

memorandum

DATE: March 13, 1984

REPLY TO
ATTN OF: Chief Curator

SUBJECT: Curatorial Strategy for 1984-1990

TO: Participants, Cultural Resources Workshop

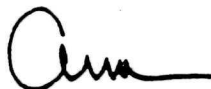
Attached is a draft curatorial strategy for 1984-1990. It is based on the recommendations made at last June's Curatorial Goals Workshop. Those recommendations have been formally and constructively reviewed by the regions. We received 22 individual replies, the longest of which was ten pages. All were supportive of the general directions proposed by the curators. Most recognized, too, that curatorial progress on any one front will be slower than any of us would like because we must move forward on several fronts at once.

The curatorial strategy we are proposing for the rest of this decade begins with a list of six key elements. Following that is an element-by-element discussion stating the goal for each element, what is currently being done, and proposing other steps to implement this aspect of the strategy. I encourage your regional and park museum personnel to seize this Servicewide framework and use it to develop innovative projects appropriate to the individual needs of each park and region.

If we blend our separate efforts in a united drive pursuing the elements of this strategy, we will begin the year 1990 at a level of curatorial accomplishment we thought impossible to achieve as we entered this decade.

When finalized, this strategy will formally be sent to the regions by the Associate Director, Cultural Resources.

Attachment



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

CURATORIAL STRATEGY FOR 1984-1990

Key elements

- *1. Bring storage and exhibit conditions to an acceptable state for all collections.
- *2. Achieve responsible levels of accountability for all collections.
- *3. Provide necessary preservation care to objects in collections.
- 4. Strengthen the level of curatorial expertise applied to collections care.
- 5. Incorporate curatorial review into the planning process.
- 6. Provide field curators with needed management tools and policy guidance

*These are in priority order, the rest are not.

1. Bring storage and exhibit conditions to an acceptable state for all collections.

The Goal:

Ensure that every object in NPS care is stored or exhibited in the best possible circumstances for preservation, commensurate with the condition and significance of the object and the facilities and resources available.

Current Actions:

Storage and exhibit assessment is a key part of every Collection Management Plan, and preservation maintenance is covered in a special installation section in each Historic Furnishing Plan.

Storage improvement projects are eligible for funding under the Cultural Cyclic Maintenance and the Cultural Resource Preservation Funds.

Standards for storage and care of archeological collections are being developed by the staff of the Departmental Consulting Archeologist, in consultation with the Chief Curator's office.

The first indefinite quantity contract for curatorial equipment has been obligated by the Curatorial Services Branch; it will simplify field purchases of recording hygrothermographs and yield a savings of over fifty dollars per instrument.

Training in storage assessment and planning has been conducted by Curatorial Services at Death Valley and at Independence.

Energy-efficient Bally buildings have been used in innovative storage facilities at Golden Gate and Fort Pulaski. Golden Gate has also developed a visible storage area.

Research funded by Curatorial Services and conducted in 1983 at Rochester Institute of Technology has affirmed that the photographic enclosures used by the Service are of an acceptable curatorial quality.

Proposed Steps:

Produce a packet of materials to guide field personnel in doing their own on-site storage assessment and improvement planning.

Continue to place high priority on storage improvement projects for funding from Servicewide cultural resource programs.

Expand the use of indefinite quantity purchases by the Curatorial Services Branch when it will result in actual savings, simplify procurement, and provide an acceptable standard for material to be used throughout the Service.

Reinstitute the annual Museum Storage Equipment Needs Report, in order to provide the regions and WASO with the information necessary to assign priorities and consolidate procurements.

Emphasize storage assessment and environmental monitoring in Curatorial Methods courses.

Emphasize early, thorough, and constructive curatorial review of exhibit plans by park and regional curatorial personnel.

Support the development of regional preservation centers as a cost-effective way to provide acceptable storage conditions for large quantities of objects that do not need to be readily accessible at the originating park.

2. Achieve acceptable accountability for all collections.

The Goal:

Achieve a condition where every object in NPS care is consistent with an approved Scope of Collection Statement, accessioned, registered, cataloged, and periodically verified as physically present in the collection.

Current Actions:

All areas will be asked to have a Scope of Collection Statement (SOCS) approved within 1984.

All objects acquired for museums to be accessioned by September 1, 1984.

The new registration and cataloging system will be ready for implementation in summer, 1984.

Field testing has been done that will provide managers with information on costs of registration and cataloging.

Accountability for care of collections is now part of every Regional Director's performance standards.

The Chief Curator has been a member of the MBO Property Management Core Team, reviewing property accountability procedures.

Proposed Steps:

Request all parks to plan and program for registration and cataloging of all museum objects.

Establish an acceptable deadline for completion of each level of documentation and give museum record projects a high priority for Servicewide funding.

Study feasibility and recommend Servicewide strategy for computerizing National Catalog Records and related collections management data.

Develop and implement an optimal periodic inventory system.

Support more Curatorial Management courses like the one conducted at Blue Ridge in 1983.

3. Provide necessary preservation care to objects in collections.

The Goal:

Assure that a systematic approach to object preservation is in place throughout the Service, starting with field personnel who are capable of monitoring the condition of their collections and who can apply the preservation techniques appropriate to field use, including regional curators who know and can orchestrate the available conservation services to match field needs, and ending with professional conservators whose services can confidently be obtained within the Service or by contract or cooperative agreement.

Current Actions:

Condition monitoring is taught at Curatorial Methods.

Housekeeping techniques for preservation of objects in storage and on exhibit will be taught at Tuskegee in April 1984.

Object condition surveys will be recognized as important collection management planning documents in NPS-28, currently under revision.

National Capital Region has received four condition surveys by contract, which are now being used to prioritize treatment requests.

Pacific Northwest and Southeast Regions have entered into Cooperative Agreements for conservation services with non-profit conservation centers.

Hubbell Trading Post, Southeast, Rocky Mountain, and Pacific Northwest Regions have acquired positions in the consortium backing Rocky Mountain Regional Conservation Center, thus obtaining reduced costs for services.

Conservation services are now available from Service personnel at Western Archeological and Conservation Center, the North Atlantic Regional Office, and the Division of Conservation, Harpers Ferry Center.

Proposed Steps:

Develop standards for conservation contracting.

Support the development of professionally staffed and adequately planned conservation laboratories at regional preservation centers.

Appoint an in-place task force to assess the conservation needs of the Service and the currently available sources of professional conservation services, resulting in a recommendation for the best way to deliver conservation services to the collections of the National Park Service.

Encourage the use of cooperative agreements and other innovative means to provide responsible conservation services.

4. Strengthen the level of curatorial expertise applied to collections care

The Goal:

Provide every collection in the Service with adequate collection management attention on a day-to-day basis, backed by professional services in specialized fields, such as conservation, storage planning, etc. This includes opportunities for field curators and specialists to develop their expertise through research, in-service training, and project assignments, both in-place and at other sites.

Current Actions:

Minimum training requirements for collection care responsibilities are being investigated.

A workshop to train instructors in the new cataloging system has been funded for June 1984. It will be followed by regional training to provide this knowledge to the field personnel.

Field curators have received in-service training by assisting in storage planning and preparation of Collection Management Plans, and by serving on the National Catalog Steering Committee.

Innovative regional courses have been developed on natural history collections and on curatorial management in Southeast Region, and the North Atlantic Region has instituted a three-phased museum technician training program.

American Association of Museums (AAM) accreditation of the Service's curatorial support activities in conjunction with Independence NHP is expected in 1984.

A persistent problem in Service collections, leather preservation, is being addressed at an international workshop to be held in June 1984, at Mather Training Center, hosted by the Division of Conservation at Harpers Ferry Center.

Proposed Steps:

Develop the Curatorial Methods course as qualifying training for non-professional collection care responsibilities.

Produce a slide-tape program on storage, as well as others to meet needs identified by the regional and park staff.

Develop topical workshops annually to bring curators up to date on latest developments in a particular area.

Continue to publish original curatorial papers in CRM Bulletin, the Conserve O Gram series, and through cooperating associations; other outlets will be sought.

Encourage and support curatorial workshops and training at the regional level, such as the one on Curatorial Housekeeping being conducted at Tuskegee in April 1984, and the Curatorial Methods course at Lincoln Home, March 1984.

Involve field and regional curators in the revision of the Museum Handbook.

Seek AAM accreditation for parks that qualify, as an important link with the professional museum community.

5. Incorporate curatorial review into the planning process.

The Goal:

Inclusion of a professional curator in the review process for any undertaking with a potential for impact on NPS collections.

Current Actions:

The Chief Curator reviews all Resource Management Plans, some exhibit plans, and other documents as they are submitted to WASO for review.

Regional and Park Curators provide review of Resource Management Plans, XXX Forms, exhibit plans, Statements for Management, and other planning documents.

The collection planning documents recently known as Collection Preservation Guides are now titled Collection Management Plans to denote their wider frame of reference, and they will receive formal review and approval at all levels.

The Regional Curator is accorded review responsibilities in NPS-28 equivalent to other cultural resource specialists.

Alaska has established and is advertising to fill a Regional Curator position, completing the roster of Regional Curators.

Proposed Steps:

Emphasize review of plans in Curatorial Methods Training.

Ensure systematic curatorial review of XXX Forms, Historic Structure Reports, and development plans dealing with archeological and architectural resources as well as those clearly dealing with collections.

6. Provide field curators with needed management tools and policy guidance.

The Goal:

Provide new procedures and write new or updated policy where needed to improve management of collections.

Current Actions:

The deaccessioning manual and proposed amendments to the Management of Museum Properties Act of 1955 are ready for regional review.

Computer programs for collection management are in place or being developed at the park or regional level in the Southeast, North Atlantic, Southwest, Pacific Northwest, Western, and National Capital Regions.

Recommendations are being prepared for a Servicewide standard for dealing with nitrate negative film in park collections.

Proposed Steps:

Develop and implement a computerized museum accountability program, capitalizing on the experiences of regional programs and, if possible, including those programs in a working network.

Find a means by which emergency acquisition funds can be made available for purchase of original and needed objects that come unexpectedly on the market.

Reconstitute the committee to revise the Museum Handbook. New sections have already been written for cataloging and deaccessioning; the rest should be accomplishable within three years.

Continue and expand the Conserve O Gram series and explore other ways of providing technical information.

Summary

Realistic short-term goals cannot be set for all elements at this time, nor can we see far enough ahead to predict all of the steps that will be necessary for each element over the next five years. Therefore, we readily accept the challenges of a strategy which directs our efforts while requiring us periodically to reassess our actions. In this way we will be able to accommodate new ideas, to incorporate progress that has been made, and to redirect our resources accordingly.