

University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives**Interviewee: Wayne Pitard****Interviewers: Joe Baronovic and Vaughn Fenton****Length: 02:39:58****07/15/2020**

Vaughn Fenton: So for the first group of questions, we just kind of have, basic, initial questions about you and how you came to the university and stuff. Our first question is how you actually came to your career. Essentially, how did you get into classics and museum studies and all of that good stuff?

Wayne Pitard: OK. Well I was born and raised in Knoxville, TN. Went to the University of Tennessee as an undergraduate. There I had originally planned to go into film, but I got captured by general education courses that I took on religion. I did a course on the religions of the ancient Near East that introduced me to the ancient Mesopotamian epic poems and Egyptian literature and such, and I just got absolutely fascinated by that. I had grown up in church, in a relatively conservative church, but had read the Bible on my own at age 18 and discovered that it was much more interesting than I'd ever been led to believe in church and. So I was interested in biblical studies. I got into some religion classes on Hebrew Bible and just got absolutely fascinated by it and its connection, Israel's connections to the ancient near east. So I wound up double majoring in religion and history at the University of Tennessee. I began taking ancient languages, took biblical Hebrew and classical Greek and then with my Hebrew Bible professor I took Ugaritic, which is the Canaanite dialect, the dialect of the only surviving library of Canaanite religious texts. And then with my ancient history professor I took Akkadian, which was the ancient Mesopotamian language. The primary one, now, for most of its existence. And by the time I finished, I was interested in going in that direction instead of film. So I applied to several places, including Harvard. Got into Harvard's near Eastern languages and civilizations program, and seven years later emerged with a PhD in ancient near Eastern languages and civilizations with focus on Hebrew Bible, Biblical Hebrew, Archaeology of Syria-Palestine and Akkadian. So I went on a number of excavations in Israel, Syria and Jordan. And so, in 1983, in the spring of 1983 during the time when I was looking for a job, David Peterson, the Hebrew Bible professor at the University of Illinois, whom I had met at an archaeological excavation in Jordan in 1979, David Peterson got a fairly late job offer that took him away from the University of Illinois, so Gary Portin and Bill Shadel, two of the of the full professors, called me up said that David had mentioned me as a possible replacement—temporary replacement—for him at the university and they wanted to offer me a two year visiting appointment, a visiting assistant professorship at the university. I had a couple of other job offerings, asked my professors, “which one of these I should do? Should I do the tenure tracks, at a couple of other places, or this one?” and they all said: “Do the temporary one at University of Illinois since they say it will become a... you'll be able to apply for a full time position there. That's the place you want to be.” So I took the two year temporary appointment. They liked me enough that I got the permanent tenure track position in 1985. And so I spent my entire career until I retired in 2016 as professor in the Department of Religion, Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient near Eastern Religions. In 2006... Yeah, we'll maybe get into that story in a separate thing, but, though...

VF: Yeah, you can head off in any direction you want. We'll just work it in as we go, so don't worry.

WP: Oh OK. OK, well when I arrived in 1983 the World Heritage Museum existed on the 4th floor of Lincoln Hall. And I was very quickly introduced to the museum and Barbara Bohlen, the director over there. I didn't do very much at the museum during that time because my area of expertise was the Levant, you know, Syria, Palestine, that area biblical studies, Canaanite material from Syria, and the collection, and ancient near east that they have—they had, over there, and we still have—was Mesopotamia and Egypt. So it was the two important but peripheral areas. So I didn't, I wasn't overly involved with the with the museum. I began... I have a colleague who is at University of Southern California who has been a leader in developing methodologies for photographing ancient inscriptions and I had gotten involved with him while I was graduate student at Harvard. I continued to be involved with him and in the mid-80s I began going to Syria or in some cases Paris to the Louvre, where some of the tablets discovered at Ugarit in Syria are located, and trying to photograph them in a way that made the signs more easy to read and such and I trained out at University of Southern California with cameras and stuff. But then before I left on my expeditions, I would go to the World Heritage Museum and they would pull out some clay tablets and I would practice on the clay tablets there. I knew which tablets were important tablets, so I would always practice on really significant ones that they didn't actually have out on display. They wouldn't let me take tablets out of the display cases just for practice. Anyway, so I do have very nice early photographs of a couple of famous tablets.

But, I had good vibes about the museum back there in the 80s, was particularly involved in the 90s and then of course the museum moved over to the Spurlock. And I did some talks for the Spurlock, we also did some... I just happened to be involved in some things that... oh yeah, sort of getting ahead of myself. When they moved, when they got the money to do the new building, they of course were going to completely redo the exhibits. And they asked me to be the curator—So this would be in the late 90s—asked me to be the curator of the Mesopotamian and early writing sections of the Middle Eastern exhibit, Middle Eastern cultures gallery. And so I did that, and that's how I got to know the main staff people there, including of course Doug Brewer¹, the director, but also, people like Kim Sheahan and Tandy Lacey² and Christa Deacy-Quinn³ and Beth Watkins⁴. You know almost all the people that were at the museum when I became director of the museum were already at the museum or just beginning during the time I was involved with doing the curator work. And that proved to be a really enjoyable thing because, as a lover of the artifacts there, my thought was to put all sorts of things out. And of course they had a very limited space. And you know, I would have been happy to put out 1000 of the of the clay tablets, you know, and such and Tandy and Kim, very, very kindly, suggested that maybe the average museum goer would not be that interested in seeing. And so they worked really, really carefully

¹ Doug Brewer: University of Illinois, 1984-2012; professor, University of Illinois, 1997-2012; assistant director Museum Natural History, 1991-1992; associate director Museum Natural History, 1992-1997; director World Heritage Museum and Natural History Museum, 1997-2007.

² Ann Tandy Lacy: Director of Education at the Spurlock Museum, 2010-2015.

³ Christa Deacy-Quinn: Senior Collections Manager at the Spurlock, 1998-present.

⁴ Beth Watkins: Current Manager of Exhibit Interpretation and Visitor Experience at the Spurlock Museum.

with me. I'd write this message—description of a thing, and then they would expertly pare it down to what made sense and such. And it was a really great experience that they were just, were very... they were very tolerant of me as we worked our way through these things and they really got things organized the way they should be, so it was my role as curator in organizing those two cases at the museum that I, you know, got to know the people who would be the foundation of the Spurlock Museum. And so from that point on we had friendly communications, and I came over and did a few things at the museum, you know, talking about some of the artifacts. Yeah, we... there were just a lot of fun connections that I developed there.

But finally, in 2006 my colleague at Southern University of Southern California Bruce Zuckerman and his team had gone to a conference where they had seen a camera setup that was a digital camera setup using a traditional 4 by 5 inch camera. So a large format camera but with a digital progressive scan back to it that you could set up on a pedestal and then have it rotate 360 degrees and give you a 360 degree panoramic shot in very high resolution. And they looked at that, and they said: "Wouldn't it be great if you could keep the camera still and put something like a cylinder seal, a cylindrical stone cylinder that has carvings around its barrel? If you could put that on a rotating stand, and then have the stand rotate and take a 360 degree picture of a cylindrical surface?" And the people at bright light—the company that had developed it—said: "oh, we'd be happy to work on that" and so they developed a program to make that work. Bruce and his team made a set up to see if it worked. But his problem was that the University of Southern California does not have a collection of cylinder seals. But he had visited here a number of times, and it just so happens that the World Heritage Museum and then the Spurlock, has a collection of 59 ancient Mesopotamian cylinder seals dating from between 3200 and about 450 BCE. And so he said: "Why don't we see if we could use your collection as our test case to see if making this kind of high resolution 360 degree imaging tells us enough to make it worth pursuing as a way to do it?" So I went over to the Spurlock and talked with Doug Brewer and Christa Deacy-Quinn, the collections manager, about it, and they agreed that it sounded really interesting. At that time there was only one such camera around and that was at USC. So we packed up the set of cylinder seals, I took three students in tow with me—3 undergraduates—to work on this project as a summer project for credit, and off we went to the University of Southern California with our seals. And it was an astonishing success.

It was amazing what you could see by doing this kind of thing. And so it was a big enough success that I was able to write a proposal to the research board to finance the construction of a camera setup so that we could do it in more careful ways here at the Spurlock. And so that worked out, we got that. We got another type of a camera system that my USC colleagues were also working on called a polynomial texture mapping Dome that we could use for flat objects that had relief in them, and it's a whole other thing... Anyway, so we got all this stuff, that we were able to put into the Spurlock as its home. And that happened in 2006, and so I was spending a lot of time over at the museum. One afternoon in early spring semester, 2007, Doug Brewer said to me: "I'm going to be taking a sabbatical in the fall. How would you like to be the acting director of the Spurlock while I'm gone?" And I said "Oh, that sounds like fun. Yeah, I'll give that a try." So I, in the fall of 2007, I—who had no real museum experience, certainly no museum administrative experience, no museum studies courses, nothing except for my tiny bit of curatorship for the Mesopotamia in early writing cases—became the acting director of the Spurlock Museum. So that was fall of 2007, in December of 2007.

VF: Lucky break!

WP: Yeah. The Dean called me—Ruth Watkins—called me and she said “Douglas has taken another job. He's taken a job as head of distance learning—online learning—for us and so he's not coming back to the Spurlock, would you mind remaining on as interim director until we can find a full time director?” Well, my experience of the fall semester there had been an absolute hoot. It was great. The staff knew exactly what they were doing, and so I didn't have to deal with big issues and such and I could go in and take a look at all these great artifacts and grounded things that I hadn't had a chance to see before, and so it was really great, so I said “sure, I'll stay on as interim till you find somebody.” And so in February, Ruth called me into her office and said “You seem to be doing a really good job at this. Everybody over there seems to like you and such, so I think I'll just appoint you as head of the Spurlock.” So through this extraordinary fluke, without any real experience, I became director of the Spurlock Museum.

This is why it's good to get this stuff down. I'm trying to think... but it may have been Sarah Mangelsdorf who was still dean at that time rather than Ruth Watkins. I'll have to look at the dates. Anyway, 'cause I worked—in my 9 years as director—I worked with five different Deans of College of Liberal Arts. Actually only four, but we had two that were the same person, just staggered. So now I can't remember exactly who was there. But anyway, the point is that the Dean appointed me without a national search. And we can talk a bit more about why that was possible in 2007/2008, when it was no longer possible when I was replaced after retiring in 2016. But anyway, so I became the full director in mid semester of 2007. And then I was director all the way through to 2016 and... maybe I'll stop there and let you ask other questions and then let's see where those questions take me.

VF: Yeah, so we just plowed right on through the second question. So yeah, you knocked that out of the park.

WP: OK.

VF: As some sort of clarification: so, when you were curating both the Egyptian and cylinder seals (and everything) exhibit, and when you were acting as director, were you doing these in parallel to also being... holding your full professorship?

WP: Well, yes, I remained a professor in the Department of Religion. However, during the 2007/2008 year. Uh, maybe even into 2000... fall of 2008, I taught one course. It was sort of a one course release kind of thing. Well, what became clear to me and it also had already been clear to Doug Brewer who had gotten a full release from teaching was that I couldn't do a good job as director—which kept me constantly busy—and teach courses. And so they released me, maybe after the fall of 2008—I feel like I taught through the fall of 2008. After that they released me from teaching, so I remained a member of the department and I was involved in promotions and tenure committee and the Graduate Studies Committee and some other committees there and such, but I did not teach after the fall of 2008.

VF: Sure that makes sense. I was considering that that would be an awful lot of workload to do.

WP: Yes, yes. My salary was actually paid as professor with a... I think I was paid 7000 dollars a year to be director on top of my professorial salary.

VF: A little bit tangentially: so, I was stricken by just how many languages you learned in undergrad. And I'm just curious, did you have any hand in starting up some of those languages here too? 'Cause I know we teach, Akkadian, I believe, or Hittite.

WP: Yeah, Hittite has just spent... last year, was it last year? maybe it's two years ago, Hittite began to be taught.

VF: Right.

WP: And I know that the fellow doing that is also planning on doing Akkadian here, but, what I taught while I was in the Department of Religion... we were, particularly early on, we were a very small department and our great strength and the reason we were protected from budget cuts and faculty cuts and things like that during bad years in the 80s and 90s was in part because we found our value in teaching Gen Ed courses. And so I taught Gen Ed courses, one Gen Ed course a semester, which was half my teaching load, and then for several years I taught Biblical Hebrew, a four semester sequence in Biblical Hebrew as my other course. Eventually we cut that back so I could teach other things as well. Because of that, I did... I taught Aramaic to some people, some students, as an independent study. What was clear is biblical Hebrew could draw a reasonable number of people, but because I was Hebrew Bible and there was no one else doing Hebrew Bible in the department 'cause we did, essentially the religions of the world. So we had Hinduism and Islam and Judaism and Christianity and Daoism, you know and Buddhism and Hinduism and things like that. So I was the only one in ancient near Eastern religions. So there just wasn't really a place to do those languages. I would have loved to have done Ugaritic, which became one of my big areas and such, but never was able to do that.

VF: Interesting, yeah, I was just really curious about that, I suppose. So, Joe, do you want to ask a question?

Joe Baronovic: Yeah I had a question sort of backing up to the creation of the Spurlock. Do you remember anything of note of the effort to move the collection and the fund raising to get a new building and to create this new institution?

WP: Most of what I know about that is secondhand, because I wasn't specifically involved in the moving. I was not involved in the fund raising that began in the early 90s there. So what I know, or at least what I think I know is stuff that I've gotten secondhand, so I'm not sure how much you would want me to tell my secondhand impressions of how it all happened.

JB: I think we're still fairly interested to find out, and we also have Jim Dengate as another resource to get more answers or to supplement your answers. It is probably inevitable that

we will contact you at some point, hoping to follow up and ask some follow up questions after we've learned a bit more about all the things that are going on here.

WP: Yep, OK. Well what I can tell you about that is basically the following and that is that, to go back a little bit, the museums in Lincoln Hall—what became the World Heritage Museum—those museums from the depression period onward had essentially lost the interest and much substantial support from the university. You know, everything of course largely shut down during the Depression and World War II—after World War II—the museum was looked at as old fashioned because of the plaster casts that were a major component of it and so it, even after World War II, was given a fairly minimal budget. And then things got worse in the late 50s, when the Krannerts decided to fund an Art Museum. And so the Krannert Art Museum came online in 1961 and was the darling Museum, a brand new building, beautiful, well-constructed with all of its wonderful great galleries and such, and made it a stark contrast to the somewhat cobwebby feel of the 4th floor of Lincoln Hall in the 1960s and following. So, there had been there very little new acquisitions in the 50s, 60s, into the 70s and in 1979 they had actually hired full time directors beginning in 1966, and had two: Oscar Dodson and then Meredith Baxter. That right? Yeah, one of the things about being retired for four years is that your mind for names turns to mush.

VF: My mind already does that for names.

WP: Yep, but anyway... I actually had my little thing here... let me just see if I spot her name. Oh, Georgette Meredith, that's it. Yeah, Georgette Meredith. So they had had two full time directors, but still not a huge amount of money, but by 1979 I think the budget was \$78,000 a year for the World Heritage Museum. But in 1979 the acting Dean was trying to deal with \$1,000,000 debt in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and one thing that he thought he could do was simply shut down the World Heritage Museum and save that \$78,000. And that would be a nice chunk of the debt. So in order to do that, he had to get a committee together to go do an official evaluation of the museum. And Jim Dengate was part of that, and Eugene Giles, I think, and Richard Mitchell from the history department I think were the three. Anyway they went—oh, I guess also, John Bateman, the chair of the Classics Department, was part of that—and they went and did the evaluation and then wrote a letter, arguing that the collection was valuable, not just from an educational point of view, but that, for example, the plaster casts that were seen as worthless by so many people actually preserved elements of these statues that no longer exist on the originals. They pointed out that the museum held plaster casts of some ancient linear B tablets from Crete, that the originals had disappeared, and so these plaster casts were the only three dimensional preservation of some of the important tablets and things, but then that the tablet collection was valuable that several important things among...in the classical collection and the European collection and such. And so they made this huge argument that the museum ought to actually be supported rather than dispersed.

So the Dean withdrew the idea of closing the museum, but he cut the budget by 2/3 and said, OK, you guys figure out how to run this thing on \$23,000 a year. So they did actually figure it out. They used the \$23,000 to hire—part of that—to hire Barbara Bohlen to become the new director. And then they got 5 departments to offer 1/3 research assistantships in their departments for students to come and work at the museum. And that allowed them to stay open and those

departments did it for a decade, which gives you an idea of how important classics, art history... continuing education, there's one other department for gauge.⁵ which gives you an idea of how important classics, art, history, continuing education, there's one other department, I've forgotten which.

But anyway, so Barbara Bohen came in. And I know she had her faults in many ways, but one of the things that made her a great director and an absolutely critical director of the museum was that she was extraordinarily good at putting together interesting exhibits and at fund raising, and she became the primary fundraiser for getting a new museum. She brought in most of the people who endowed the various galleries in the museum as it stands today and she was the one that brought in William Spurlock, who gave the vast amount of money to build the building. And so she really was the the basic one to get the money to build the building. So that is my understanding. I know that is the case because I also had occasion to see all of the endowment agreements and such and she was the one that got the most of them. Douglas was able to bring in some important ones as well, but the critical ones for getting the museum up and going were done by Barbara. And so she has this extremely important role in the preservation of the museum. And the thing is that, in 1979 and 80 they were trying to simply close the museum. By 1983 she had permission to raise funds for a whole new building for the museum, so that's an **astonishing** turn around.

So that's what I am aware of. I'll mention to you and you might want to think about this: Barbara Bohen still is alive.⁶ She lives in Florida, and I think she is the only—Besides Doug Brewer and I—she is the only surviving director of the museum. She will have a very different perspective on things from what a lot of us have, and such. But, I think it would be really good for you guys to see if you could arrange a meeting with her.

VF: We'll look into it, that's a great idea.

WP: 'Cause she's a really remarkable person. You know she had very serious conflicts with a lot of her staff. And she had some good ideas for exhibits, she had some not so great ideas for exhibits. And she rubbed a lot of people the wrong way and such, but the fact is that... I don't know if there was... I suppose there might have been other people who could have pulled things out the way she did, but the fact is that they got her in here and she transformed the possibilities for World Heritage Museum and brought in those critical donations. It's really fantastic. So anyway, she deserves a place of honor, among the history of the museum. It was interesting that, after she was removed from the position, 1997, during the next decade and a half actually, until we did our 2011 Centennial exhibit at the museum, she essentially disappeared from the official histories of the museum. I, in working on the timeline... I gave you a copy of that timeline didn't I? Did I give you my..?⁷

VF: I don't think we have one, but it would be great to see.

⁵ The last sentence is corrupted, but the sense is clear: the museum and its collections are important to the departments.

⁶ Barbara Bohen passed away shortly after this interview in late 2019. After the Spurlock, she went on to a very distinguished career outside of UIUC at Vanderbilt University.

⁷ Prof. Wayne Pitard's timeline is included in the project materials.

WP: Oh yeah, if I haven't, I can easily send it to you, but I wrote up—it's not polished...

VF: That's OK.

WP: ...by any means, but it is a timeline that I've got of the history of the museum as I had come up with it.

VF: That would be absurdly helpful.

WP: Alright, well yeah, it's 10 pages, single spaced, so it's pretty...

VF: Even better!

WP: So that's what I know about the fund raising. I know primarily from Christa Deacy-Quinn who was in charge of boxing up all of the materials to move them from the 4th floor of Lincoln Hall to the museum. That it was a monumental challenge to move about 50,000 artifacts from upstairs, most of them not kept in kinds of crates that you could simply say OK, we'll just pick these up and take. So it was a massive undertaking that took them a very long time.

I know that Douglas Brewer was not overly enthused about bringing plaster casts over to the museum because plaster casts went out of fashion in museums in the late 1920s into the 30s and stayed out of fashion until the 1980s, when scholars began to realize that plaster casts actually preserved what the statues looked like when the original molds for those casts were made, and many of those molds were made in the 18th and 19th centuries. And so the casts are in many cases extremely valuable for preserving things that no longer exist on the originals. But some museum people still don't like casts and don't want them. And Douglas wasn't all that interested in them, but Christa loved the casts. And so he said “well, I won't give you any additional funding to crate the casts and bring them over. But if you really want to do so, I have no objections.” And so in fact she crated them all up and got them over and preserved a lot. There would have been a few that would have been in the museum anyway, but she preserved all of them and...

VF: Good thing she was able to do that.

WP: ...yeah, yeah, and she's another person that you oughta think about: she and Kim Sheahan over at the museum have been there since the days of the World Heritage Museum. And therefore have this long 20 odd year history with the museum and they have wonderful stories you know about the olden days and also would have wonderful stories to tell you about the two directors before our current director who'd been there, Douglas Brewer and me. And I have offered them money to say only nice things about me so.

JB: Can I actually ask you to spell Kim Sheahan's name?

WP: S H E A H A N.

JB: Thank you.

WP: Yeah, she is in the education department there and then Christa Deacy-Quinn is the collections manager. And both have been there from time immemorial and have been great pillars of the museum that you ought to talk to about this stuff.

VF: We had mentioned from Jim that they had had a cast breaking party at some point?

WP: Yes, so the university... there were two great cast collections that mostly no longer exist that came into the university: one was collection of casts that was part of the 1st Art Museum on campus. 1874. Casts were bought by the president of the university, John Milton Gregory⁸, the 1st President of the University, because he insisted that the university needed to have an Art Museum and he raised the money himself, went to Paris, bought a set of plaster casts between 16 full size plaster casts and 42 reduced size and a bunch of busts and things like that, and brought them over and opened an Art Museum. January 1st of 1875, which at the time that it opened was the largest Art Museum West of the Allegheny Mountains and was opened four years before the Art Institute in Chicago. And it was a sensation. An extraordinary reaction to it. It played a significant role in convincing members of the state legislature that the university should be more than just an agriculture and engineering trade school. And it was part of John Milton Gregory's great achievement to insist from the beginning of his presidency that this was going to be a comprehensive university and not just an A&M kind of deal.

And so it was really important. Eventually, though—it was on the third floor, University Hall, the one big university building at the time—they needed the museum space for classrooms eventually in 1897. So they moved—and by then the Museum had no new things in it so it was getting kind of old—it to the basement of Altgeld which was the Library building at the time and then from Altgeld in 1897 they were put in the basement. Nobody went to see them. They were dispersed across campus in 1908 and part of them went into the collection of the art department. And in the early... in the late 20s, early 30s, what is Temple Buell⁹ Gallery in the architecture building—the huge room in the architecture building for displays and such—that became the hall of casts for the art department, and they put a huge number of plaster casts of great sculptures there, and that became the place where people learned how to draw people.

In 1936, Lorado Taft, the great artist, who started here at the University of Illinois, died, and he had in his possession several hundred plaster casts—full sized plaster casts—of all these huge and beautiful sculptures. And his widow sold them to the University for a very small amount of money, on the hopes that they would build a museum to house these plaster casts. Well, that museum never materialized. They put some of the plaster casts in the hall of casts by 1938. And then the rest of them were... some of them were stored under the seats at Memorial Stadium, some of them were stored in the basement of Lincoln Hall. The ones under the seats at Memorial Stadium decayed and were eventually worthless.

⁸ John Milton Gregory: First President of UIUC, then Illinois Industrial University, 1867-1880.

⁹ Temple Hoyne Buell: Born 1895, died 1990. Graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and successful architect. The gallery is named in honor of his philanthropy.

VF: That sounds like a bad idea.

WP: Yes, it was. It was. But a few were kept by the art department, but eventually they didn't need them anymore, but they didn't know particularly what to do with them. So during the 50s and apparently into the early 60s, when someone got a PhD in art history, there'd be a party for the new PhDs and they would bring out one of the plaster casts and allow the new PhD to demolish it with a sledgehammer. Nobody in the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s for the most part, nobody saw any value to plaster casts. They closed down the hall of casts in 1948 because they started using live models for students to learn how to draw the body. And fortunately, there was a graduate student in charge of the Museum of Classical Archaeology and Art, on the 4th floor of Lincoln Hall, who found out that they were about to take out the stuff and destroy most of it, and asked the dean of FAA for permission to go and save some of them—bring some of them to the classical museum—and among those that he did, were three of the four plaster casts—full sized plaster casts—that we have from the Gregory collection. He saved all but one of the four surviving full scale plaster casts of the Gregory Collection and that includes the Laocoön and his sons¹⁰—that is the first thing you see when you go into the classical gallery at the Spurlock—and the beautiful statue of Artemis, that is when you're standing at the Laocoön, if you turn right and look down the gallery, she's standing right in the middle of the floor and she is this spectacular thing too. And he saved those along with a bunch of ancient Egyptian statues. All the Egyptian casts in the Egyptian section of the Middle Eastern gallery. All of those were saved by this graduate student Alexander Schulz¹¹. Yeah, so now I can't remember even what the question was we were talking about.

VF: It was barely even a question. It was as I mentioned, that we had heard talk of these plaster casts...

WP: Oh that's right. I thought this had nothing to do with the museum. That had to do with the art department.

VF: Sure, yeah. Well, that is just wild to me.

WP: I know. Yep, but that just indicates how little regard there was. Now... the Museum of Natural History in New York,¹² you know, actually the museum at Oxford has a full room dedicated to their collection of plaster casts. The Victoria and Albert has two massive halls of theirs, you know it has actually become just fine and such to have plaster casts. And we have several that are extremely important because they preserve materials that no longer exist.

VF: To close out this part of the questions or, this first section here: So other than what we're doing right now, what kind of work do you still do with the museum, now that you've retired?

¹⁰ Original in the Vatican Museum.

¹¹ Alexander Schulz, graduate student in the Department of Classics, 1945-1950.

¹² This sentence is corrupted.

WP: Yeah, yeah since I retired I haven't done as much as I really want to, but I've got plans for the future. I didn't really do much the first year because I wanted to give Elizabeth a chance to get herself settled in, so that actually took up two years 'cause we had an interim for the first year after I was gone, but I have done a little bit of fund raising work still for them. I have and will be doing a little bit of writing for the magazine and for blogs for them. The big thing is that I started work on publishing the cylinder seal and stamp seal—the ancient Mesopotamian cylinder and stamp seal—collection. And I got about two-thirds or three-quarters of the way through my research on it when I got sidetracked on a completely different topic after I retired.

VF: As is so often the way.

WP: Toward the end of my time at the museum, I was doing some curatorial work for an exhibit on the university sesquicentennial, and I'd volunteered to do some work on the early history of the museum. And I came across a remarkable fella—I may have told you about this—at the university, by the name of John J. Bird, who was appointed to the Illinois Industrial University Board of trustees in 1873. So, six years after it was founded. And turns out that he's unusual for a whole series of reasons, including the fact that he was only 29 years old when he was made a trustee, he had no higher education, and most significantly, he was African American. And, here he was appointed to the museum, and in fact, he was a Pullman Porter on the Illinois Central Railroad, and yet he was appointed by Governor Beverage in 1873 to be on the board of trustees. And so when I was thinking about people that we ought to know about... I've read Quentin Solberg's early history of the... actually, that's probably where I discovered him. He had a paragraph about him and didn't know... had not been able to find much about him, but certainly found that striking and interesting and somewhat mysterious. And I discovered that there were no biographies of John Bird. There were no encyclopedia articles about John Bird, know “who's who” of major African Americans, things like that. He just seemed to be lost. And so I thought: “Well, here's somebody that we should talk about in our thing and I'll just start looking and see if I can find more information about him.”

Well, when I started looking for him, particularly reading newspapers from this town of Cairo, Illinois. I discovered he was really... I found all sorts of things fun. Turns out he was really important. In fact, he was probably the most prominent African American in post Civil-War Illinois, from central or southern Illinois for 3 decades after the war. And so I thought, well, I'll get this stuff and then I'll write an article about him, and people will know who he is, and I'll start gathering more stuff, more stuff, more stuff and more stuff. And I wound up with the book. I have, I have sent the book to Southern Illinois University Press; it has a good African American studies series where this would make sense since he's a Southern Illinois person. And everybody at the press loves it, so this week I think they're sending it out to two readers—outside readers—and if they like it then it will come out. So yeah, that has been my last four years. It's been a stunning education.

Because, you know, I didn't know anything about African American history in the post Civil War era, and certainly nothing about African American post Civil-War Illinois. And what I what I very quickly began to discover is that anything that you've learned about the way African Americans have been treated since the Civil War period, it's all much worse than I had imagined, you know, and being in the North did not change a lot of what was happening. Things are better

for African Americans in the North than in the South, but not much. Only a relative kind of thing, and by 1896 all the hope that there was that African Americans would be incorporated into American society had pretty much disappeared, and it all went backwards at that point. But anyway, it's just a fantastic change for me and a chance to get a whole new perspective on American history that I did not have before. So that project has been my main project, but now that I've finished it, I'm planning to go back and finish the Spurlock's collection of seals and get that published. And then the plaster casts. Need some work. It needs some restoration work. And so Christa and I will be trying to raise some grant money to get some people trained on how to do restoration work and then start working on our... I think we have 250 plaster casts, so we've got a lot to do.

VF: Yeah, that's quite a bit planned then. Well Joe, would you like to start on the next series? We can probably skip some of these. We'll go ahead and plow right in.

WP: OK.

JB: Yes! But first we've been recording for a bit over an hour now. If you need a break or anything please don't hesitate to ask for one.

WP: Yeah I am fine.

JB: OK.

WP: Yeah I'm fine to continue on for a while here. You are now discovering the great dangers of trying to interview me. You think you're going to spend an hour or so, but you are trapped now. Who knows when this will end?

VF: Not so bad to be trapped here from our point of view, so don't you worry.

WP: OK.

JB: So our next group of questions revolve around your memories and insights about specific objects and acquisitions. Our hope originally was that we would be in the museum looking at things while we had this conversation. But now we're sort of relying on your memory and your enthusiasm... I mean you were just talking about the the Mesopotamia and cylinder seals, so it seems like that would be a great place to start if you'd like to share.

WP: Yes, OK so. One of the great things about being director of the museum was that I could work... I could go into the galleries or I could go into the storage areas in the back, and look and see what objects there were that I thought were particularly interesting. And they didn't necessarily have to be in my area of expertise, but just things that I thought were really interesting. And then as director, I would assign myself to do research on those objects, and so I would, I would say: "Wayne you should do some research on John Bardeen's music box, the first transistorized device in the world." And so I said to myself: "yes. I'll be glad to do that. Thank you for the assignment." and so I would do research on a number of objects totally outside my

field of expertise. And so that was really fun. And so I wound up just falling in love with too many objects to go through in any kind of detail here.

But let me start with my favorite place. And that, of course, is the Mesopotamian section. And I will tell you of the really great stuff that we have there. So, cylinder seals: this collection of cylinder and stamp seals from ancient Mesopotamia. We have 93 cylinder and stamp seals; 83 of them were bought in 1918 by a fellow named Dr. Olmsted¹³, who was a history professor at the university and was named when he came in 1917 as the curator of the Oriental Museum, which was sort of the third museum up on the 4th floor of Lincoln Hall, smaller than the other two, focused on the ancient Near East. And he was hired to be both professor in the history department and the curator of the ancient Near Eastern Collection, because Edmund James, the president, was fascinated by the ancient Near East, and he originally wanted to start up an ancient near Eastern studies program at the university. But that never happened 'cause James got sick in 1919 and retired in 1920 and David Kinley, who replaced him, wasn't interested in the ancient Near East, so that was the end of the department. But anyway, so in Christmas—during the Christmas break, 1918—he was in New York and somebody told him about a collection that was for sale at an antiquities store in New York and he looked at them, he said “I sure would like to take them to the University of Illinois and look at them and make sure that I would want to buy these” and they said “sure, let's pack them up and you can take them with you.” It was a different day.

VF: Yeah, I was going to say, antiquities store, that's a new one.

WP: Yeah, I know so. So he brought them here, looked at them during 1918. Thought they were fantastic. They were \$2500; he got money from James to purchase them beyond his annual budget. So they came into the collection. They are this extraordinary collection. It was Minassian's Antiquities shop and the Minassians¹⁴ were super experts on antiquities and such. And so they had pulled this collection from a whole series of smaller purchases that they had made and they took the best ones, and they made it into this remarkable collection that has exemplars of the major types of motifs carved on these seals, from 3200 BC down to about 450, and so it was brilliant. But it was never published. He had hoped to publish it in the 20s, but he got involved in writing other big books. It was supposed to be published in the late 40s, early 50s by Edith Pirotta, one of the great cylinder seal authorities at Columbia University. She liked them and wanted to publish them in one of her series but something happened there too and she never did, but she looked at each one and made notes as to date and what the motif was about. And she had one of the Assyriologists at Yale take a look at the inscriptions and give us translations of the inscriptions on them, and she took them to the American Museum of Natural History and had them analyze what type of stone each seal was made from and so she sent all that information back when she sent the seals back, and so: whammo! There is this huge amount of great data that had never been published.

So when we started doing the 360 degrees cylinder seal book, I thought: “well.

¹³ Corrupted, but the last name is Olmstead.

¹⁴ Probably Kirkor Minassian, late 19th century – 1944, whose business was taken over by his daughter in 1945. Minassian was a famous antiquities collector and dealer from the Ottoman Empire (later, Turkey).

Maybe it would not be a bad idea to make use of Edith Pirotta's notes and try to get familiar enough with all of this stuff to maybe be able to update things that need to be updated since 1948, in terms of dates and understandings of motifs and things like that, and publish them." So I worked on that off and on while I was there, but I was usually a little too busy to do too much. But they are fantastic. There are some just extraordinarily beautiful seals, too many to individualize, but there are just remarkable seals from every period. And you know it is like, these are Tiffany seals. They include one that specifically in the inscription of it tells us that it belonged to a courtier—a member of the Royal Court—of King Samsu-iluna¹⁵, who was one of the Great Kings of Babylon. He was actually the son of the famous King Hammurabi, The Great Law-giver King of Babylon (Babylonia). And so just really interesting things, and they need to be published and such.

But I love them and I have personal favorites that I would have shown you if we'd been at the Museum, but they are significant. We got this great stamp seal from the Neo Babylonian period, 6th century BCE, that has a beautiful merman on it. Upper torso of a human and the body and tail of a fish. That's just remarkably modern looking and such. And then we just have... there's just so many great things in the Mesopotamian collection. We've got this beautiful little bowl—alabaster bowl—fragment that has an inscription of king Naram-Sin of Akkad¹⁶, one of the most famous and enduring kings of Mesopotamia, from about 2250 BCE. That's our oldest inscription that we have in the collection and it is from the time after he became the first Mesopotamian king to proclaim himself to be a God, and he proceeds his name on this bowl, with the sign that indicates that the name following is the name of a deity. And so, it's a wonderful piece, but we just have all these great individual pieces there that I just can't mention them all.

We have great clay tablets. We have a fragment of an early Sumerian epic. Sumer was the first great culture, the first urbanized culture in the world and the first great culture of Mesopotamia, had its own distinctive language that has no known relatives in the languages of the world. Had a number of epic poems about a great Sumerian king named Gilgamesh. And Gilgamesh, we have a tablet of about half of the first tablet of Gilgamesh and the land of the living—one of the one of the epic poems. Gilgamesh continued to be an important character, and in the succeeding culture they spoke a Semitic language called Akkadian, produced during the Old Babylonian period. An epic poem that used a lot of these earlier shorter Sumerian poems but created an overarching storyline that was new. And created the first genuinely universal and great piece of literature in history: The great Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh, that is just astonishing. So anyway, so it's nice for us to have one of the predecessor stories that that was actually incorporated into the Great Gilgamesh epic and and such.

In the history of writing section that I worked on, we also have a papyrus fragment from Egypt, from the city of Oxyrhynchus, that is the oldest surviving fragment of the New Testament book The letter of James in existence. And who would have expected that to be here in the corn field in central Illinois? But we got it in 1914 from the Egypt Exploration Society which had excavated the site. And we were one of the fortunate few who could purchase some papyri, and they sold us 29 fragments for \$250, and one of them was this fragment of James that the original

¹⁵ King of Babylon, 1750-1712 BCE (middle chronology), 1686-1648 BCE (short chronology).

¹⁶ Naram-Sin of Akkad: Ruler of the Akkadian Empire, 2254-2218 BCE (Middle Chronology).

publishers and editors of the papyrus had misdated to the mid 4th century when it turns out to have been from the early 2nd... from the late 2nd early 3rd century. That then was discovered in 1960 and all of a sudden we had the oldest surviving fragment of the letter of James in existence. And so I love it as well.

Well, there's a private letter that we have. That is, it's just a spectacular and very sweet letter from one fella to his brother, in which he asked the brother to watch out for a young woman whose parents... whose father has died and now she has neither mother nor father. And the fellow knows that there are people out there who don't have her best interests at heart and so asks his brother to take care that she doesn't get taken advantage of in this in this period and such, and it's a really, really sweet letter. And then he closes the letter by saying: "if you guys have any pickled fish, send me a jar" you know? And so yeah, this is it. It's just, it's great. And then, sends greetings from his wife, you know and himself to his brother's family and stuff. So it's just a really neat letter. Reminds you that 2,000 years ago people were essentially the same in most key ways and such.

Yeah, there are things that I love in our Egyptian collection. We got this painted pavement slab from the royal sanctuary, the Maru Aten, at the ancient city, known today as El Amarna, which was the capital of Egypt during the reign of the famous heretic Pharaoh, Akhenaten. And, it's a spectacularly beautiful piece that we're really fortunate to own. And we have our Egyptian mummy. It's a child mummy from the 3rd... about the 2nd century CE/AD from Egypt, from the Faiyum Oasis in Egypt. It is great, because scholars have found that it is very closely related to about eight other mummies that are known to exist in museums in various parts of the world. And so we know essentially where it came from, and probably some of the people that, whose mummies are elsewhere, were relatives in one way or another of this child. And so that's kind of neat. We did, in 2012 I think it was, we took them on over to Carle¹⁷ and did a really high quality CAT scan of it. And it showed us a lot. It did not show us, unfortunately, whether it's a boy or a girl. The child was about 8 years old and the pelvis, which might have given us a hint, had collapsed. This child died and it was a pretty good while before it was mummified, and so the body had already decayed a bit. Anyway, we still haven't been able to figure out whether it's a boy or a girl, but we have found out a lot about it and so that's also one of my favorites.

I love all sorts of things down in the classical gallery. The Laocoön plaster cast that comes from John Milton Gregory's original art gallery is one of my favorites, both because of its importance to the university and because of the importance to the art gallery and that whole story. But also because when it arrived from Paris it had been shattered into hundreds of pieces. Most of it was just broken into pieces and so President Gregory and a geology professor by the name of Don Carlos Taft¹⁸ decided to try to glue it all back together and then hire a fellow from Chicago to come down and put the final covering over it and do the final work to get it back into shape, but they would do the gluing of the pieces back together. And they started on it but shortly afterwards they realized that they needed more hands. So Don Carlos went home and called his 14 year old son, who had no idea what he wanted to do with his life, and according to some of his writings later on was on the verge of being decided a failure by his parents at that point 'cause

¹⁷ Carle Foundation Hospital in Urbana, Illinois.

¹⁸ Don Carlos Taft: Born 1827, died 1907. Lorado Taft's father and professor of Geology.

he seemed to have no real interests. He said to his young son, “Lorado, will you come and help us glue this cast back together?” So 14 year old Lorado Taft went over and began working on the plaster cast of Laocoön. And in putting it back together, he became really interested in sculpture. And when that was complete, and he did some work on a couple of other damaged pieces that arrived. He then became a student of the guy who was brought down from Chicago to do the finishing touches on the Laocoön and that became his first art teacher, and then he went on from there to become an art major at the University Illinois Industrial University. Then he went off to Paris, where he studied and then he came back. And then he became part of The Art Institute in Chicago and then he became one of the biggest names in sculpture in Illinois, in history, and that story you know, he's the sculptor of the Alma Mater Statue here and such...

JB: And some of the statues in front of the library and...

WP: Yes, that's correct. Yeah, those are his. There's a statue of an Illinois farmer in the main library on the main floor, down the hallway that goes onto Gregory. Yeah, he's well represented here. Lots of stuff at the Krannert Art Museum, but also all over Chicago. Some of the big public sculptures there, like the Fountain of Time in the area around the University of Chicago is his, the Big Black Hawk statue in Northern Illinois, that's his, and, just all sorts of things. The Art Institute has a number of his works and such as well. So a really important person for Illinois and for the University of Illinois, and he gets his start in his career because he put together the Laocoön plaster casts that we have on display in the Classics Department—or in the Classics gallery.

But I could go on and talk about the Parthenon Frieze plaster casts we have. Belongs to a set of molds that were made in 1787 and preserved 10 figures on the east Frieze that have since either been completely or heavily destroyed, and were destroyed before 1803, when Lord Elgin¹⁹ arrived and carted all the stuff off to the British Museum. And, we just have all sorts of great things.

The huge funerary jar from Apulia—the eastern coast of Italy, from the 4th century BCE—it's one of our showcase pieces, and we've got an official ID for jury service for an Athenian citizen—a bronze ID—there. That is fairly fascinating as well. We have a number of plaster cast busts of famous Greeks and Romans, several of which are also part of the original Gregory collection from 1874. And so it's great to have those. You know we have, like I mentioned, John Bardeen's music box, which was the first transistorized device. That was built specifically, so Bardeen and Brattain,²⁰ they—two real inventors of the of the transistor—could take these portable boxes to demonstrate what a transistor was, and of course he came to the University of Illinois in 1951 and brought his box with him. And from that time on, the Smithsonian kept trying to get him to give it to them. And he always said no, I want it to stay at the University of Illinois. And so in 1985 he gave it to the World Heritage Museum. And it has come to us. And it's just again an astonishing thing to have and such. But yeah, it just goes on and on. I have things I love all through the other galleries as well so.

¹⁹ Lord Elgin: Thomas Bruce, better known as Lord Elgin, 7th Earl of Elgin. Elgin was responsible for violently and illegally removing many pieces the Parthenon and transporting them back to England, where they remain today, thousands of miles away from their kin in Athens.

²⁰ John Bardeen, 1908-1991, Walter Brattain, 1902-1987, inventors of the transistor.

VF: In a lot of this we had hoped to be able, like we had said, to walk around and point out things. So it's great that we're going into a ton of detail here.

WP: OK yeah well. That may be something that we should think about doing at a later point, and I might be able to sort of pull up images that then I can actually point things out to you that and such. So we can think about how we might do that, for sure.

VF: For sure. You mentioned a bunch of different ways in which we've gotten these things, and we're just wondering are the general methods for acquisition? And if there are any acquisition strategies for getting things, or if they just kind of fall into your hands.

WP: Yeah, in the early days they had an acquisitions budget and they went out and specifically bought things, primarily things that they knew would be helpful for students for classes and such. After 1931, acquisition budgets disappeared and they never fully returned. You know, most of our budgets have been budgets to pay the salaries and some maintenance and things like that so over the past 40 years—40 or 50 years—the main way that we got new stuff was through donations. A lot of people connected to the university have been to all sorts of places and they brought back, things that they had in their collections. And then as they got older, they decided to give them to us, so a lot of material has come in that way. During my time in particular there got to be somewhat of an interesting addition to that. And that is that we got to be very well liked by some collectors who had no previous... no other connection with the university. And then the fact that we had slight connections with them. But when they decided that it was time to give their collections to a museum, they chose to give it to us. We got a spectacular 6000-piece collection of African materials that was given to us by a couple who had no real connection with the University of Illinois. They had sold things for sale in our museum shop from Africa for a number of years, had come to really like the museum and trust the way the museum handled its collections and such and so the Smithsonian Institute had offered to take their collection. And they had told us that they were thinking about us. They decided on us because they knew that we would take care of the collection, and they knew that we would actually put parts of it on display, whereas Smithsonian, you know, the vast majority of their stuff would disappear in their vast storage collection and such. So, we got that one.

We got other collections, because someone would have a friend or a relative who was at the University of Illinois and they would mention to that person they were trying to figure out what they're going to do with their collections, and that person would say: "well, you know, the university has a really great museum, the Spurlock. And so maybe you ought to talk to them 'cause your collection would be something that I'm sure they'd be interested in." And by Golly, several times we were. You know, we have to be very careful about collections that we accept because we follow very much the international rules on things, so people have to have documentation. We've been unable to accept a number of heartbreaking collections that may or may not have been brought out before the 1970 deadline on these things, but they could not produce evidence that it came out before then, and so we just couldn't take it, and so we, had to turn down some really good stuff, but we have also been able to accept stuff that was very carefully documented. We went through piece by piece through the materials from the couple giving us the African collection, to make sure that there was nothing there that could be

considered looted from graves and nothing there that was archaeological that did not have a valid exit license and such and it wasn't a huge amount, but I think there are just about 7000 pieces and I think we were able to take about 6200 of them. So yeah.

It's only occasionally that we had bought something specifically for an exhibit, that we have bought ourselves. And otherwise, it's been donations and we've had donors with really spectacular stuff. So, it's worked out quite well. We actually need more storage space. Our collection grew about 13,000 artifacts I think over the period that I was there. And we wound up with about 40,000 artifacts when we came over and we've moved some stuff out. We had a lot of archaeological materials from Native American excavations where somehow, we had actually accidentally sort of gotten a whole bunch of that stuff, while the Illinois State Archaeological Survey had gotten the other half. And so, when we found that it made more sense for them to have the whole thing. So, we removed actually several thousand artifacts over to the Illinois State Archaeological Survey. But we started with 40,000. We ended with about 53,000 or so by the time I retired in my 9 years, and I felt pretty good about that.

VF: Yeah, that's over 1000 artifacts per year.²¹

WP: Yeah, so we've done very well and continuing with queries from people that are not related to the university as such, but who have heard good things about how we take care of our artifacts.

JB: Vaughn and I have had the pleasure of going down to the basement of the Spurlock, and it's a magical place.

WP: Yes, it is. That is true. Did you get back into the storage rooms at all?

VF: Yeah, she—Christa-Leigh—took us through some of the cool stuff.

WP: Excellent, excellent. Yeah, it is really great when you get back there. Did you see the emperor's robes?

JB: Yeah, they're amazing.

WP: Yeah, now we were in China and we saw in the Beijing National Museum some of the emperor's robes on display there. And ours were certainly at the same level as the ones that were displayed there and, you know, some of this old stuff would not be allowed to be owned now. But we got those in the 30s, I think. Some of the stuff comes out because of political turmoil and such. And things like that, and would no longer be the exportable, legally exportable. Most of our antiquities come from collections from 1911 to 1930, essentially, and such. From well before the setting up of of the date lines for not accepting things and such, so it's all very interesting.

²¹ The speech on this part is corrupted but I have made an educated guess.

VF: In terms of the stuff in the basement or just in terms of everything: are there any pieces in the collection that you really think need more attention? I mean, I'm sure there are. But like I said, I'm particularly interested in things that don't get as much display in public.

WP: Yes, you know the galleries display about 4% of our collection. So 96% down in the basement. It doesn't mean that it's not used because, we bring out stuff for classes, for example, and for scholars, scholars come and look at our stuff all the time and things like that. There are a whole bunch of things that I would love to have on display out. We have a number of really fascinating Native American pieces that have not been on public display but are but are really gorgeous. Some of those we don't put on display because the people that we deal with among Native American tribes would prefer us not to. And Christa is very careful about things. We have the war club of Chief One Bowl. That and some other items are not supposed to be touched by women in Lakota society and so Christa has made sure that when they need to be moved or cleaned, they're done by men and not women. Some things need, when they are stored, to be stored in a certain direction. And so we make sure that it is always stored in the direction that is appropriate for the objects and such.

We would love to put the emperor's robes on display. But we don't have room. They were displayed on a mannequin—on mannequins—from the time they were received until the World Heritage Museum closed and what happened is that gravity eventually began to pull the sewing of the shoulders out and so the shoulders are too damaged to ever be replaced on a vertical kind of thing. So the only way we can display them now would be on a relatively flat place, but to do those robes that would be a huge spot so, we're gonna have to wait until we get enough donors to build. We have an expansion plan that would expand the Asia and the Americas galleries more than double their space heading out toward Gregory Street. If we eventually get donors who will make that possible, then those would probably come out. They're just all sorts of other classical things. There are a number of beautiful Papua New Guinea items that I think would be great to have out for people to see. Yeah, just all through there. We could do... I would like to put out more cylinder seals. We've got 15 out but there are some others that I would still like to do. Let people take a look at 'cause they're...²² Yeah so we could easily take everything down that we've got in the museum and then put up totally new stuff.

This African collection that we got. It's just fantastic and it virtually needs a gallery in itself. Which is also part of the expansion plan that we have. So if either one of you wants to give us \$10 million...

VF: I'll check My Piggy Bank.

WP: Yeah then we will start the process of expanding these things.

JB: Got that lying around somewhere.

VF: Couch cushions?

²² The audio is corrupted here.

WP: Yeah, let's see what loose change you have in your pockets and such. But, the museum is still loaded with additional stuff. Lots of stuff there would easily be worthy of gallery display.

VF: So our last bit to close out of this section here is: do you have any advice for students—grad students or undergrad—who might want to do work on collections or just help the museum in general?

WP: Well, this is something that that Elizabeth and the current team is most able to help with. We try to hire a large number of undergraduates for part time work, some work studies, some we have other monies that we use for hiring students. If you are interested in museums and collections, we have a jobs page on our website and we hire a lot: 50 to 60 students in good years. And so there's a lot. We have had a surprising number of students who spend their undergraduate days at our museum who go on into museum studies programs and then wind up in major museums around the world. So yeah. There is certainly that system. We do have volunteers—a lot of our volunteers are retired folks who come in and help and such—but younger volunteers. I know we started up a docent program where we trained students to give tours of the museum and for different age groups and such, and so that's something that is for people who would be interested in that. That's certainly there for people to do. So yeah, there are lots of opportunities. And a lot of them are paid opportunities.

VF: So that kind of segues us into our next question. Joe, would you like to kick us off here?

JB: Yeah, so our next questions are about the personnel and staff who have worked in the museums, and you've obviously talked a good deal about a lot of people who are heavily involved. But we also wanted to get down, especially before the Spurlock became the Spurlock: What sort of people were taking care of the collection? How were they chosen? Or hired? And like I said, you've already talked a bit about this. So feel free...

WP: Yeah, OK, I'm not sure that I can add too much, you know? I know, sort of the basic history of how this went. You know, up until 1962, it was two separate museums and the headship of the museums up until 1962 was a curatorship. They were called the curators of the museums. And they were professors usually in the Classics department—always in the Classics Department for the Classical Museum—and then either in the history department or German department or something like that for the Museum of European Cultures. And it was just an add on to the professor's full duties of teaching and research. And I don't know that they got any additional pay. They may have gotten a slight... oh, actually I do think that I remember looking at salary records and seeing that maybe they got \$25 a year or something like that in the 20s. Not an insignificant amount in the 20s. Anyway, but they were expected to do their full share of teaching and departmental things. And this was just one of them.

In 1962 there were people in the university that apparently did like the museum. They weren't able to get it huge amounts of money, but the budgets do start going up in the 60s and in 1962 a young Classics professor was hired so that... let's see it was at 1961 that he was hired as assistant Professor of classics, but 2/3 of his appointment was to be curator of the two museums

together. So they had decided that the museums were still distinct at that point, but they came under the curatorship of a single person and that was 2/3 of his appointment. And that's where it begins to move toward full time. When William Donovan²³ left in 1966, Dean Rogers²⁴ hired Oscar Dodson, who was a retired Rear Admiral, but also a numismatist—a collector and studier of coins—to become the first full time director of the museum. By that time it has merged into a single title of The Classical and European Culture Museum. It had merged into a single museum and so Dodson, then, whom I never met, took over the museum and was there from 66 to 71 I think? No, 73. And he's the one that got its name changed to the World Heritage Museum—hoping—that was not an accurate title of the museum in 1968, but it was aspirational. And they were able to pull together a little African exhibit and a little Asian exhibit. But the hope was that it would become, as it could grow, that it could grow to try to cover the cultures of the world.

I never met Georgette Meredith either, who was there from 73 to 82... 81 or 82. I guess 81. And she's the one that went through the loss of her job because they were trying to get rid of the museum at that point. I did get to know Barbara Bohlen. And really got to understand both why she was controversial and how her personality tended to rub some people the wrong way. But it tended to rub other people a very right way and like I said she was able to raise the vast majority of the money that led to the building of the Spurlock Museum. And during her days I really wasn't over there very much, and even when I was, I didn't see her all that much either. I worked with people. I do have vague memories of getting some of the collection of clay tablets out from Christa from her early years in the 90s, over there, but then didn't really start getting to know people until they asked me to be the curator for the Mesopotamian section and, so I can't really tell you much beyond what I've told you about Barbara.

I've actually become friends with her in the last few years. After she lost the job in 1997, she refused to ever come over to the Spurlock. But particularly once I worked my way through the history of the museum and realized her significant role and such. I wanted to get her over so she could see that her contribution was acknowledged in the 2011 exhibit. And it took me a long time to get her to come over. I didn't get her over during the Centennial, but eventually she came over. And I took her through the museum, and she had her own idea as to what the museum should be like, and that was completely jettisoned and Douglas and others had pulled, together this other one. So she didn't want to see it. But when she came, and I took her on a tour of it, when it was over, she said: “this is a wonderful museum. I'm glad you kept at me.” And so we actually have continued to stay in touch. And she lived here until about two or three years ago, as she'd been going back and forth to Florida, and so we'd have lunch every once in a while and such. And she harbors a lot of bitterness about how she was removed and it was... I do not understand exactly, what all was going on. When I talked with Doug Brewer about his tenure, for the exhibit, he was not ready to talk about all of that either and how he came into the position and what was going on. So what I know is that is that among the administration there was no doubt, for the most part, that that she needed to go. Beautiful cat there.²⁵

VF: Yep, this is Gaius.

²³ William Donovan: Curator of the Classical Museum and the Museum of European Cultures and professor at UIUC, 1961-1966.

²⁴ Possibly Robert W. Rogers, Dean of the college of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 1964-1979.

²⁵ At this point, Vaughn's cat Gaius wandered on screen.

WP: Oh, very good. Excellent. But at the same time it appears to me that it was handled rather clumsily.

VF: It sounds very political.

WP: Yeah, so anyway, I have long known of Jim's concerns about her as director. I know from talking with Christa and Kim that she was really not good with her staff and did not treat them well and such. And so she is a really interesting combination back and forth. I think she's mellowed a lot and I think she understands a lot more now about aspects of what was going on and such. But anyway, I think, like I said, it would be great for you to get her perspective on this. Just getting her sense of things, getting to see how her personality is and such. You know, I think it would just be a really helpful thing for people delving into the history of the museum to have recorded as much as she'd be willing to tell you, and I don't know whether she'd be willing to talk to you or not. We just have to give it a try.

VF: Sure it can't hurt to ask. We'll definitely look into it. Thank you.

WP: But the people that I worked with and the staff didn't change very much during my nine years there. They were all established. They all knew what they were doing, you know? The education people that I worked with were just terrific. Tandy Lacey was just a delightful and serious person, not the most organized in the world, but she made up for that with her heart and such. Kim Sheahan is this obsessive workhorse who does... when she retires, they're going to have to replace her with two, perhaps three people, as much as she does. She's just astounding. Just absolutely dedicated to the museum. Absolutely dedicated to the notion of making it easier for children to come to understand humanity's heritage and Illinois's heritage now, and she's just astonishing. We had other people who were here for shorter amounts of time that were also just uniformly wonderful people. Beth Watkins, who does the editing of the magazine, but also writes a lot of the in-house exhibits and then does all sorts of educational programs for kids and stuff. She's fantastic and just also works her heart out as well. You might be interested in knowing that: I believe we have had either eight or nine staff members since 2007 who have won either the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Academic Professional Excellence Award or the Chancellor's Academic Professional Excellence Award or the Civil Service Professional Excellence Award; our security fella—the security chief for the building—won that one. There is no unit in the University, I believe, that has had such a high percentage of its staff rewarded with these top academic professional honors and civil service. So I was really lucky because I'm not a great administrator. I was really lucky that I had people who knew what they were doing and they could make me look good. And that was great.

And I do also want to just mention somewhere in here all the deans. We had a lot of Deans during...2007 to 2016 was this weird period when we had this huge turnover. So I worked with five different presidents and acting presidents and five different chancellors and five different provosts and four different deans. It would be 5, except for number 3 and 5 were the same person. So it was a period of just extraordinary instability in the upper leadership. But everybody that I worked with from President down to Dean came to love the museum and really supported us just all down the line. We were not well known or understood when I first took over. In many

ways the museum was still trying to get itself organized after it opened in 2002, and figuring out how it was all working. So when I came in it was the perfect time to start getting ourselves known in the administration and out to the community more and further out. I did that by inviting the President and the Chancellor and the Provost to come and let me give them a tour of the museum, and they really realized that it's an enormous treasure. And then I just sort of kept doing that every time there would be a new one, and that was quite often but everybody became very supportive. And provost Odessa²⁶ forgave a huge percentage of our debt to LAS, which was fantastic for us and early on we had one point where we had an interim Provost who did not know what we did and so was thinking of cutting our budget by 25%. And Ruth Watkins,²⁷ the Dean of LAS, went with me to talk to him, to explain to him why the value of our collections can't be monetized like the value of Krannert Art museum's collection can be and therefore there's a huge difference in the monetized versions of these collections, but that doesn't mean that the Spurlock's collections are any less significant and such. And so she really helped and this was during a time of budget cuts all across the board. But he moved it down to 15% instead of 25%. And that got it equal to the cut for the Krannert and so everybody in that upper administrative situation wound up being extraordinarily supportive of the Spurlock. Particularly once they had been given the tour, they were just enormously enthusiastic about it. And so that was very helpful. And one other, just another little section maybe; you're about to get exhausted too.

VF: We I'm not really doing anything, we're coming up to the end anyway, so you can...

WP: One other thing—sort of outside of the thing, but it just sort of has popped up into my mind—is that one of the things that happened during my time was not only did we establish a much firmer relationship with the upper administration of the university and not only did we start drawing in a lot more people my first year—the museum brought in 20, 21, 22,000 people; by my last year we brought in 53,000 people. So we've got ourselves much better known out and about in the university itself, and out in the community—But also, I was able to get us involved with a whole series of international connections—national and international collection connections. I've photographed cylinder seals with the 360 degree camera at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago and at the Detroit Institute of Art, which had a collection of cylinder seals and so the Spurlock is actually thanked in their revamped Mesopotamian exhibit for helping create the 360 degree images that they use about 20 of. I have more photographs in the Detroit Institute of Art than Van Gogh! Yeah so there. Anyway, we did international things. We had international people coming from China to study our Mesopotamian tablets, Israel and such, and we had collaborations with China, Dunhuang, China collaborations with Cyprus with the... can't quite remember the name of the university, but with a university in Nicosia. And so during my time I felt that one strength I had as a faculty member was that I could actually expand the the influence of the museum into wider places and that was sort of my big thing. By 2016, when I retired, I was really ready to start thinking about how to reimagine the galleries. And that was something that I couldn't really do because I don't have expertise in museum studies. And so it was a perfect time for me to head out and let someone who was a real museum person step in and start doing that kind of stuff. So I feel like my nine years were good, and I accomplished a lot of

²⁶ Possibly Ilesanmi Adesida, Provost of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2012-2015.

²⁷ Ruth Watkins: Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences, ~1993-2013.

things. But that if I had stayed longer I would have delayed good stuff that is now in the process of being done, so it all worked out really nicely for me.

VF: It does sound like your nine year... I can't think of the word, I want to say reign. It's definitely not right. Your... nine year employment there was very beneficial.

WP: Yeah, well reign is actually exactly right. When I arrived at the museum, the staff actually crowned me king of the...

VF: Oh yeah, they hailed you emperor!

WP: ...Right, I was given a royal robe, a crown and a ring, and a gold box. It has been conservatively assessed at being valued at least \$1.89. Yeah, so I took on the throne name of King Sargon, the third of...²⁸ and maintained that title until I retired, so reign is good.

VF: Well, let's see what do we have left here? We have one final question really. And that would be—and we kind of already touched on this, but just to get a better idea—what kinds of behind the scenes work were done at the museum and by who? What's the insider scoop that we don't see or that we wouldn't even see from documentation?

WP: Well, actually, much of the behind the scenes stuff is carefully documented. You can't not. But I think what is maybe not: well, there are several places that are just not recognized. Each of the departments is doing stuff that goes well beyond. We've got a small staff. We've got a pretty big museum and so people have to do more than what they would be charged with at a large museum where somebody else would take it on. And each of the departments, the sections...really does... just a huge amount of work that is not the big visible stuff and that's in the background. Education, you know, does the tours for kids. They do the outreach; they are out in the schools all the time and such which is often not visible to a lot of people. And the Education Department is in charge of doing the in-house exhibits. And we would have generally one major exhibit in our Campbell gallery—the big temporary exhibit—we would do one in-house exhibit a year, and it is astonishing how much work it is to put together something like that. And it involves Education which is responsible for writing up and figuring out what it's going to be about, writing up the text and such, but also the collections management team which has to work with the Education Department to figure out what artifacts are going to be used in the exhibit. Then they have to conserve those, make sure they are in good shape to go on exhibit. Then they have to build the mounts. We don't have the money to hire out mount building and things so they build the mounts there. They build the mannequins, if it is clothing. The mannequins are built specifically for the single piece that's going to be on that mannequin, and such to keep it safe. And so a lot of that background stuff. Registration has to keep track of where all of these artifacts are coming from. They gotta photograph them to make sure they are safe. And so, putting on these annual exhibits is a huge project that most people don't realize how much work goes into it and how much background.

²⁸ The exact word cannot be heard here due to laughter; perhaps "Spurlockia."

We have curators for most of these exhibits who come in and help us organize them as well. So it's just this really complicated thing and people tend to think: "oh it doesn't take much, you pull out your artifact, you write a few sentences here and you stick it up right there to exhibit." Well, it is not at all, and so that is certainly I think one of the most important things that goes on behind the scenes that people don't know. But collections management people you know have to keep these 50,000 artifacts. They have to make sure that the none of these deteriorate, that no insects creep into the cloth or wood items. That the humidity does not damage artifacts and such. And so there's a constant reassessment of the condition of the artifacts to make sure that they all stay safe. And that's also really important, because it does not take long if you let something go for it to decay and for things to be lost and such.

But there's also...we had committees; we had a five-year plan that we needed to work out to figure out where we were going, what our collection plan was going to be. A whole period of time working on collection plans. What we were going to accept. What kinds of things we would accept and what kinds of things did not fit the basic notion of what our museum was about. And the acquisitions committee would get offered things and we would have to decide on an individual basis which pieces we would accept and which pieces we wouldn't. And preparing that for sometimes hundreds of items where the registration person/people would need to go through all of the legal issues about every type of object that was being offered to us. Try to get if the people did not know exactly what they were, what the pieces were, which was often the case. Try to get enough information so that we could look at it and say: "Yes. This is something that fits our collecting plan." or "No it doesn't." So the amount of work that it takes just to accept things, both rationally and ethically, it's a huge amount of work as well.

And then we've got our IT guy who has been involved in setting up databases for the collections for registration and for collections management. He also does the work on creating the videos for our temporary exhibits and, as we move along then, for ones that we're gonna put in the permanent galleries when we redo them and then he has to keep track of—I've forgotten—something like 50 computers in the building. And keep them running. And all the problems there. We gave the University a really good bang for their buck in paying for the people that we had there.

And most of what makes the museums seem so peaceful and calm... I should also mention the security people are having to do an awful lot of stuff. Besides standing in or near the galleries, and to keep people from pushing over statues and such. Security in the building like this is also a complicated thing, and they were also responsible for paying attention to all of the mechanicals in the building and keeping track of those and making sure that nothing was going wrong with any of that, because they were the first line of defense if something went wrong before Building and Grounds could get there and help. So it's just really been this... everybody just works so hard and everybody is so dedicated to the museum that it's really quite remarkable.

VF: That's pretty much precisely what we're looking for in that question.

WP: Oh good, good. Yes, I think I have mentioned all of the departments 'cause all the departments have to do those kinds of things. Oh, my administrative assistant also was just constantly dealing with vast amounts of stuff connected to our endowment, and those kinds of

things as well as just all of the administrative things connected to making appointments and keeping things straight in payroll and all that stuff. The two that worked with me while I was there were just both spectacular and I should also probably mention Brian,²⁹ the fellow in charge of our auditorium. Because our auditorium is used all the time and we have museum events going on, of course, in the auditorium, but we have all sorts of outside events and use it as well. Lots of musical events, lots of lectures, MillerComm³⁰ has its home there. And it just goes on and on. So he has been a master at keeping all of that going and making sure that the lecturer's PowerPoint shows up or film; while I was there we had some film festivals. We had a film festival in honor of an exhibit we had on the 60th anniversary of the publication of the first James Bond novel, *Casino Royale*. And a donor had given lots of Ian Fleming materials to the rare book room. So they did a thing on the books and we did a thing on the movies because there have actually been three film versions of *Casino Royale* and two film versions of *Thunderball* and someone to look at the unusual Bonds, which were the ones that had non Eon productions—versions—of their books. So it was it was a great exhibit. We got stuff from Eon productions with props from the 2006 Daniel Craig *Casino Royale* and we had the original script of the 1954 television production *Casino Royale*, which was the first *Casino Royale*. The first James Bond was not Sean Connery, but Barry Nelson was James Bond in 1954 for this CBS One Hour live stage production of *Casino Royale*. And so we had wonderful things, but we also did a film festival that showed all three of the *Casino Royales* and both of the *Thunder Balls*. And it was great, getting access to the films and things like that was the job of Brian in the auditorium. So now just vast amounts work for those two areas as well.

VF: Well Joe, is there anything else you'd like to add or ask?

JB: No, this has been fantastic.

WP: I'm glad. As you might have guessed, I really loved my time at the museum. It's actually probably my favorite years of all of my career as a full-time person, which has all been at the University of Illinois. You know, I just loved it. It was a hoot. And the support that I got from the upper administration, they always seemed happy with what I was doing and never tried to tell me things that I ought to be doing and stuff they really left alone and that was nice. And the staff was just so supportive and so competent at what they were doing that they made me look good. And I just was like a kid in a candy store for nine years and could do all sorts of things that I wanted to do and occasionally had to do the ick-administrative stuff. But most of the time I just got to do things that I enjoy doing, so, it was great.

VF: Well, with that I guess we'll close out then. Thank you very much. We really appreciate it. If you want to send us anything, we're open to accepting anything.

WP: Yeah I will send you my... like said it's fairly rough, I never actually did much in the way of revisions...

VF: That's OK.

²⁹ Probably Brian Cudiamat, Manager of Visitor Services and Events at the Spurlock Museum.

³⁰ MillerComm Lecture Series: Lectures that occur weekly at the Spurlock; <https://cas.illinois.edu/millercomm-lecture-series>

WP: ...Besides adding things as I came across them, and I think I've got the latest version sitting here on my desk, so I will send it off to you and...

VF: That would be fantastic.

WP: ...and it'll give you a nice general sense of the history of the museum as such. OK.

VF: Thank you very much. We cannot... it's really helpful.³¹

WP: Well, I have enjoyed talking about all this stuff. So anyway you guys keep in touch. Let me know how things go on all of this.

VF: Will do, yeah, we'll be sure to... you'll definitely hear from us again.

WP: OK.

VF: Perhaps we'll have more sessions, but for now, we'll... and we assess where we're at.³²

WP: OK sounds great, well you take care.

VF: Alright, thank you, you too.

WP: Bye-bye, bye-bye.

³¹ The text here is garbled and cannot be perfectly transcribed.

³² The middle part of the sentence cannot be transcribed, but the sense is clear.