady who used to spend her time in needlework, painting and basket weaving is the operator of a machine repairing irreparable ethnology spec

imens in a sunny, plant-filled lab. With only a year of college chemistry to

draw upon, she has managed to devise a new process for removing the white stain from the potter

y, which she will soon publish.

Mrs. Gibson's first principle of cleanin

g and repair is "Be very careful not to use anything that might do damage." To do so is "Destroy anything... any substance that cannot be removed easily later on without damage to the object. A better process might be in

vented in the future."

Ironically, Mrs. Gibson's most difficult jobs have been those for the first time. Another challenge was a chain mail shirt of which nothing remained but a few

less mass of links. She made stainless steel rings herself and figured out how to attach each to the shirt's complex pat

er of linkages. It was a tedious task, "but it's mostly fun," she says convinc

ingly.

The potentially wearying job of cleanin

g and repairing "the machine that can clean objects from sawdust to gilding to masks. An air-blasting machine known as an airabrasive machine is as fine as talcum powder against a con

centrated area of the object to be cleaned. Glass beads will even knock the oxides loose from corroded copper with

just like that."

Mrs. Gibson restores all types of ob

jects except pottery. That delicate job is left to the lab's chief potter, Dr. Robert H. Andrews, chief pre

parator. An artist-sculptor who has been with the employees welfare office since 1939, he is responsible for the burs of various races and the fine

rors that contrast on the third floor of MNH. He has also designed and built dioramas for the North American Indian hall, includ

ing a lively depiction of a buffalo hunt.

Mrs. Gibson would like to be a potter, but her husband has no desire to relinquish her time.