

Caroline Dosker

SHE DUSTED
THE MUMMIES
BY ELIN C. DANIEN

FOR MANY OF us who knew her, Caroline Dosker's death on June 26, 2005, marked the end of a more free-wheeling era in the Museum. Caroline was fond of boasting that she grew up in the Museum, playing in its galleries as a child and making up stories about objects

on exhibit while her father, the Museum's public relations liaison, met with curators and journalists.

As an adult, she was employed as an Assistant Registrar beginning in 1951. In charge of photographs, she was, in effect, the Museum's first photographic archivist. Later she became a Reference Specialist in the Archives. In those days titles counted little, and the rather fluid composition of the Museum staff meant that Caroline's on-the-job training included stints as greeter, curator, party planner, and conservator.

There were always things to be done, and volunteers eager to help, but someone had to organize and direct them. That's how Caroline became involved with the Thursday evening group known as "The Mummy Dusters"—volunteers who repaired pottery, washed sherds, catalogued objects, and did anything that needed doing. For years, when envelopes needed to be stuffed, documents copied, or filing done, the mantra was, "Ask Caroline if the Mummy Dusters have time."

When I first came to the Museum in 1972 as a volunteer guide, somewhat awed by the Museum's collections, reputation, and personages, Caroline introduced me to the real Museum. She could answer any question and tell you where to find even the most esoteric bit of information. She knew all the anecdotes, and her stories of past parties and scandals were sometimes scathing, often witty, and always fascinating. Her Museum home was the Registrar's Office, at that time a small room with bulging card files and overflowing file cabinets, but her knowledge encompassed the whole building and everyone who had ever worked there. She could locate the acquisition background of any object and then flesh out the facts with



Caroline Dosker staffing the reception desk in the Museum's Kress Entrance, December 1986. Photo by Ruth Scott.

tales of the archaeologist who had found it and the curator who either appreciated or ignored it, wrapping the story with incisive commentary.

Caroline officially retired in 1986 but continued to mother the Mummy Dusters and to fill in where needed for the next decade. When the free-wheeling days of the Museum gave way to a more structured atmosphere, Caroline never changed. She always "forgot" to sign in, scorned new security measures, and ignored the no smoking policy. On Mondays, when the Museum was closed to the public, she served as the receptionist at the staff entrance. She always had cigarettes and an ashtray with her and a smoke cloud around her head. Although the Mummy Dusters disbanded several years ago and Caroline is now gone, on Monday mornings I sometimes imagine I can still smell the cigarettes and hear her wry laugh. 🏠

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