

University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives

Interviewee: Jim Dengate

Interviewers: Joe Baronovic and Vaughn Fenton

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Vaughn Fenton: Alright, I am also recording and we should be good. Ok Joe, do you want to start?

Joe Baronovic: Yeah, sure, so our first little section of questions are questions about you and how you came to be involved in archaeology and the museum and at the university, so we wanted to start by asking what introduced you to the field of archaeology. How did you get into it? What's your, what's your story?

Jim Dengate: I was at Michigan State University as an undergraduate and had a great teacher and took her world history class as a beginning freshman, and she steered me into classics, which I was interested in anyway. And so I was in effect a Classics major there, and then picking places she recommended Rodney Young having an excavation at Gortyn and said that would be interesting. And so I applied there and other places but got accepted for Graduate School at Penn in Classical Archaeology, and so that opened up what then I continued to do until now and continue to do.

JB: So then, just to continue that, how did you end up at the University of Illinois? And our program and museum specifically?

JD: Well, I was looking for a job as an assistant professor and one opened here, and we had an interview in Chicago with then head of classics Miroslav Markovic¹ and he called me up—I was staying with my parents in Grand Rapids, Michigan—and said, “you now have the job.” And so then we came here in 1975, and I've been here since at least off and on.

JB: So when you came to the university, you came as an assistant professor. What was your job like at the beginning of your career at the university? And then how did it evolve into... you've obviously done more work since then.

JD: Well, I was teaching the classical archaeology program and had the first sort of job was to invent more than just the introduction. There was an introduction to Greek archaeology, an introduction to Roman archaeology, and they wanted it to expand to, what could be, the basis of kind of a bachelor's degree, or a cognate bachelors with classics or with anthropology. So I had to start a number of classes, including some graduate classes which they didn't have in classical archaeology at that point. At the same time, I discovered the World Heritage Museum and discovered that they had some interesting collections and began to work towards improving the

¹ Miroslav Markovic: Professor of Classics at the University of Illinois, 1959(?)–1989.

situation there with the idea to making a museum eventually, which became the Spurlock and which we're now in the course of talking about.

VF: And so if you—if you'll allow me to ask— what state did you originally find the World Heritage Museum in? Or was it just nonexistent, pretty much?

JD: Oh no, it was—it had a new director, Georgette Meredith, who became Georgette Meredith van Buitenen² when she married later, and she was working to improve the museum as well. She was a cultural anthropologist and was working more with the anthropology collections and didn't know much about the ancient. And so she was working towards improving it. And then we had a whole history of ups and downs with the museum project until finally the up of the Spurlock.

VF: Great, thank you.

JB: Sorry, do you mind, Georgette Meredith van...?

JD: Buitenen. B U I T E N E N.

JB: OK, thank you.

JD: He was at the University of Chicago and a Sanskrit scholar and worked on the Mahabharata and did a huge translation of it in English. Into English from Sanskrit.³

VF: So our next question is about getting into the Spurlock—we kind of got into that a little bit already—but to recap the evolution of the Spurlock real fast and get a general timeline. So we know, it started as a World Heritage Museum, but we would like to know when it became the Spurlock, what the major milestones were. You could be as lengthy or short in this as you want.

JD: The World Heritage Museum was a somewhat new thing when I got here. Because Oscar Dodson⁴ is the one that went around the world, he raised money from alumni. He was the first real director. Before, it was simply the European Museum and the Classical Museum and the departments ran it usually with a graduate student. And maybe, or maybe not, one of the secretaries would be delegated to run it as well. And so he was the first sort of professional.

He ran his museum claim, was running a money bank, for a, a money museum, sorry, for a bank and it was, I guess, called the Money Bank or something like that 'cause that's what I remember. Anyway, he did that in Detroit and then, for whatever reason, came here as the first director and he joined the two museums to become the World Heritage Museum, which then when he retired, van Buitenen, Georgette Meredith, took over. That was her name when she was director at first. Oh! Going on, then: what happened, for years we had a museum committee, consisting of

² Georgette Meredith van Buitenen: Director of the World Heritage Museum, 1973-1981.

³ Johannes Adrianus Bernardus (J.A.B.) van Buitenen, professor of Sanskrit and Indic Studies at the University of Chicago, 1957-1979

⁴ Oscar Dodson: Oscar Dodson: Rear Admiral, United States Navy; Assistant Professor UIUC 1957-1959; President of the American Numismatic Society 1957-1961; Director of the World Heritage Museum 1966-1973.

the major departments involved: classics, history, art history, architecture, etc. Sometimes people from other departments, but those were the main constituent ones, trying to work towards a museum. Our initial plan was to put it in what was the football field next to the Krannert Art Museum, because the collections are roughly parallel in the Old World; in the more modern period, Renaissance on, the Krannert is obviously the outstanding one for Fine Arts and the, what became the Spurlock or the World Heritage Museum, had all the good anthropological and historical collections that fit with that. And coupled with the Anthropology Department makes a—very good—full collection of that, but instead what happened when we did get the money, finally, for the Spurlock, it later became most sensible for a variety of reasons to close the Natural History Museum and combine its collections with Spurlock with, with some of Anthro's.

VF: And around what year was that?

JD: Oh dear, I don't have my... OK. I think the museum opened in 2002, but it was in the late 90s and it was all during the 80s and 90s that this was going on.

VF: Sure, yeah. Just to get a general time frame of when Spurlock becomes a thing.

JD: Yeah, I think the museum opened in 2002, so, we were built, we closed the World Heritage Museum in order to do an inventory—computerized—of all collections, at least in the end of the 1990s. I don't remember how many years it ended up closed before we opened the new museum, at this time.

VF: Ok interesting.

JB: I have a question about the collections before they were gathered together into the World Heritage Museum. Where were they? If you know, where were they stored or housed and were they stored on campus in the department buildings? Or did they have a separate location?

JD: Well, they were in what was the 4th floor of Lincoln Hall, which covered much of the 4th floor and eventually covered all of the 4th floor. But initially when I first came there was a series of offices that faculty had on the 4th floor as well, but eventually those were all joined with the museum, but each museum had a section of galleries, the European Museum, and the Classics Museum, and for a while there was an Oriental Museum which was, also, in some of the rooms on the 4th floor. And storage was in what we call pigeon dropping rooms because the pigeons could get in that were up on the 4th floor. These are little attic rooms off to the side and they would get in and make messes, in raising their young pigeons in those rooms and that was one constant difficulty was...

VF: I can see that being a problem.

JD: ...getting the pigeons out, yeah. And of course, they're full of germs and bugs and everything else which is not good for the collections, but the collections were all scattered in these storage

rooms. It was all there on the 4th floor with some plaster casts still around the campus from the original collection in the 19th century, by the 1st President.

JB: OK. And then I wanted to follow up. So, you said that it obviously took a while to get the funds together to make the Spurlock and combine these collections and create the new museum. What sort of things were done for fund raising, were there... was the university involved in trying to raise funds? Were there any people who were instrumental in getting money together?

JD: Yes, when Georgette van Buitenen retired, we were able to replace her with a director, Barbara Bohen⁵, who was extremely active in not only building the museum collections, but also in fund raising and she got and kept the LAS and campus administration as well as the university administration interested and helping with the events and we had, by having events at the museum, openings of new galleries, constant adding to things so that she could have public events that then would bring interest, and she started a number of adjunct organizations to help raise funds for the museum. So she was a chief fundraiser for this, along with help from the fundraisers connected with LAS and the campus fundraisers and they got the Spurlock family interested in donating towards a world cultures museum. The unfortunate thing there is that the university has a rule which normally is a very good rule when they get a bequest, they immediately sell the stock. The unfortunate thing was that it was Eli Lilly money, and it was at the very lowest point when we had the Prozac scare of the stock that they then sold. We would have had a much bigger museum and a much bigger plot if that had waited just a little while, 'cause the stock rose way out. But normally that rule is very good. This time it wasn't, so we had to cut off a great deal of what we had hoped for with the amount of money that the original bequest would have brought had it been sold. Not when the Lilly money and stocks were at their lowest ebb ever.

VF: Right. Well, to piggyback off of this a little bit, who contributed to the fund raising? Are we talking private donors of families like Spurlock or lots of little people or...?

JD: Yeh, lots of little people, lots of town folk here. A number of people in Chicago, alumni—the alumni who had some interest in, either having the UI have a Museum of world cultures or having a kind of cultural experience for the students, that they remembered the old World Heritage Museum. They'd often say they wandered in up to the 4th floor of Lincoln Hall looking for a place to study and were astounded that this thing was. A number of these people, they, becoming older and having made a certain amount, felt that they could donate, and the museum, as a result, we have this very nice program for educational purposes for the undergrads and grads thanks to it, as well as for the other area fund raising was for teaching in the schools 'cause the museum had a big program, as the World Heritage Museum, of working with the local schools and having them in for tours. And that was a big place for smaller donor fundraising as well.

VF: Interesting, thank you. OK, so to move on a little bit here, we'll get back to the museums of course a little later, or I guess the museum directly, but what exactly was your role like throughout this whole time with the museum?

⁵ Barbara Bohen: Director of the World Heritage Museum, 1981-1987; professor at Vanderbilt, 1987-2002; Renaissance Society of America President, 1996-98.

JD: Well, because I was teaching classical archaeology...

VF: Right.

JD: ...once I, which was quite quick, I realized it was a perfect place for teaching classes and for projects and papers and so on, of the more advanced students, and actually even introductory students. So I had my students do, for their paper topics, the things in the museum and that led to more and more things being done with the museum.

VF: Good idea. We should do that now.

JD: Yeah, we still do to some extent.

JB: We do.

JD: I'm not quite sure what, but I know that a number of people have had me in to lead their classes around the museum and so on since I've retired. So I'm still doing some of...

VF: Yeah, I like the idea though of using, or having students write papers about, objects that they choose in the museum.

JD: Yeah, and other times, for instance, when Scanlan was teaching the big myth class, I would arrange for the sections to get a museum myth tour, and so on, for one of the section meetings they would meet in the museum.

JB: So you've been still leading groups around the museum since you've retired.

JD: Yeah, off and on. Whenever someone is interested in having me do so, yes.

JB: Have you continued doing any other work for, for the museum since you retired? I mean, besides, obviously, you're talking to us now, which is of help, thank you.

JD: Whenever they have something that they want me to look at or have an opinion on or so on, I'll come in and, again, that is off and on, whenever there's something that comes in that they need advice on, or some discussion and I'll talk with various members of the staff on various things and various research projects.

VF: OK, so that basically completes all of our initial questions, and if it's OK we can move on to stuff about the museums and what is in the museums specifically, and initially what we had wanted to do was kind of, have you guys walk around the museums, and stuff like that. Obviously, that's not possible now, so we're going to do our best here.⁶ Perhaps in the future, we could set something else up, but, this, with the situation now, this is what we're doing. So to start with, just as a broad sweep here: are there any interesting acquisitions or

⁶ Owing to the Covid Pandemic, at the time

early acquisitions that you could tell us about? That really got you going or interested you or anything?

JD: Well, one of the interesting things when I got here was discovering the cast collection, both, some of them in what was then the auditorium. It's now the Foellinger auditorium, upper gallery, some... there were statues there as well as in the World Heritage Museum in plaster casts, some of them brought by the 1st president, and those are great teaching devices because they're actually some of the best preserved ancient marbles or bronze statues from antiquity, plaster casts of them, so they can see what they, students can see what they actually looked like, and so that was a great discovery. And this was a period when plaster casts were frowned upon, so for instance, when the Krannert Art Museum was getting ready to do the opening of the new museum, they wanted only original works of art, which there is some argument for, and this was the period when that was the dominant consensus, so they had a wine and cheese party with great hammers and axes and chopped up the plaster casts and then that became... these were part of the ancient collection as well as some added to that—by ancient I mean the original collection in 18th collected in 1867 by the 1st President—so they got rid of the casts except for the Ghiberti Doors, which are still in the original architecture building and you can see them there and very few others, which... the others eventually became part of the Spurlock collection. But we had lost sort of half that had been used mostly for drawing classes, because they're... another good way to learn to do art is to draw and to draw or paint the plaster casts—not paint them, the cast themselves, I mean, to paint images of the cast—the students were doing that, and so the Classical museum or what became the World Heritage and Museum and finally the Spurlock was the only source on campus. Then once they had broken up all the ancient casts for the opening of the... in celebration of the opening of the Krannert art museum, so that was a low point for that, but the plaster casts became again treasured because unless you can go to the Louvre or to Italy or to Greece or to other museums in Europe—The British Museum and the German Museum, etc. and others—you don't have a chance to see these, but the plaster casts give you a real sense of the size and form of what these objects are that you will study in either your art history class or your archaeology class.

JB: It's a very sort of Renaissance artist technique to do studies of old masterpieces.

VF: Yes, that's the...

JD: Same with saving classic texts.

JB: So I had a question just to clarify: some, not all, of the plaster casts were destroyed at the party.

JD: No, just most of almost all of the ones of that were in the collections of the College of Art and Design.

JB: OK.

JD: But the ones that were in College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the undeclared ones, such as those in the Foellinger Auditorium and other places that they were around campus were eventually collected in the Spurlock.

JB: Got it, thank you.

VF: That's pretty wild that that was able to happen even.

JD: It was not unusual. It happened at a lot of universities and the ones that, like us, did preserve some or all of their collections are very happy that they did now. It's a minority. There aren't that many places around the country. And now they're unaffordable to buy, so you can't replicate them. So a good teaching collection was lost as a result of that.

VF: And around when did this happen?

JD: Shortly before the Krannert Art Museum opened in the early 60s, 1960s, I think. But you know you'd have to look up when the Krannert Art Museum opened. But it was like the time before the Spurlock opened, when we had to get things together and plan the museum. Or the Spurlock. Alan Weller⁷ was the director as well as Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts who gathered together the collections for the Krannert Art Museum and he did a great job that really got some good treasures there as well, but he's not responsible for that party.

VF: Interesting. In terms of actually acquiring these things, I mean, I know we said that the plasters were mostly from, the original 1867 collection.

JD: Well, not mostly, just some. A number had gotten broken over the years and then thrown away for that. I shouldn't say it's all from the party, but they added, Classics, added to them over the years where relevant for teaching and had them on the 4th floor of Lincoln Hall.

VF: OK, and then in terms of just acquiring everything else: I mean, don't go through every item, line by line, of course, but how does, how does that work exactly, do they...?

JD: Well Rich Miller...

VF: ...What, where do we get them?

JD: Originally it was normal to buy antiquities and so the classical archaeologist or whoever was interested in classical archaeology such as the founder of the Classics department, Oldfather⁸, whom I'm sure you've heard of by now. He got, added things to the collection. They would purchase them from dealers, or purchase them on their travels, and then donate them when they got back. So that's how some of the things in the museum... Oldfather himself is the one who

⁷ Alan Weller: UIUC 1947-1997; Professor of History of Art 1947-1997, Art Department chair 1948-1954, Dean of College of Fine and Applied Arts 1954-1971, Krannert Art Museum Director 1961-1963.

⁸ William Abbott Oldfather: Associate Professor of Classics (1909-1915), Professor (1915-1945), Head/Chairman of the Classics Department (1926-45), and Curator of the classical museum at the University of Illinois. Created the Classics Library at UIUC.

collected, when he was doing research in the Greek countryside, our fragment of an emancipation decree in the museum, and he published it, and then gave it to the classical museum so, and I mentioned that specifically, 'cause that may be the only emancipation decree in the Western Hemisphere. It's the only identified one at this point. There are some fragments of other Greek inscriptions that haven't been identified. But that little, tiny fragment is important. And then, given the political circumstances today of Black Lives Matter, emancipation decrees, and so on become something of special importance in the US.

JB: I also know that we have in the Spurlock collection some *Oxyrhynchus papyri*? And I believe that, well, how? How did we? How did we acquire... those if you know?

JD: Yeah, that's an interesting part too. Under a British guy whose first name is, I don't remember, but Petrie is his last name.⁹ He went to both what was then Palestine, now Israel, and that area as well as Egypt to excavate, to prove the Bible and he became a great Egyptologist and established this British society called the Egyptian Exploration Society in the 19th century. And in order to raise funds, they would—and they had in a legal agreement, as most states did, that had foreign excavation of partage, where part would stay in the country and part would go out and they would agree with the archaeological authorities of the country which half stayed and which half went—but what the Egyptian Exploration Society did, if you joined it, they would give you certain items that were their part of the excavation results. And here because it was the classical museum they were interested in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, Hellenistic and Roman after Alexander the Great. And so they selected mostly those objects, although they did a fair selection of the earlier Bronze Age and Iron Age Egyptian so that we do have a complete range, but they emphasize those, and that's where the *Oxyrhynchus papyri* came in, and a number of the other later Egyptian things, since the Classics Department contributed to the Egyptian Exploration Society.

VF: In terms of some of the more big ticket items, for instance, sarcophagi or the big suit of armor in the medieval section, I assume that those aren't, the same process by which you just go somewhere and decide “I'm going to buy a suit of armor”.

JD: Ah, it's again. The university and the Museum and American universities, as opposed to European ones, profited by the end of the First World War and the hyperinflation that hit Germany thereafter, where many places, including universities, sold their collections. This happened in France too, so we got a big collection of French Prehistoric as well as Historic items. So these things could be purchased, as did a bunch of the wealthy American tycoons, for their own private collections, which eventually became part of the Metropolitan Museum and the Art Institute in Chicago, for instance: both have big armor collections, but our armor was a minor... collector of those things.

VF: Right. Interesting.

JD: ...And there was a parallel European museum run by the history department. I mostly know the classics, but there were other professors in the history department who were interested in European material, and so that's where the European part came from.

⁹ Flinders Petrie (1853-1942): British archaeologist and Egyptologist.

VF: OK, cool. Let's see, OK, we kind of already covered the next question by accident, incidentally. So, how far into or into today, I suppose, were we using this method of essentially just buying things from the antiquities market as opposed to buying them from museums or in more ways that we consider more moral today?

JD: The antiquities market is a very bad thing because it encourages looters to take the objects out of their archaeological environment and so. And as the university, we do not approve of that. The purchasing that was done was done when it was legal, or purchasing legal items that have a provenance, that can be shown to allow it to be sold on the market so. Recently acquisitions are coming from donors who have acquired the things themselves and we try to trace, as best we can, the provenance so that they are legal. UNESCO made a convention in the United Nations, that objects after 1972 can't be sold legally or acquired legally, and the university does follow that, religiously.

VF: Right, this idea... the idea that the antiquities market is a really bad thing, that we all follow today. I mean when... I'm wondering if people thought the same way say in the 60s or earlier, or later, or when this idea came about that yeah, we probably shouldn't be trading on the market.

JD: It was slow coming in, but people acquired the sense of that in the 60s, if not earlier.

JB: This is almost the same question. But as far as strategies of acquiring objects. It sounds like, probably very early on, there are sort of haphazard different ways of getting things. Is there, is there something of a system now for getting things from donors? Do we ask for certain types of objects? How would one go about donating to the to the Spurlock Museum?

JD: People who have things and are interested in donating them will contact the museum, and generally there's an acquisitions committee that will meet with them and look at the objects and decide if it is something that is appropriate to be added to the museum 'cause the other end of things: there's a lot of things that aren't necessarily appropriate, and having it in the museum collection means that it is going to have to be cared for and researched. And dealt with. And that is expensive too, requiring staff and space to store it. So that... there is a process of continuing to acquire things, and there are things that the museum would like. In my terms one of the things I would like is one of the chariot scenes from the Parthenon Frieze. We have the largest collection of the Parthenon Frieze in the Western Hemisphere. But we don't have one of the chariot scenes, and I'd like to get one from... a plaster cast of one. These are all plaster casts that I'm talking about, not originals. The originals are in Athens with a few... with other pieces in the British Museum. But I'd like to get a plaster cast of one of their chariot slabs of the Parthenon Frieze. That's the only main type of frieze piece that we don't have. But there are other things like that—that's my own personal—but each person of course has their own individual wants for the museum that would make the collections more complete and part of being a world cultures museum.

It's the whole world that's involved. So there are areas where we're not in the museum as strong as others. One is Mexico. We have good South American collections, but not much for Mexico, but with the Great Mexican American population in the United States we should have more Mexican things if that ever happens. Again, we're not out buying things and we couldn't legally.

VF: Right.

JB: I think if Vaughn wanted to add anything to the to the Spurlock, it would be a, probably a cast of the Siphnian treasury.

VF: Yeah, that would be nice.

JD: There are casts of that, but...

VF: I have a big print out on the side of my office with it over the top of it, but it's in the resolution that I had to take with my camera so parts of it don't even show up. So for the ancient collections: have there been any effects, good or bad, for having them split up between the Spurlock or the Krannert, or in the Krannert? And presumably this is better than what it was before, of course, being split up into a billion different collections.

JD: Well, the Greek vases, or the Greek pottery, are the one that suffers the most because the very best artistic pieces are in the Krannert Art Museum, but the other ends for the early stuff, the Bronze Age and the post classical stuff are in the Spurlock, as well as more near Eastern stuff and more Egyptian stuff and more later early European stuff and Byzantine stuff. So there's a much more in depth collection between the two museums put together, but it doesn't really matter. You can go to both and see them, see the selections on display. And for scholarly purposes, you can put them together. We in fact did that with the ancient part of the ancient vase collection in something called the Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum and a fascicle of that was done. But the second fascicle has never been done. The rest of the collections together, so the Krannert art and the Spurlock can be seen together in the fascicle of the Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum. But it would have been nice, of course to display them, the best ones together. That's not going to happen.

VF: Right.

JD: At this point.

VF: And you say that's not going to happen, right? Is there any one major inhibitor? That would just stop us from just taking the collection and shoving them together or I mean, this is probably a simple question I just don't know.

JD: Right. It's just the tradition at the University, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences having the Spurlock stuff and the College of Fine and Applied Arts, having the Krannert stuff. And yes, they could be brought together, and there's certainly mutual cooperation all the time between the two museums. It's not as if they're fighting battles or anything, they agree, get together, when they do exhibits, the stuff in one can be displayed in the other and vice versa, so it's

congenial. It's just physically a little... had it happened in the 70s and 80s and over the last century, it would have been very nice, but it didn't.

VF: Of course. Right. Let's see, where were we? To move on a little bit, this one is a little bit more open ended and the answer can be no, I suppose, but are there any particular pieces or works that have had research done on them that have good stories about them?

JD: Oh quite a number there... it's mostly uncovering things. For instance we had a graduate student in our history [department] who is now director of the Douglas County Museum here in Illinois and she did her PhD thesis on the Merovingian artifacts in... that came to the museum after the First World War in large purchase from the European Museum of what's called the Baudin Collection, who were father and son, head of the European... of the French Prehistoric Society and mostly dug... dug Paleolithic caves, but they also acquired half of a set of Merovingian objects and she was able, by going to France, to the region, the small little area of France where this excavation took place, and discovered the director of the local museum and find that the individual who dug them up had did very fine drawings of the graves as they were uncovered in the 19th century, and thus was able to place the objects in the Spurlock collection into its original grave and the other half of the collection is still in France, so that was one of the, in my view, one of the great discoveries...

VF: That's wonderful.

JD: ...of the... and there's a lot of that yet to be done. Some has been done, some putting things back into their original context has been done, but there's much more to do. That's one of the research areas that's open both in the classical collection and in the European collection.

VF: Yeah, I noticed when I was looking into Spurlock collections that lots of the coins we had had students who had just come in and did a dissertation on just like a billion coins. The coin acquisitions from some decade. But I didn't know that was happening for other objects too, so that's...

JD: We had three master's theses on the very large Roman collection. We happen to have one of the largest collections of Roman Republican denarii in the country, and when I got here and discovered that we began working with the Roman. And my regret is I had, when I retired, never found someone to do a master's thesis on the Greek coins because it would be nice to publish the three Master's theses, which covers the vast majority of the Roman coins, and the Greek coins together. We did have a history bachelor's thesis by Kim Sheahan¹⁰ done on the Greek coins, but it didn't cover all of them, it just covered some of the best and we need the rest of them to be filled in at some point and then all three published together, but that's... the student just who was interested just never came around. So that is one of my regrets that we never got that done.

VF: Sure, interesting. Yeah, this one, the next one, we sort of just answered here, but I guess we could elaborate more on any more. Are there any pieces or collections in the

¹⁰ Kim Sheahan Sanford: Assistant Director of Education for the Spurlock Museum, 2010-Present.

classics collection that you feel needed or still need more attention? We just talked about coins, of course, but...

JD: Well, there's still even with the CVA¹¹, here's one of the stories of the past: when they acquired a number of these ancient vases from collections that were sold after the First World War and we had ancient blueprints of some of the acquisitions and a number of the pieces lost their provenance as a result of various mishandling through the periods of time they were in the museum. But these blueprints existed up until just before we closed. But, Sarah Whisman, who did the CVA, could never find them, so she did them without these sales catalogs, so there is no more provenance to a number of the—we use the CVA as the abbreviation for corpus Vasorum Antiquorum. So when I say CVA that's what I mean—And when she did the research for the CVA, she didn't have that information. Now all these old catalogs have been scanned by the Getty and supposedly—I've never gone to the research—are available for online study so that we could compare the objects that are now listed as unknown provenance in the Spurlock collection, with the ones from those original sales catalogs that the university acquired and thus put them back into their original European collection, and what was known when it was written in the sales catalog about their provenance. And that would be a very valuable project.

JB: Any other pieces or collections that could use some investigating?

JD: Ah, quite a number. Wayne Pitard did the great work with the cylinder seals. Well, there's another collection, from the Oriental Museum time, of scale weights. Really beautiful tiny objects that were made for weighing gold and silver in semi-precious stones. Or just stone others of them. But most in semi-precious stone. They're absolutely exquisite tiny artifacts and I just hope that they are now classified as scale weights. Because when we first encountered them, we didn't know what they were and so gave them the sort of “what is it” category of a ritual object that archaeologists love to apply to things in the initial cataloguing of them, but I hope they've been moved to scale weights and they're out of Mesopotamia. He found the background of a great number of the cylinder seals, and it would be nice to do that with these scale weights if it hasn't been done. I don't think it has, but it might have been.

JB: I was taught to read “for ritual use” as “for nobody knows”.

JD: Right! A “What's it?” as we call them.

JB: Let's see. So if we had colleagues or future students who wanted to try their hand at research on these sort of things, what would be the process of getting involved? Obviously contact the museum in some way.

JD: Yeah, the museum is very interested in legitimate research on the objects in its collection by someone who knows what they are and would like to explore more and even, often, undergraduate papers are valuable. Even if they aren't worth publishing itself, but the scholarly publication is also worthwhile.

¹¹ Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum.

VF: Yeah, and this is just so we can let other students in our department and also undergrads know that yeah, these things are available for you to work on. We have a whole museum down the road, right? 'Cause, I guess a lot of people in our department or the new students don't even know that they're allowed to do this so.

JD: Yeah, they are allowed, and they're encouraged.

VF: Right. And who do you think is the best person or where... what is the best position to contact? If you wanted to do these things, how would get your foot in the door?

JD: In a way, it's to address the director of the museum. And then there's a person in charge of collections. And a person in charge of keeping the records, the registrar and all three of them would be involved. But start with the director.

VF: Just finishing up some notes here. Cool. Do you have any general advice then? Just about how... things you should do if you wanted to start work on these things other than everything we've said, and this could be no, you've pretty much said everything.

JD: It is, if you are interested, get involved with the museum first at a lower level to see what you're interested in. If it will continue and before you get too involved in the actual research and get a sense of what the museum does. And here we're now in a problem with the pandemic that the museum is not open, you can't go in just as we were talking, we'd like to go around the cases and talk about things and do that. And so.

VF: Right. OK, so to move on a little bit, we'd like to talk a little bit about personnel, staffing and what kinds of people are at the museums and whatnot if that's OK, but do you need a break or anything?

JD: Oh no, I'm fine, let's keep going for now.

VF: Great. great. Yeah, this is our pretty much our last category so. We won't keep you too much longer. But, so in terms of personnel and staff, a really broad question: What sort of people worked in the museums? I mean, we have you and Wayne¹², but...?

JD: A variety. Because in a... with the World Cultures Museum you get people from all sorts of things. All sorts of interests. Whether South America, Mexico, Europe, Africa today and so on. The other is more educational purposes because the museum to keep going has to be seen as an educational function on campus. We are a campus museum and therefore we have to do things that are valuable for the university's job of teaching and research. Though we were talking mostly about the research end, but the teaching end is important too. And one of the purposes when we were planning the Spurlock Museum was to get the whole collection online, which we were pretty much able to do. The second was to have the collections online as well as in the museum accessible, via the computer, via the web so that they could be looked at and studied.

¹² Wayne Pitard

One—with this closed down—one of the things that would be ready Wayne¹³ prepared—and they're very good—a number of instructional items that you can push the button when you're in the gallery and view about the cylinder seals that give you all sorts of aspects of the cylinder seals. Getting that kind of program online would be very useful for all the classes that now have to be... now no longer in class or in the museum.

VF: Right.

JD: ...so students could take that section if you want, but do more of those while the museum is closed and doing more... using the collections to educate.

VF: Right. And, once again, pretty broad, but to piggyback off this, how... how do people end up working at the museum? Are they picked by current museum members or they... do they just kind of fall in your lap or walk in and say hey I want to do... I want to work for the museum? Or is it a mix?

JD: Well, yeah, students can come in and apply for a job. They want to, probably, have you show some interest or whatever: Why you're there as opposed to taking tickets at the football games or something, but yes, graduate student jobs and undergraduate student jobs, work study jobs, are quite frequent, and they're a good introduction to the museum. And then as you get more interested there is museums courses that are offered, and that you can take too. There's a museum studies course.

VF: Right, I think it's happening next semester. I think Ashley had spoken about that, but anyway. In terms of people like yourself or scholars who are working in the museum. The question would be: we kind of already went over this for you, do people normally ask you to do things or did people normally ask you to come in in your early years or did you just kind of do it?

JD: Both, that is, at first it was just looking...

VF: Right.

JD: ...Around the museum, and asking someone how did they get this or that thing and then “oh we have this in the collection, could you give us an opinion on it?” And so then I'd look at it and it just accelerates from there.

VF: Right. Joe, you want to take the next one?

JB: Yeah, actually I'm gonna kind of stay on this topic. Before it was the Spurlock...

VF: Yeah, go for it.

¹³ Wayne Pitard

JB: ...and even before it was the one World Heritage Museum, and there were different collections, if you know how were those staffed or attended to? I mean, I think you mentioned earlier, there was a museum committee of the heads of different departments. But were there people whose job were devoted to the collection? Or was it more ad hoc? Sort of a professor from this department will also look after...

JD: Essentially, it was assigned to one of the professors in history or in... and in classics, and eventually it just became one of the professors in classics who was in charge of the museum. The Classics department was on Lincoln Hall's third floor, just under the 4th floor where the museum was, so all you had to do was climb the stairs and you were in the museum.

JB: OK. And continuing with this, we wanted to ask a couple questions about the history of who was in charge of the museums at different points and what sort of things they brought to the museum. Milestones of development or acquisition or the missions of the museums changing, that sort of thing, and this is a very broad question, I realize.

JD: Now essentially it was at seen as an adjunct to the History department and the Classics Department. So the professors that were interested in the areas are the ones that built the collections, and so the one that jumps to mind was a great archaeologist, George Melonas, who did a great deal for Greek prehistory, he came here as an assistant professor originally, and then later went on to George Washington University in Saint Louis. But he, while he was here, he added a number of prehistoric Greek—they they weren't Greek, they were Mycenaean or whatever they called themselves, but many of them spoke to Greek language—but also Neolithic. He wrote his dissertation on Neolithic Greece and some of... he gave some of the pottery from his dissertation as well as from his excavations that he was doing at the time to the museum. So they formed the basis of the prehistoric collections in the Spurlock now. So that's how it happened. It was the interest of the faculty, essentially, and when you had a faculty member who was interested, then you've got things as well as research related to them added to the museum.

VF: And in terms of the directors of the museums: How do they come into their positions? How do they come about? Is it just kind of like, the guy who's interested, or woman who's interested the most ends up as the director?

JD: Well, it hasn't been that long since there was a director involved with the museum. It was always just run by the 2 departments and whichever faculty in the departments were interested. In LAS the Classics and the History department were the prime movers until one of the deans decided to hire Oscar Dodson as the director of what then became the World Heritage Museum. And that was, I think, more to give him a position at the university, and I don't know quite exactly anything about, since I wasn't here yet, about the politics or why that happened, but it was in one sense a good thing for the university because he opened up what became the World Heritage Museum and added the rest of the world. If we just kept as European and Classical, it would not have flown today. The museum would have long ceased to exist by being a world cultures museum, the Spurlock today. So he deserves credit for that, although I will also add he deserves a good deal of lack of credit for some of the things that he did while director. He was not a professional museum person even though he liked to put himself forward as that.

VF: Yeah, actually that's a perfect segue. Our next question is about Oscar Dodson. We wanted to know some of the things he did, good or bad, how he came in. Because we know you guys had mentioned him when we were talking a few months back. Just seems like an interesting character.

JD: He was an interesting character. His interest was in promoting football and promoting sports, and that's how he worked his way into his academic position, was as a sports promoter. As I said earlier, he was... his claim to being a museum director was in charge of this money museum in Detroit as adjunct to a bank. And he was a coin collector, had a large collection which he kept promising he would give and it never materialized. It would have been nice. It was ancient Greek and Roman. Ah, and he wasn't a very good curator of the museum's coin collection. He had thrown them all together in a big box. And that's what I discovered when I got here with and it was a big box of coins that were all deteriorating and in bad condition. Many of them had been put in early plastic, which deteriorates and gums up the whole coin and then corrodes the coin with a lot of pollutants in it as far as the ancient bronze is concerned, so he also... the museum was carefully arranged with labels as to what things were and where they came from, but he liked to put things together and make new exhibits and so on. But because he was not a professional museum person, he didn't keep records, and so that's why so much of the collection is unknown in its sources of origin, because the tickets were all thrown away or lost, and the objects didn't have numbers on them. Which is a very important thing to always number your collection right on the objects, so if it moves around, you at least have something to trace back what it is and where it comes from. So he's good and bad. Good for promoting the World Heritage Museum and a wider world collection. Bad for handling the collections and preserving them.

VF: Sure, yeah, and I think you mentioned too that he was doing some interesting things with trading parts of our collections away for other new incoming things.

JD: Yeah he would, in order to promote his trips around the world, to buy things, and at least he went to odd places and they had for sale in their gift shops things that are authentic, although some of the things he bought are just tourists items, but he got many good things. I have to say I spend a lot of time detracting(?) him because of what he did to mess up the museum and it... clearing up his messes is a real nightmare, but he did some good things. He raised funds by doing what the Egyptian Exploration Society did in the middle of the 19th century of offering people artifacts, if they would donate. And so when Barbara Bohlen went to a garage sale here once, she discovered a number of objects from the World Heritage Museum that were on sale at this garage sale and was able to buy them back. So that's thanks to Oscar Dodson.

VF: Boy oh boy. Imagine the... my family garage sales a lot. Imagine the looks upon finding museum materials in a garage sale.

JD: Well, you do sometimes, this is not...

VF: Yeah, yeah.

JD: ...not necessarily, as his, right out of the museum, but museum worthy objects that have just been neglected.

VF: Let's see. So you'll notice a pattern of broad questions here, but, in what way does the museum's history—And probably, we're looking for more of the modern history 'cause we know of some of the older history—but how does the museum's history and the personnel intersect with the Classics Department? And we've talked about this already quite a bit, but might as well get the rest out if there is any?

JD: Well, the Classics department—or the Archaeology program—makes good use of the museum and still today, and as the museum expands and changes its exhibits for—exhibits aren't ever completely static. You have to change and adapt to the way things are viewed with each passing phase of development—so the Classics department will be important as we modify the current classical exhibits, as well as the students coming to the museum.

VF: Right, and do you find that perhaps with new faculty members in the Classics department you end up with new acquisitions or new focuses in the museum?

JD: Sometimes, yeah.

VF: Based on their interests.

JD: But it depends on an individual faculty member and what their research aims are and when they're more object oriented, they end up in the museum. When they're more text oriented, they will end up in the library.

Mrs. Dengate: And they all might be in the Metropolitan in New York City.

JB: We've kind of already asked that question...¹⁴

VF: ...asked, yeah, I mean to shore that one up I was thinking... so our next question is, what kinds of graduate students have done work at the Spurlock? We already talked about that, but is there, in addition to the coin collections, in addition to the Merovingian artifacts, are there any other big ticket graduate work? Or is there any other big ticket graduate work that's been done at the museum that we should talk about, or, that we haven't really mentioned?

JD: There's more, but I'm just, it's just not jumping into my brain at the moment.

VF: Sure, that's totally fine.

JD: I'll think about it, but yeah, there's a number of areas—and I'm just working from the classics side—now they're from the rest of the world, so to speak.

¹⁴ Joe is looking down at our question list here.

VF: Right. Sure, yeah. Joe, you want to take our last question here?

JB: Yeah, sure. So our last question is behind the scenes at the Spurlock. What's the work that's always being done to make sure that the museum continues existing and is able to provide the service that it does to the campus? There's obviously a lot of work done all the time, and if you could just give us a brief peek into that side of things, we're interested to hear.

JD: Yeah, it's... there's a great deal that's done for the educational purposes, so handling both elementary school and high school classes as well as university classes, arranging tours and then arranging various museum events that can fundraise or bring in the broader community. So museum events such as lectures, and other sorts of public events, opening new exhibits, and this is constant and ongoing, and the staff is really marvelous in trying to keep up with all the possibilities and all the events that are going on.

JB: And then a little bit of a follow up. We've talked a little bit about how the museum obviously has to respond to the current situation of pandemic. No one can go in, and it's possible that that you don't know anything about this, but, obviously the museum must be trying to do something about that. If you know anything I would... we'd be interested to learn.

JD: Well, one of the things I suggested earlier was making virtual tours through the Museum of a variety of sorts. The other is they're working strongly on getting the records up to date since there's a little respite with visitors. They are working on records and getting the museum collections in order, preserving them in ways that they may not have had time to do when the museum was running full tilt.

JB: Yeah, I guess a lot of people's jobs are now a little bit different, if they can't perform the service that they used to be able to perform they switch [*inaudible, perhaps "tasks" or "roles"*].

JD: Right. But they still have a lot to do.

VF: Of course, of course, and I assume too there's a very fair amount—a generous amount—of keeping these things from deteriorating behind the scenes and that they have to keep going even now that nobody is coming into the museum.

JD: Right. The stuff doesn't stop weathering—aging—just because the museum is closed and the preservation has to go on and conservation as needed.

VF: Well, those are all the questions in general we have. Joe, do you have anything else you'd like to know?

JB: Obviously there's so much.

VF: Well yeah, but...

JB: At this moment right now I'd just like to say that we would really enjoy being able to contact you again and more about more questions as they come up, and we're obviously still formulating questions, learning things about the museums that we didn't know before, and so we would obviously like the opportunity to follow up with you and ask more questions in the future.

JD: Sure, and especially if it's ever able to open again, I'll be happy to go around with both of you too.

JB: Yeah, that we were very much looking forward to that.

VF: Yeah, that was a major part. Is there anything left that you were excited to talk about before the call that we didn't really go over or anything like that?

JD: I don't think so. I made a list, I've got a list of things and we seem to...

VF: OK, great.

JD: ...have covered all my lists.

VF: OK, great, that means the questions were OK then.

JD: Yeah, oh, very good.

JB: Great.

JD: Good luck with your project.

VF: Yeah, thank you. It is super helpful very. I mean I think we all agree it's really important to map out and record all these things so, yeah.

JD: Glad you're doing it.

VF: With that we'll leave you for lunch. Thank you very much. We appreciate you being here and we will talk soon.

JD: OK, I'll push the leave button now, and thanks it was a good experience.

VF: Alright, thank you.

JB: Thank you.