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Thematic
Issue



Architectural Study Collections

Material Worthy of A Second Life

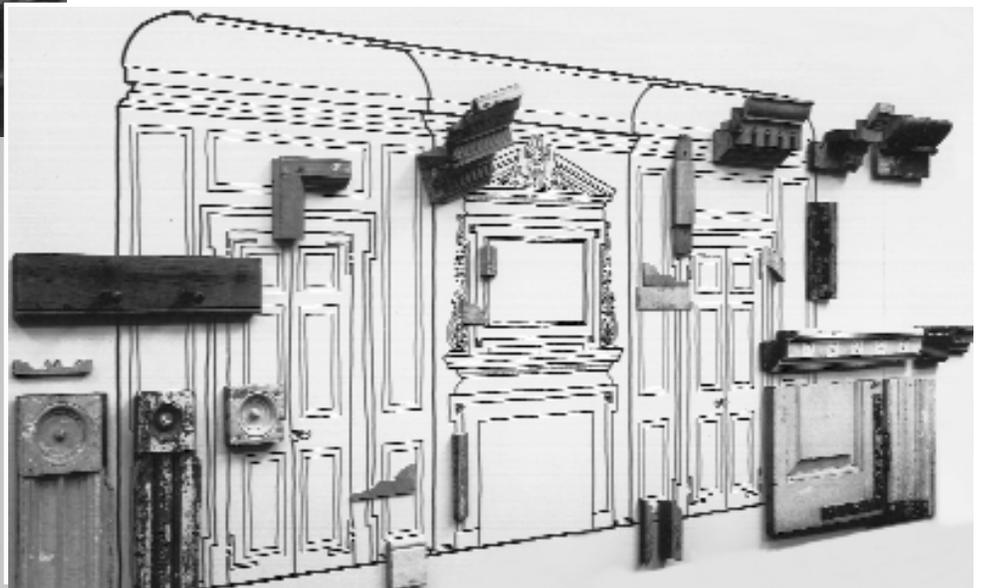
Emogene A. Bevitt

In their **first lives**, structures that are now historic were envisioned, designed, crafted, assembled, and, most importantly, occupied over long periods of time. For a variety of reasons, including inherent design flaws and construction, changes due to owner whim or neglect, natural disasters, or the changing economic needs of a community, features crumble; an entire building is razed.

At the end of the first life, **a second life** may begin based solely on remaining material fragments. Sometimes they are the only surviving pieces from a structure that had stood for several generations. Or, if the effects of time and weather have required the removal of a single feature, it can now be preserved in a less harsh environment. Collectively, these features, materials, and finishes have many stories to tell as they provide a tangible link with the people who designed, crafted, and used them over time.

Study collections offer new life for significant elements that were integral to a structure, but are now only artifacts. These artifacts vary in size from entire facades, large carved columns or cornices, to tiny chips of paint or pieces of the mortar found between bricks. Whether the artifacts are sheltered by museums or private offices and individuals, today anyone who has an interest in historic structures can learn much from them.

(Second Life—continued on page 3)



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Send articles, news items, and correspondence to the Editor, CRM (400), U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; (202-343-3395).	

Material Worthy of a Second Life

(continued from page 1)

The information in this issue of *CRM* is only a small part of what can potentially be learned, discussed, debated, and shared. The potential exists as never before for individuals with backgrounds in science and the humanities to combine efforts to establish and document how a building system performed, why it failed, how an element was crafted and units assembled, what tools were used, how materials were selected and why one was selected instead of another. The answers to these questions can save money, time, and effort in assuring the long-term preservation of a structure.

Some artifacts are assemblages of materials—each reacting differently to humidity, heat, moisture, and each other—that are not easy to handle, move, care for, or store. Because they have varied so much in size and shape, and because buildings and their components are often thought to be more durable than other types of artifacts, architectural study collections have not always received curation and conservation care according to museum standards. Perhaps the most common problem facing these artifacts is the fact that collections were initiated to gain immediate knowledge and preserving them in perpetuity or including them in a museum collection was not considered. Many organizations that have architectural study collections have begun to grapple with the challenges such collections afford.

Challenges of Collecting

This issue of *CRM* presents information to help the reader to better understand why such collections are important and what kind of information can be learned from artifacts that cannot be learned any other way. If preservationists were to think of architectural study collections, they would likely think of one of the major collections covered in the articles that follow. With the exception of the Smithsonian, each collection represents a distinct region (figure 2) and specific time frame. While these are large collections—with over 200 collections identified in the database of collections in the United States—there are many with collections either equal in size or considerably smaller. Learning, through these articles, that the challenges faced are common to any collection regardless

of size could prove encouraging to all. If this issue of *CRM* generates renewed interest and more sharing of information on this topic, then individual successes, if reported in future issues of *CRM*, could well become collective successes on a fairly large scale.

Each of the contributing authors shares information about the strengths of an individual collection and the ways in which this material has proven its usefulness in the past. Each is working to develop databases to be able to retrieve and compare information and objects. Each reflects a growing, collective awareness of the need to provide improved care for these objects despite the significant challenges that exist in storing, documenting, labeling, managing, and caring for them.

In writing about the collection at Colonial Williamsburg, which was initiated in the 1930s with enthusiasm and great

hope, Roberta Reid describes the present-day challenges that are being addressed with painstaking effort. Shantia Anderheggen describes the history of the collection of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), located in Boston, that was founded in 1910 by William Sumner Appleton. Documentation is a hallmark of their collection and has been since its inception. In his description of the architectural study collection at Independence National Historical Park, in Philadelphia, as a source of information “not found in books,” John Marks shows a collection begun in 1951 that has been a resource for both exhibits and research ever since.

Catherine Anderson shares some perceptions and observations gathered from visiting several architectural collections to better understand the state-of-the-art in curating and conserving these artifacts. She also presents some tantalizing glimpses of the extensive collection held by the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution. For both contrast and comparison, Julius Bryant describes English Heritage’s archi-

tectural study collections which date back to 1903 and announces the recent opening of an Architectural Study Centre in London. After learning more about these specific collections, John Maounis and Liz Banks offer a thoughtful introduction to curatorial concerns.

While in one way or another each author points out the educational benefit of these collections, John Milner, writing as a college professor, demonstrates the way in which he has designed specific courses to investigate and devel-

(**Second Life**—continued on page 4)



Fig. 2. The exhibit provides a sampling of architectural details such as cornices, pilasters, wainscoting, architraves, and newelposts from historic structures in the Charleston area. Exhibit from the Frances R. Edmunds Center for Historic Preservation, Charleston, SC. Photo by Lee H. Nelson, FAIA.

(Second Life—continued from page 3)

op architectural study collections as a primary research element. During these courses, he imparts to students the clues to look for, how to interpret them, and how to corroborate deductions with other documentary evidence.

When the preservation of cultural resources is a primary focus, the circumstances that lead to the development of an architectural collection deserve careful scrutiny. Kay Weeks explores some of the ethical implications in starting an architectural study collection and provides a framework well worth considering.

The potential of study collections to excite interest in the public is demonstrated in the multiple showings of the *WINDOWS THROUGH TIME: An Exhibit*. A brief article summarizes the success of this show which has been seen by over 100,000 people since 1986.

Points of View

Featured in this special *CRM* are five richly illustrated points of view that show artifacts and allow a glimpse into the perspective of different professionals in understanding the usefulness of an object. The craftsman, the architectural historian, the historical architect, the engineer, and the interpreter are each able to find value in the study of these objects to benefit their work-related efforts. Their views differ considerably because they reflect the biases and needs implicit in their professions.

David Flaharty shares the enthusiasm and expertise of a craftsman looking at plaster ceiling medallions. Kathleen Catalano Milley represents an architectural historian's perspective as she studies the documentation developed based on an artifact's existence. Lee Nelson discusses sections of structural elements and a hinge and hinge pattern and identifies whole new topics that have received little attention to date. Robert Silman uses the office study collection daily in training newly-hired engineers and makes a convincing case for such a collection being essential for any practicing engineer. Corky Mayo presents several examples of the way in which an architectural element could be used as a focal point in interpreting a historic structure.

Conclusion

Architectural study collections may provide a second life for the architectural artifacts and fragments but they also offer us a second chance to look at, touch, and come to a better understanding of the role played by individual units that were once indistinguishable within a structure. This

issue of *CRM* helps us see them as important cultural resources in their own right, objects that are well worth our efforts to preserve and protect; objects that will repay our investment of time and effort with the information only they possess.

Acknowledgements

The impetus for this special issue came out of a lunchtime discussion during the Interiors Conference in February, 1993; my involvement in the topic began in 1986 based on numerous discussions (both then and since) with Lee H. Nelson, FAIA; his interest having been sparked by Charles E. Peterson, FAIA, in 1960.

This issue reflects the efforts of the authors and the support of their supervisors and organizations. Special thanks go to: Tom Taylor, Richard Nylander, Nancy Carlisle, Lorna Condon, David Bohl, Penny Batcheler, Doris Fanelli, Martin Burke, Nikki Horton, Scott Odell, Beth Richwine, Rodris Roth, Catherine Sease, Akua Annis, John Hnedak, Marie Ennis, Paul Franceschi, Michael Lo, Ed Meade, Sandy Weber, Joe Burns, Melissa Cahn, Regina P. Jones Underwood, Marianne Mills, Ann Hitchcock, Tony Knapp, Randy Biallas, Blaine Cliver, Lee Nelson, Chuck Fisher, Ward Jandl, Kay Weeks, and Irene Duff for comments, review, encouragement, and support.

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Emogene Bevitt is a program analyst in the Preservation Assistance Division of the National Park Service, Washington. She coordinated this issue of *CRM* and served as guest editor.

Request for Feedback

While this issue of *CRM* presents information about some large collections, it would be useful to learn from house museums and other collection holders of challenges faced and solutions found or needed. With architectural study collections in virtually every state, there are certain to be some ingenious solutions to problems of storage, labeling, documentation, and information retrieval. *CRM* will be tracking this topic in the future, and the editor would welcome articles detailing different aspects of this topic. Maintenance technicians and maintenance supervisors may well be in the forefront in recognizing the value of architectural artifacts and in taking the steps needed to preserve them. They, and all of the many other people interested in this topic, are invited to share their information.

As mentioned in an earlier article in *CRM* (Vol. 16, No. 5, pages 15-18), a survey is being conducted to gather information on architectural study collections in the United States and to verify and expand existing data on over 200 collections prior to publication. The deadline for receipt of entries has been extended to November 1, 1993.