

# Penn in the World

TWELVE DECADES  
AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF  
PENNSYLVANIA  
MUSEUM

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**I**N THE FALL of 2006, we assembled a marvelously diverse group of undergraduate and graduate students from the Departments of Anthropology, History of Art, Religious Studies, Architecture, and East Asian Languages and Civilizations to plan an exhibition that would tell the complex and compelling story of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology

and Anthropology. This was made possible by the History of Art Department's Halpern-Rogath Curatorial Seminar program. The starting point for our work was the Museum's

recently completed Historic Structure Report (HSR), funded by a grant from the Heritage Philadelphia program of the Pew Charitable Trusts. The HSR provides for the first time an authoritative and exhaustive architectural history of the Museum's beautiful building. We gave our students the task of assembling materials that could illustrate a similarly complete history of the Museum's work, and we collaborated with them in devising an exhibition that would tell these parallel yet closely related stories about architecture and exploration.

After our students had read the various published histories of the institution, they plunged into the Museum Archives, where they probed deeply into the records of the Museum's Sections and Departments and identified the important stories and themes that we would highlight in the exhibition.

Wilson Eyre's proposal for the Museum building, 1921.



Architectural Archives, University of Pennsylvania



Two painted wooden masks from Frank Hamilton Cushing's excavations at Key Marco, Florida. Watercolors by Wells M. Sawyer. UPM Image 174609.

Most had not done archival research before, but with the help of Alex Pezzati, the Museum's Senior Archivist, they divided up the work and forged ahead.

In the Archives they "discovered" those familiar favorites to us old hands—the photographs of Louis Shotridge in Tlingit dress, George Byron Gordon with the canoe christened "Penn," Harriet Boyd Hawes and her Cretan workmen, and the vast excavations at the site of Nippur in Iraq. This gave new life to these tried and true images, but the students also made genuinely new discoveries among the memorabilia of the Museum's researchers—the equipment of their expeditions and the artifacts they had collected and studied.

Our students worked hard to identify materials that were visually interesting as well as important. They succeeded brilliantly. The exhibition will showcase the remarkable field journal of Clarence S. Fisher's excavation at Memphis, Egypt, Max Uhle's impassioned correspondence about Peru, beautiful watercolor renderings that Wells M. Sawyer made of the masks from Key Marco, Florida, the rifle permit carried by John Punnett Peters while he excavated at Nippur, a crudely sketched map of Borneo from William H. Furness III, Alfred C. Harrison, Jr., and Hiram M. Hiller's expedition, and rarely exhibited pottery from William C. Farabee's expedition to Nazca, Peru.

We debated throughout the semester about the best way to organize these many stories and present them to the Museum's visitors. By the end, we reached a consensus that the show would start with the architecture, told in grandiose watercolors, working drawings, photographs, and even a few pieces of building material. Then we would divide it into two large categories: what went on outside the Museum—its archaeological and ethnographic expeditions—and what went on inside—its collections, exhibition policies, research, and education.

For the outside story we worked with the students to identify 13 expeditions (mostly from the Museum's early decades) that could vividly represent the hundreds of field projects that have been conducted over the years. Naturally we chose to begin with Penn's first archaeological fieldwork, the excavations at Nippur that were launched in 1889. But we also included Clarence Fisher's work at Memphis in Egypt, Max Uhle's excavations at Pachacamac in Peru, as well as Henry Usher Hall's expedition to Sierra Leone on Africa's west coast and Frank Hamilton Cushing's work at Key Marco, Florida. Each expedition will be represented by photographs (some familiar and many new ones), papers, artifacts, and a small sampling of less well known objects from the Museum's storerooms.



A Nazca pot from William Curtis Farabee's expedition to Peru in the 1920s. UPM# SA 2947.

Proposed design for the new Museum (ca. 1895).  
Watercolor perspective by Charles Z. Klauder.



In planning the part of the exhibition that looks inside the Museum we paid attention to how the collections, which had been acquired through archaeological excavations and ethnographic-collecting expeditions, had also been enriched through purchase and donation. The correspondence between Museum Director George Byron Gordon and the noted dealer in Chinese art, C. T. Loo, exemplifies this process and reveals both a business relationship and a close personal friendship. Loo would identify objects for the Museum to purchase and



describe them to Gordon in long, detailed letters, but he also sent postcards from his travels with charming messages that reveal their friendship.

The students were fascinated by how the appearance of the Museum's galleries had changed over the years, reflecting changing attitudes toward ethnographic material. When the Museum opened in 1899, for example, hundreds of objects from the Borneo expedition were crowded into cases, hung cheek-by-jowl on the walls, and even suspended from the ceiling. By contrast, in the 1950s, many of the galleries displayed only a few, dramatically lit objects, highlighting their aesthetic beauty but ignoring their cultural context.

We shared the greatest sense of discovery in learning together about the Museum's education programs, which were central to its mission from the beginning. The exhibition includes photographs of school children, as well as older students and adults, held in thrall by Museum guides and educators. It also displays some of the games and craft projects invented to satisfy the changing tastes of museum-goers. Pride of place is given to the Museum's pioneering use of television in the early 1950s, with a monitor playing an episode from the famous *What in the World* series.

Some of the Museum's brilliant staff members and leaders attracted and sustained our interest, and the exhibition will devote space to some of these individuals. These include the Museum's "founders" (William Pepper and Sara Yorke Stevenson), visionary personalities (George Byron Gordon and Louis Shotridge), and significant donors (Eckley Brinton Coxe, Jr., and Phoebe Hearst). We also present examples of path-breaking work—Elizabeth Ralph's applications of Carbon-14 dating—and supreme art and artifice—the beautiful renderings of Mary Louise Baker, Wells M. Sawyer, and Tatiana Proskouriakoff.

Robert Stuckenrath, a research assistant, shows Alfred Kidder II (right) the combustion tube in the Museum's Carbon-14 Lab. UPM Image 63181.

Peking July 28. 17

Dear Dr Gordon.

I am in Peking since 3 days, and am going to call on Mr Bishop, expecting that he is in town yet!

I am sorry to say that we are unable up to the present to secure the 2 statues showing on the photo in the same temple with the large one now the Harrison Hall. But we have secured in another place for always in the Shan province 2 large & fine stone heads

Dr G. B. Gordon  
 Director of the  
 University Museum  
 Philadelphia  
 U. S. A. Pa

...to my mind the best quality I know. I am going to Peking Temple of Heaven stay in North for 2 or 3 weeks, unfortunately there are very very few things now to be seen now that we can buy.

Will write you if I have seen some fine things suitable for your honorable Museum.

How would you compare this Hall to that of Dr Harrison?

With my respectful souvenir  
 T. O. Harrison  
 You sincerely  
 Coo-ching Tsai



Postcard from C. T. Loo (Ching Tsai) to George Byron Gordon. He jokes, "How would you compare this hall [the Temple of Heaven in Beijing] to that of Dr. Harrison?"—the newly completed Rotunda. UPM Images 174613 and 174614.



Top, this photo shows the Borneo Gallery in the course of installation, just before the Museum opened in December 1899. UPM Image 138928. Bottom, the Museum's African Gallery in the 1950s. UPM Image 174615.



The Museum's television program, *What in the World*, was filmed at WCAU Philadelphia. Here, Museum Director Froelich Rainey (seated) moderates while (from left to right) Carleton Coon, Jacques Lipchitz, and Alfred Kidder II try to identify an object. UPM Image 174612.

As we learned more and more about the Museum's important work, we were intrigued to see how frequently, widely, and divergently its activities were reported in the press. To represent the Museum's fame and notoriety, we use enlarged newspaper clippings as "wallpaper" in many parts of the exhibition. Headlines like "Relics of an Unknown Race Discovered," which heralded the excavations at Key Marco and sparked the public imagination, will help to bridge the gap between the past and today's visitors.

All in all, from the initial seminar through the research and planning of the exhibition, this has been a fascinating excursion through the history of a truly remarkable institution. But this is also an exhibition about people and what they accomplished, and we hope that will resonate with the people who come to see it. 

One of William Randolph Hearst's New York City newspapers, *The Journal*, announces "Relics of an Unknown Race Discovered" by the Museum's Frank Hamilton Cushing, June 21, 1896. Cushing's research, the Pepper-Hearst Expedition, was supported by Phoebe Hearst, William Randolph Hearst's mother. UPM Image 174610.

Penn Museum

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#### For Further Reading

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