

## FROM NCAC, TO NIC, TO HERITAGE PRESERVATION

### A SUMMARY HISTORY

These organizations devoted to the conservation and preservation of America's cultural heritage grew out of a conference, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, held at the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, June 15-16, 1973.

The purpose of that conference was to review the needs in training for conservation of cultural property in the United States and to compare those needs with the then current limited capability for training.

In 1968, the American Association of Museums published the Belmont Report, questioning "whether even a small percentage of museums in the Country were doing more than presiding over the steady deterioration of objects in their care".

The following year, 1969, Winterthur's Research Building containing extensive art conservation facilities, was dedicated. Harold J. Plenderleith, Director, International Centre for Conservation, Rome Italy, was an invited speaker. He stated that not enough museum conservators were being trained to replace those leaving the profession due to retirement, illness, or death, or to supply institutions beginning to expand conservation of their collections.

Peter Sparks, Associate Professor of Chemistry, University of Delaware, was strongly influenced by both the Belmont Report and Dr. Plenderleith's remarks. For discussion by the twenty-five participants at the 1973 conference – representatives of conservation training centers in the United States and Canada, private foundations, and Federal agencies interested in conservation of cultural property – Dr. Sparks

prepared an in-depth demographic study. It revealed that in the United States, conservators retiring, in poor health, or recently deceased, exceeded the number of conservators being trained. His study also showed a focus for the conservation of fine art in the United States to the neglect of decorative arts objects, books, natural history collections, and photographs.

During the conference discussions, a figurative light bulb that became a literal light bulb was illuminated among the participants. It became clear that there was a necessity for an advisory council to gather and exchange information, useful not only to training centers, but also to provide a forum for identifying requirements related to the conservation of cultural property problems facing the United States. Paul Perrot and Peter Powers agreed that a strong possibility existed for a grant from the National Museum Act that could support such an advisory council. In alphabetical order, movers and shakers that brought such a council into being were: Edward Alexander, Norbert Baer, Arthur Beale, Livingston Biddle (aide to Senator Pell), Richard Buck, Robert Feller, Charles Hummel, Caroline and Sheldon Keck, Arnold Lippert, Larry Majewski, Robert Organ, Paul Perrot, Peter Powers, Peter Sparks, John Spencer, Nathan Stollow, and Charles Van Ravenswaay.

The Advisory Council first met in November, 1973. It adopted the name National Conservation Advisory Council and formulated by-laws. The Council defined its purpose as “to identify and try to solve conservation problems by serving as a national forum for planning and cooperation among institutions and programs concerned with the conservation of cultural property in museums, historic properties, libraries, archives, and related collections in the United States”.

In this formative period, council membership was limited to twenty institutional members. The proof that forming such a Council was necessary lay in the fact that in two short years, by 1975, the Council had expanded to include three officers [Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Executive Secretary representing a training program and institutions]; a five-person Executive Committee representing three training programs and two institutions]; a four-person By-Laws Committee representing three additional institutions; an Education and Training Committee representing two additional conservation facilities; a five- person Regional Centers Study Committee representing one additional conservation facility and one additional institution; a six-person Research and Publications Committee representing the National Bureau of Standards, a major scientific research laboratory, an additional conservation facility, and an additional institution; and a two-person administrative staff [David Shute, Council Coordinator and R. Janette Gamble, Secretary].

To prepare for its first working paper, the Council focused on three issues. What are the national conservation needs in training, research, and publications? What are possible ways to meet such needs? Is it advisable to create a national institute for conservation?

By March, 1976, the long period of inertia relating to conservation of cultural property in the United States began to end. The Council consisted of twenty-one voting institutional members and two non-voting institutional members. To the committees noted above, two additional study committees [Architectural Conservation and National Conservation Institute] were formed plus two new administrative committees [By-Laws and Membership Policy].

The first of a number of NCAC reports, Conservation of Cultural Property in the United States, A Statement by the National Conservation Advisory Council was published and circulated in 1976.

Of utmost importance, in January, 1976, NCAC established a National Institute for Conservation study committee charged with stating in detail what such an institute could do for conservation, and what should be its priorities. That Committee submitted a “Discussion Paper on a National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property” to Council members in November, 1977. The following year it was published for broader discussion and commentary.

In 1977, a critical shortage of gas and electrical energy occurred in the United States. NCAC created an AD Hoc Energy Committee, chaired by Charles Hummel, who was also elected to a two-year term as a member-at-large of the Council. The work of the Ad-Hoc committee resulted in publication by NCAC late in 1977 of a Statement on the Control of Environmental Conditions for Preservation of Cultural Property in Situations of Energy Shortage. In the same year, NCAC released the report of its Study Committee on Architectural Conservation.

NCAC’s statement of its purpose was revised in November, 1977 as follows: “The Council is created ... (1) to provide a forum for coordinated planning and voluntary cooperation among institutions and programs in the United States concerned with the conservation of cultural property; to assess and seek ways of

meeting national conservation needs in training, research, and publication, including data processing and data distribution, and (2) to study the advisability of creating a National Institute for Conservation to carry on such advisory and coordinating functions and to include such laboratory facilities, training programs and other activities on a national basis as may be appropriate”.

The year 1979 saw three reports published by NCAC. Report of the Study Committee on Education and Training was distributed in 2,230 copies. Report of the Study Committee on Libraries and Archives was sent to 3,700 institutions and individuals. Report of the Study Committee on Scientific Support for Conservation was distributed in 2,300 copies.

Based on the work of so many members and volunteers between 1973 and 1979, several important activities and events occurred in 1980. NCAC published and distributed a six-page public information brochure, National Conservation Advisory Council. Its contents included sections on NCAC’s purpose; its membership; NCAC’s functions; its future; its national responsibility; a list of NCAC’s publications; and a list of its permanent, associate, and individual members.

Study Committees that completed their assignments – Education and Training, Energy, Libraries and Archives, Scientific Support, - became five-person working committees in 1980.

The same year saw two publications by NCAC. Conservation Treatment Services in the United States and Suggested Guidelines for training in Architectural Conservation. They were distributed in 4,800 copies.

By invitation, in 1980 NCAC provided testimony at the Department of Energy Hearing on Energy Performance Standards for New Buildings because of the conservation concerns of museums, libraries, archives, and historical agencies.

Earlier in 1980, NCAC was awarded a total of \$101,825 from the National Museum Act and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for program and much needed professional assistance, to be used between September, 1980 and August, 1981.

To enlarge on the section, "NCAC's Future", published in the six page brochure, discussions of the full Council's agreement on "Future Activities of the NCAC" were distributed in 1980 for information and commentary. Summarized by this writer they were as follows:

1. Promotion in many forums, and work with organizations, institutions, and individuals, to achieve action and implementation of NCAC's recommendations to improve conservation in the United States.
2. More precise determination of the magnitude of conservation needs in the United States, with specification of the quantity and adequacy of resources presently devoted to their solution.
3. For immediate study, consideration of pressing conservation problems including :
  - a.) The role of private collections as part of a national patrimony.

b.)The relationship of conservators in private practice to the national conservation effort.

c.)Conservation problems in Natural History collections.

d.)Recommendations to encourage conservators to publish technical information for the profession and general information for curators and administrators.

e.)Investigate the possibility of training technical conservation personnel to work under supervision.

f.) Periodic reports of information and recommendations as NCAC studies and inquiries yield such material.

g.) The need for a National Conservation Plan. NCAC is especially aware of the urgent need for, and egregious lack of, training programs in conservation in certain categories of three dimensional objects, of structures and monuments, and of library and archival materials.

H.) Endorsement of the general concept to establishment of a government –supported national institute for conservation.

Based on a random sample of its professional members conducted by the American Institute for Conservation, a national institute should:

(1)Have a governing board with strong representation from the profession.

- (2) Provide information clearing-house services such as the result of scientific research and technical advances in conservation practice.
- (3) Provide a center for responding to public inquiries about conservation problems.
- (4) Provide information about internship opportunities for training program students.
- (5) Education of users of conservation services including seminars and demonstrations for curators and administrators in museums, libraries, archives, historic properties, archaeological properties and many others.
- (6) Encourage and circulate publications relating to conservation, both for non-conservators and conservators.
- (7) Research, including a laboratory for research into the deterioration of materials and methods for their preservation. Testing and analysis of materials as applied to conservators. Maintain a central record of ongoing research.
- (8) Funding – “NCAC is conscious of the competing demands for the shrinking resources commanded by the institutions involved. It is thus evident that some other sources of increased support will have to be found for activities which are



extremely difficult to make self-supporting”. The National Endowment for the Arts, the National Museum Act, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation were credited with taking up the challenge.

### NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CONSERVATION

Much of the year 1981 was devoted by NCAC to discussions relating to moving the idea of an NIC to implementation. As noted above, funding for such an institute would be critical, made even more so by the knowledge that grants to NCAC by the National Museum Act would cease after 1983.

During 1981, Charles Hummel and an officer of NCAC visited the J. Paul Getty Foundation for discussions with Harold Williams, Chairman of the Foundation, and Nancy Englander, its Program Development Officer. The subject raised was identification of how, and where, an NIC and the Getty Trust could benefit from cooperation. The result of continuing discussions with the Trust throughout 1981 indicated that the J. Paul Getty Trust would help with funding for a specific purpose if a National Institute for Conservation were created.

Early in 1982, NCAC published a “Proposal for a National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property. Funds for its publication and circulation were provided by the National Museum Act administered by the Smithsonian Institution and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Subsequently, support for the proposal came from more than one hundred and fifty organizations responsible for the cultural patrimony of the United States.

As a consequence, in April, 1982, the National Conservation Advisory Council was disbanded and replaced by the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property, Inc. Arthur Beale was selected as its President and Chairman of NIC's Board of Directors. David Shute served as Executive Director and Gretchen Ellsworth served as Secretary of the organization and Chair of its Bylaws Committee.

The first annual meeting of NIC convened at the Board Room of the American Institute of Architects, Washington, D.C. on October 15, 1982. Forty-five participants attended. They represented conservation training programs, regional conservation centers, historical agencies, institutions with conservation treatment facilities, libraries, museums, and professional membership organizations.

At that meeting, Arthur Beale noted that special appreciation was due to Gretchen Ellsworth, Chair, Bylaws Committee of NIC, and Charles Hummel, Chair, Membership Committee of NIC, for managing development of transitional documents for discussions and approval at the first annual meeting of NIC. Having served as Vice-President of NCAC, 1979-1981, this writer was elected to two terms as Vice-Chairman of NIC; Vice-Chairman, NIC Board of Directors; Chair, NIC Nominating and Membership Committees, 1982-1986; and designee of the Winterthur-University of Delaware Art Conservation Training Program.

With incorporation of NIC, the J. Paul Getty Trust Foundation provided a grant of \$80,000 to it for a two-year period, 1982-1984, for the hiring of a development officer.

Additional sources of financial support stemmed from an annual membership fee of \$100, and grants from the Andrew W. Mellon

Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts[Design Arts program]; National Historical Publications and Research Commission; National Science Foundation; and a Chairman's Grant from the National Museum Act.

Over a five-month period in 1983, most activity of NIC was devoted to the preparation of, and submission of , grant proposals by Council Chairman, Arthur Beale; Treasurer Ann Russell; and Executive Director, David Shute. Additionally, the structure of an endowment for NIC was established through an agreement with Loomis-Sayles, Boston, negotiated on NIC's behalf by Barbara Beardsley, designee of AIC to NIC's Council.

Two cooperative projects with other institutions occurred in 1983. First was a study by the American Association of Museums with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Its purpose was to discuss and reach consensus on major issues affecting conservation and collection needs in museums. The study plan was to bring together via colloquia, museum personnel relating to art, history, anthropology, archaeology, documentation and conservation. Arthur Beale, NIC Chairman and AIC President Pieter Myers were members of a task force providing oversight for the project. Three additional members of NIC's Board participated in the colloquia- Marigene Butler, William Leisher, and Ann Russell.

The second project resulted from a request from the United States Congress, included as part of the Fiscal Year 1984 appropriation to the Institute of Museum Services[IMS]. The sum of \$150,000 was allocated for a study of conservation needs by AAM in cooperation with NIC and AIC.

By contract with IMS, the museum community study was conducted by AAM and the conservation field study by NIC and AIC.

Of great and lasting importance to the conservation of cultural property in the United States was Congresses' appropriation to IMS of 2.85 million dollars in fiscal year 1984. Its purpose was the establishment by IMS of a conservation grants program. Arthur Beale for NIC and Pieter Myers for AIC, with respective Boards and staff, were heavily involved in developing recommendations for implementation of this new IMS program. Guidelines for this program were approved by the National Museum Services Board in December, 1983.

Concurrently, Arthur Beale provided advice and cooperation to the National Endowment for the Arts relating to their planning for future support of conservation.

Other projects sponsored in full by NIC or in cooperation with other agencies in 1983 and 1984 included:

1. A symposium on anthropological conservation, October 27-30, 1983.
2. Development of environmental standards for the storage of paper-based library and archival materials.
3. Generation of a report to the J. Paul Getty Trust by June, 1984 about the three graduate-level conservation training programs through analysis of four questionnaires distributed to museum

directors and curators, conservation intern supervisors, and employees of training program graduates.

4. Six public lectures on conservation needs of museums in the United States, May-August, 1984, with content outlines provided by the NIC Board of Directors.
5. Distribution of the NIC publication, Careers in Conservation of Cultural Property to all members of the American Association for State and Local History, and to all members of the College Art Association.

NIC projects planned or undertaken between 1984 and 1987 included;

1. Employment of an editor to work with the quantification Subcommittee on Historic Buildings to enable publication of the Subcommittee's questionnaire results.
2. Compiling information on scientific research that has been or is being undertaken, relating to conservation of museum collections.
3. In two stages, coordination of independent efforts to quantify the effects of acid rain and related costs to cultural property.

## HERITAGE PRESERVATION

In 1997, NIC changed its name to Heritage Preservation. One of its first major projects started in 1989. Save Outdoor Sculpture was a community-based undertaking to identify, document, and conserve outdoor sculpture in the United States. Its goal was to advocate proper care of a public resource on a nationwide basis. About 2011 or 2012, the Smithsonian Museum of American Art became an active partner with Heritage Preservation for the program to save outdoor sculpture.

Of equal significance was another Historic Preservation Program. Rescue Public Murals brought public attention to the unique artistic and historic importance of murals in the United States. This program achieved success in attracting expertise and funding necessary for their conservation.

With funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services[IMLS], Heritage Preservation published an important survey report, Heritage Health Index, in 2005. It included material supplied by more than 3,000 institutions – museums, historical societies, government archives, libraries, scientific organizations, and universities. Some 612 million artifacts were found to be at risk of deterioration because of improper or neglected care.

That report was featured in a December, 2005 New York Times article by Lynette Clemetson, “History is Slipping Away as Collections Deteriorate”. One week later, the report was featured in a PBS broadcast by Harriet Bashar, “U.S. Museum Collections in Dire Conditions”.

A Conservation Assessment Program [CAP], funded by IMLS, but administered by Heritage Preservation, provided assessment by professional conservators of the condition of collections and historic structures. It enabled successful applicants to focus on their most important artifacts and set priorities for their conservation. Between 1990 and 2012, 2,600 museums in all states and territories benefited from the CAP program. In 2012 alone, 101 museums participated in the conservation assessment program.

As a member of the National Museum Services Board 1994-2001, appointed by President Clinton, this writer occupied the so-called "Conservation seat". I personally observed the great success of CAP in annually attracting overwhelming numbers of applications for the program's available funds.

The Heritage Emergency Task Force was founded in 1995 to protect cultural heritage from the damaging effects of natural disasters or other emergencies. It grew to include forty-one national and Federal service organizations, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Heritage Preservation as an organization ended in 2015. The importance of its programs relating to conservation, preservation and care of collections in the United States was made manifest by the fact that some of its programs became efforts of The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works [AIC] or by FEMA.

The figurative light bulb illuminated by the 1973 conference at Winterthur literally resulted in the creation of NCAC to NIC to Heritage

Preservation. Their efforts and programs, kept alive by AIC and FEMA, with ongoing financial support from IMLS, FAIC, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and other significant funding agencies, has resulted in assuring that conservation of cultural property in the United States has changed from the fear that “It’s so big a problem that we can’t resolve it”, to agency and public recognition that tackling the problem on a priority to priority basis, the conservation of cultural property can be resolved.

This report summarizes pertinent records, Winterthur Archives, Charles van Ravenswaay and Charles Hummel Papers.

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