Director's Column

Preservation and Accessibility

It is a common misapprehension to suppose that the goals of Historic Preservation and those of Accessibility for People with Disabilities are opposite sides of the coin. I take the position that Preservation and Accessibility can be on the same side of the coin. How can this rapprochement be accomplished? Three ingredients are needed: time, determination and resources.

The south tower area of the Smithsonian Building provides an example. The building, a landmark of great significance, is not accessible to all from the south side because there are two steps from garden to entry and two steps from the Children's Room to the Great Hall. Now, let's apply the three aspects of dealing with the situation.

TIME. Professional staff members of most of the Facilities Services offices and the Accessibility Coordinator worked as a team. We discounted a ramp, because it overwhelmed the aspects of the room which give it its historic character, and a lift, when we discovered that the platform was too small for motorized chairs. We now have under design development an elevator which will stop at Children's Room level and take visitors up to the level of the Great Hall or to the floors above. The entrance to the elevator will be through doors in the wall found to date from around 1970. It took two years and a number of false starts before this solution was found.

DETERMINATION. Our process directs that we articulate the interests represented, examine alternatives, reach consensus, and carry out the agreement. Following these steps with the belief that the process is a structure for agreement, we examined the alternatives developed with a consultant architectural firm and with technical experts from preservation review bodies. The team working on the project reached consensus on a solution which is now being carried out.

RESOURCES. The elevator solution required the services of outside experts to facilitate the process and the time of a number of Smithsonian design professionals. While the bulk of the cost is in the budget as an already scheduled renovation of the South elevator, additional funds will be needed to provide for accessibility upgrades where needed. Unquestionably, the willingness to use whatever resources are needed to find the solution is an essential part of our commitment.

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Thomas U. Walter and the General Post Office Building

OAHP's newest staff member, intern Jennifer Frehling, has initiated a timely project documenting the history of the General Post Office Building. She will be doing a research project using the correspondence and diaries of Thomas Ustick Walter (1804-1887), who was one of the two architects of the General Post Office Building. The Archives of American Art holds microfilm copies of an extensive cache of letters from Walter; the original letters, located at the Athenaeum in Philadelphia, have never been published and contain much valuable information relating to Walter's work on public buildings in Washington.

Walter held the position Architect of the Capitol from 1851-1865, during which time he designed extensions to the Treasury Building, the Patent Office Building (present home of AAPG), and the Capitol Building. All three buildings had been designed and built by the previous Architect of the Capitol, Robert Mills, during his tenure (1836-1851).

The General Post Office Building was yet another instance in which Walter enlarged upon a Mills design. Mills had completed the south wing of the building by 1842, presaging the Italianate Revival Style that would become popular during the late 1840s. Mills also referred to eighteenth century neo-palladianism, continuing the tradition of classicism in the federal city. As space in the GPO soon proved to be insufficient, in 1855-6 Walter enclosed the building by creating north, east, and west wings, creating a courtyard in the center. On the east and west elevations, Walter continued the original design, except in the execution of the Corinthian capitals. Walter's external contribution is visible at the courtyard entrance and the east entrance vestibule, which formerly served as the entrance to the Post Office Department. The north elevation, where the open, arcaded City Post Office entrance is situated, may be fully credited to Walter, who also did entirely original work on the internal design and structural systems of the new wings. The GPO remained in the hands of the Post Office until 1897, when it was transferred to the Department of the Interior for use as the General Land Office and Bureau of Indian Affairs. During World War I, the building was used by the Army, and after 1921 it was taken over by the U.S. Tariff Commission and has remained in their hands until the present day.

As the Smithsonian is in the early stages of planning for the Institution's occupation of the building (at this time choosing an Architect/Engineer firm to do the renovation), Jennifer's project will prepare OAHP to handle more effectively the Section 106 Historic Preservation process that must be followed before the renovation. Most of the information currently contained in OAHP's files relates to Robert Mills' work on the building. OAHP does have copies of Walter's drawings for the GPO, the originals of which are in the office of the Architect of the Capitol and at the National Archives, but Jennifer will ensure that our files on Walter's contribution to the building are fully documented as well.

Jennifer will be with OAHP for six months before going on to graduate school in architectural history in the fall. She is also contributing to the book in progress on the history of the Smithsonian Institution Building.
OAHP "Castle" Collection

Audubon Prints on View

Smithsonian staff and their guests are invited to view a selection of hand-colored lithographs from the 1840 octavo edition of prints based on John James Audubon's original paintings of birds. These prints, from OAHP's "Castle" Collection, illustrate extinct, endangered or threatened birds of North America. They were recently hung on the second floor hallway of the east range of the Smithsonian Building. The prints are accompanied by a text panel, a brochure and a checklist which provide historical background about the Audubon prints as well as information relating to each bird's current status.

The Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation includes among its responsibilities the restoration of the public rooms of the Castle. Though not open to the public during work hours, the Visitor Information and Associates' Reception Center (VIARC) offers weekend tours of selected areas of the building. These spaces symbolize for visitors the history of the Institution, especially when appropriate period furnishings and finishes are used. The Audubon prints were chosen to fulfill this goal in three ways: first for their aesthetic appeal as fine examples of nineteenth century printmaking, second for their historical connection to the building and the Institution, and third for the visual record they provide of the many species of North American birds extinct or threatened with extinction since the time Audubon painted them.

John James Audubon (1785-1851) began painting the birds of North America in 1820; his desire was to paint and publish an example of every bird on the continent. Audubon, like every scientific rendering of the period. His intense interest in the behavior and habits of birds compelled him to include in many of his pictures indigenous botanical elements and landscapes. He became the first bird painter to do so.

Audubon's search in 1826 to find a printer capable of reproducing his bird paintings resulted in the publication of a series of large prints. The prints of this so-called "elephant folio," a term which refers to the large size of the paper chosen by Audubon in order to portray his images in near life size, were hand-colored engravings and aquatints.

By 1835, Audubon was an international celebrity due to the great success of his large bird pictures. The publication of a second, smaller and more affordable version of his prints, however, further enhanced his reputation. This octavo edition (roughly 1/8th the size of the elephant folio prints) was published in seven volumes in Philadelphia and New York between 1840 and 1844. This edition consisted of 500 hand-colored lithographic plates and originally sold for $100.00 (or twenty cents per print).

A quote from Audubon's Journals sums up his feelings about art. In an entry dated March 1, 1827, remembering a conversation with a young artist, he wrote, "I pointed out to him that nature is the great study for the artist, and assured him that the reason why my works pleased him was because they are all exact copies of the works of God, who is the great Architect and perfect Artist; and impressed upon his mind this fact, that na-
ture indifferently copied is far superior to the best idealities."

OAHP wishes to thank Dr. Richard Zusi (Bird Division), Dr. Richard Banks (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Phillip Angle (Bird Division) and Leslie Overstreet (SI Libraries) for their invaluable assistance with this special project.

**Renwick Chair Restoration:**

Preserving Our Heritage in the Regents' Room

The Regents' room is one of the most historically significant rooms in the Smithsonian Building. The room has been restored to the Gothic Revival style in keeping with its original design and the nine original Regents' chairs designed by the building's architect, James Renwick.

These arm chairs, which are placed along the perimeter of the Regents' room, were designed especially for this meeting room. They were originally part of a set of eighteen chairs. The other nine were presumably destroyed in the fire of 1865 which gutted the central section of the building.

The window replacement project in the Smithsonian Building is nearing completion with the installation of the Regents' room windows and shutters. The dust has cleared and the deep, burgundy velvet draperies have finally been unwrapped. The middle column of the oriel window has had the paint of generations removed, to reveal the red Seneca sandstone from which it was built, and the other columns have been colored to match the sandstone. The conservation of the James Renwick Regents' chairs continues, one chair at a time, in the Office of Architectural History and Historic Preservation's Furnishings Preservation Lab.

As the restoration of the chairs progresses on schedule, we reflect on the objects themselves and why we value them. The Renwick chairs are tangible relics of the earliest expressions of the Institution's purpose. The artist's purpose was to articulate forms that might represent the purpose of the Smithsonian. The chairs are works of art, designed by the architect for the very space that they now occupy, and are part of a larger aesthetic fabric, which is only realized when the objects are seen in their broader context, within the building. Because these chairs are of known provenance, exceptional quality, and were designed for the room itself, they are extremely valuable.

By emphasizing preventative care over the restoration of accumulated damage, we can promote the most economically efficient and ethically responsible strategy for the preservation of these important objects. If those of us who use the room adhere to preservation policy, we will all become the caretakers of the collection. Therefore we wish to restate certain rules to be observed by the users of this room that will ensure the protection of its contents.

As a reminder, the capacity of the room is only forty people, which is a fire regulation based on the size of the room. Events with an expected attendance over that number should not be scheduled for this room.

The policy of OAHP and the Office of the Secretary since 1987 states that the Renwick chairs are not to be removed from the room, or moved from their permanent location around the perimeter of the room. The
constant handling of the chairs has, over the years, inflicted damage to these historically valuable objects, which has been recorded in photographs dating from even the nineteenth century. Observance of these policies by all of the room’s users will not only help to conserve the Institution’s resources, but will go a great distance toward maintaining the value of these significant artifacts of the Institution’s heritage.

PLM

Inspecting the Past for the Future

The Office of Plant Services (OPlantS) is one of five offices in the Facilities Services Group. These offices, which include Architectural History and Historic Preservation (OAHP), Design and Construction (ODC), Environmental Management and Safety (OEMS), OPlantS, and Protection Services (OPS) form a cohesive unit to service two sets of customers: the buildings and their occupants. Robert Boyd, John Chiari and Alan Pechner are three of the Office of Plant Services’ (OPlantS) multi-talented staff which includes carpenters, gardeners, plumbers, electricians, painters, and planner-estimators for heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems (HVAC), as well as electrical and structural systems. They comprise the Facilities Inspection Branch. The Facilities Inspection Branch is tasked with conducting regular inspections of all Smithsonian facilities - in Washington, Boston, New York, Panama and Arizona.

Photo-Op

- WHAT: The Army Medical Museum (built in 1887 by Adolph Cluss)

- WHERE: 7th and Independence Avenue, SW (note A&I and SIB North Tower in background)

- WHEN: This photograph was taken in 1969, as the building was being razed to make way for the Hirshhorn Museum. Readers may be interested to see one of the Medical Museum’s geometric tile floors, saved at the time, which was installed in 1989 at the north vestibule entrance to the SIB’s Great Hall. OAHP recommended this re-use for the tiles because the same architect designed the entrance spaces for both buildings. Adolph Cluss was responsible for the renovation of the Castle after the fire of 1865; he designed the iron north stairs for the vestibule. Then as now, thick tiles were recognized for providing colorful, decorative and especially durable floor surfacing in heavily trafficked areas.

- WHO: Adolph Cluss, an architect trained in Germany who left after the failure of the 1848 uprisings, was the architect of the Army Medical Museum. He was also involved extensively with the Smithsonian in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the Smithsonian he was responsible for reconstructing the main part of the SIB after the fire of 1865, reconfiguring the east wing in 1884 to add two extra floors, and fireproofing the SIB throughout the 1870s and 80s. Cluss was also the architect of the National Museum Building (Arts and Industries), which was completed in 1879. He designed the Army Medical Museum several years later using a similar Romanesque Revival Style, with polychrome brick and a square symmetrical plan.
The Branch defines the existing building system, identifies the condition of each system and establishes programs to ensure that facility deficiencies are corrected. These inspection reports provide the Institution with a historic record of each facility by defining the type of construction and condition at the time of each inspection. During the past two years, major improvements have been made in this inspection process and the resultant reports generated by the inspectors: Jim Daniels, Structural Inspector; Bobby Boyd, Mechanical Inspector; and Alan Pechner, Electrical Inspector. John Chiari, formerly a Structural Planner-Estimator with OPlantS, has replaced Jim Daniels as the Structural Inspector since Jim’s retirement from the Institution this past January.

The facilities’ inspections are similar to a regular physical at your doctor’s. The adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" can be applied not only to people, but also to buildings. If a deteriorating roof can be discovered and repaired before it leaks, then this action will prevent damage to interior ceilings and walls. Maintenance is preventive medicine. No construction project, whether it be rehabilitation or restoration or new, will endure unless a sound maintenance program is established and inspection controls are in place. The team’s work is especially important in this day of tight budgets when maintenance is important to prevent costly repairs.

This article was co-written by Howard Wink, Chief, Engineering Division, OPlantS and Amy Ballard, OAHP

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