A major anniversary is a wonderful reason for an institution to reflect on the people, events, and achievements that have brought it to where it is, but it is also a great opportunity to look forward. As the Penn Museum celebrates the 125th anniversary of its official founding on December 6, 1887, we are busy doing both.

A new Museum website showcasing 125 of our more than 400 excavation and research expeditions includes some of the storied excavations from which have come the signature collections in our galleries. It also highlights projects that Penn Museum curators and researchers are conducting around the globe today. Bringing that current, groundbreaking research work into our permanent galleries—to show the public what we are doing and how we are doing it—is a major goal of our future exhibition plans.

Recent changing exhibitions have done just that. MAYA 2012: Lords of Time, on view in our galleries through January 13, 2013 (assuming the world does not end on December 21 despite both the supposed Maya predictions, as well as a lively late-night dance party hosted by our Young Friends that night), offers visitors not only a chance to see astonishing objects from the Classic Maya site of Copan in Honduras, but also to learn about recent excavations conducted by Penn researchers, with colleagues from the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History and Harvard University.

As Williams Director for just over four months as this special issue of Expedition goes to press—a tiny blip of the Museum’s 125 years of history—it is too early to outline all of the priorities that will emerge from the new strategic plan we have just begun. But I believe strongly that now is the time to take a fundamental look at our permanent galleries—many of which have remained unchanged for a much longer portion of that 125-year history than they should have. We will do exactly that as we discuss the future of the Museum during the coming year.

An exhibition that opened this fall in one of our newly renovated West Wing galleries has been a wonderful showcase for both ancient artifacts and cutting-edge research. In the Artifact Lab looks forward to a reinstallation of our famed Egyptian galleries, most notably the mummy gallery, by putting on full public display members of our team of highly specialized conservators restoring and preserving our Egyptian mummies and several related funerary artifacts. As the conservators’ work advances, new scholarly research can take place: once restored, a papyrus previously too fragile to unfold will be translated by Curator David Silverman and Penn graduate students, and papyrus and translation will go on display in the gallery.

In essence, we are seeking to bring the thrill of exploration to our galleries just as we long have to the pages of Expedition, whose readers have always been partners in our journey. Our anniversary tagline is “125 years and still exploring.” The adventure continues, and I hope you will journey on with us.

JULIAN SIGGERS, PH.D.
Williams Director