

Spurlock Museum Historical Timeline¹

By Prof. Wayne Pitard

PROLOGUE

1874—Regent (President) John Milton Gregory travels to Europe to purchase a collection of plaster casts of great European sculptures for an art gallery at the Illinois Industrial University (later the University of Illinois). The Art Gallery opens on Jan 1, 1875, on the third floor of University Hall (where the Illini Union now stands), with sixteen full-size sculpture casts, including the Laocoön and His Sons, Polyhymnia, the Amazon of Phidias and the Artemis of Gabii now in the Spurlock collection, along with 42 reduced-size casts, 92 life-size busts, and 28 reduced-size busts. Only the four full-size casts in the Spurlock survive from the original sixteen. But these pieces had a long odyssey before arriving at the museum. In 1897, the Art Gallery was moved from University Hall to the basement of the new Library Hall (now Altgeld), where the pieces languished. In 1908, nine of the full-size statues, including three of those in our collection, the Laocoön, the Amazon of Phidias and Polyhymnia, were placed in the Auditorium (later, the Foellinger Auditorium). By 1932, the statues had been removed from there and were located in the Architecture Building's Hall of Casts, where they were used as models for art students. A photo exists which shows the Dying Slave, the Thorn Extractor, the Amazon of Phidias, Polyhymnia, and the Laocoön in the Hall.

*The nine statues that went to the Auditorium in 1908 are listed in the Art Gallery Inventory UA12/3/4 from ca. 1907-10 as follows: Laocoön, the Dying Slave, the Faun of Praxiteles, Antinous of the Capitol (broken beyond repair and stored in a closet off the foyer), the Venus de Milo, the Amazon of Phidias, the Polyhymnia, the Discobolos, the Apollino di Medici. The Artemis of Gabii at first stayed in the Library (Altgeld), then was moved to Lincoln Hall when it opened, but unknown where. The Laocoön, Dying Slave, Discophoros (Discobolus), Amazon of Phidias, Thorn Extractor, and Polyhymnia (all Gregory pieces) are visible in a photograph of the Hall of Casts in the Architecture Building ca. 1932. The Laocoön, Polyhymnia and the Amazon of Phidias are still in the Hall of Casts in a photograph from ca. 1938, while many others were replaced by casts from the Lorado Taft Collection.

1904—Edmund J. James, one of the leading authorities on higher education, becomes President of the University of Illinois. Perhaps more than any individual, James is responsible for developing the University into a world-class institution. During his administration it is transformed. James is responsible for convincing the trustees and the state to create the largest public university library in the country. He inaugurated the Graduate College. Forty-two university buildings were constructed during his tenure, including the Auditorium (now Foellinger Auditorium), Lincoln Hall, the Commerce Building (now the Henry Administration Building), and the Armory, plus significant additions to other buildings. One of his most important emphases was his support for the humanities and his interest in the development of museums for the campus.

1909—Plans are made for a new building to house the humanities. Evarts Green suggests that it be named in honor of Abraham Lincoln, an idea universally approved. The first drawing of the

¹ The following is a timeline written by Prof. Wayne Pitard. It is unedited, and all work is Prof. Pitard's.

building has three floors, to match the other buildings on the Quad. But President James wants a fourth floor, where a pair of museums can be placed. W. Carby's Zimmerman, the state architect, accommodates James' proposal by maintaining an exterior that looks three stories, but adding an "attic" that has inconspicuous dormer windows on the court side of the building and small slits along the front. Thus the building looks like a three-story structure, but is actually four. Plans for Lincoln Hall are approved by the Board of Trustees, with most of the area on the fourth floor specifically intended for a museum. Only the east half of the eventual full Lincoln Hall is built at this time.

THE MUSEUM

1911—July 8, 1911. With President James' support, the Board of Trustees approves the establishment of two museums for Lincoln Hall--the Museum of Classical Archaeology and Art and the Museum of European Culture. The Classical Museum will be located in the southern corridor of the building's fourth floor, while the European Cultures Museum will be located in the northern corridor. Arthur S. Pease, professor in the Classics Department, is appointed curator of the Classical Museum, and Neil C. Brooks, a professor in the German Department, becomes curator of the European Museum. The position of Curator is in addition to the professors' teaching and research schedule, a situation that will usually be the case until the first full-time Director is appointed in 1966. Pease will oversee the Classical Museum until 1924, while Brooks will spend the next 26 years in charge of the European. The contributions to these museums of the two founding curators are incalculable.

1911-12—Pease and Brooks acquire "such material as the modest initial appropriation permitted," most notably the plaster casts of the Parthenon Frieze and several classical statues, as well as the casts of the Strasbourg Cathedral. The first major donors of artifacts to the Museum, Mr. and Mrs. William G. Hibbard, Jr., name the Classical Museum as the recipient of 126 ancient Egyptian artifacts from the Egypt Exploration Society in these two years, then others between 1914 and 1926. They also donate a collection of Roman and Medieval European coins.

1912—November 8. The Museum of Classical Archaeology and Art opens to the public. In its first year, the museum draws 933 visitors. By 1918, the annual number of visitors has risen to 6529. In the January 1913, issue of *The Alumni Quarterly*, Arthur Pease writes, "We may perhaps hope for an adequate and dignified building, exclusively for museum purposes, somewhere upon the University campus." (p. 11). This is the first reference to a desire for an independent building for the museums, even before the Museum of European Culture opened!

1913—February 6. The Museum of European Culture opens to the public, nearly a week before the official dedication of Lincoln Hall is held on February 12.

1913—September. Pease, with the enthusiastic financial support of President James, purchases 1000 ancient Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets, the first of several purchases through 1918 that will give the museum a very substantial collection of ca. 1750 tablets that date between 2100 and 500 BCE.

1917—The Board of Trustees approves the establishment of an Oriental Museum to focus on the civilizations of the ancient Near East. Albert T. E. Olmstead, newly hired as Professor of Ancient Near Eastern History, is appointed the first (and only) curator (1917-1928).

1919-1921—The post-war economy leads to severe budget cuts at the museums. The museums are open only two days a week, and very few objects are added to the collection.

1922—The economy turns around and better budgets return to the museums. For a decade, the Classical and European Culture Museums are given annual budgets of \$2000, while the Oriental Museum is given a budget of \$1000.

1923—Olmstead purchases the painted floor fragment from Pharaoh Akhenaten's Maru-Aten temple at el-Amarna from the Egypt Exploration Society for \$500. It becomes a centerpiece of the Oriental Museum's collection.

1924—The Baudon Collection of Merovingian artifacts from France comes into the Museum of European Cultures. Its 541 pieces cost the museum \$727.09.

1924—Arthur Pease, the founding curator of the Museum of Classical Archaeology and Art, takes a position at Amherst College. A newly appointed Instructor, Dr. Franklin P. Johnson, is appointed curator. [Long lost from institutional memory, Johnson appears in two letters from Egypt Exploration Society Archives in London, both from Marie N. Buckman, secretary of the Boston Office, to Miss Jonas, secretary of the London Office (Nov. 12, 1925 and December 1, 1925)]. He was involved with the acquisition of the 1926 materials from the Egypt Exploration Society. He was curator for either two or three years. He left the university after the 1926-27 academic year, one year after William A. Oldfather became chair of the Classics Department.

1927—Following Johnson's departure, Professor Herbert N. Couch of the Classics Department is appointed curator of the Classical Museum. (See Sebastian Naslund, *A University Museum Comes of Age*, p. 6 (pages not numbered)).

1929—Olmstead leaves the University of Illinois to become a professor at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, where he will spend the rest of his life. Curatorship of the Oriental Museum is combined with that of the Museum of Classical Archaeology and Art, and Herbert Couch becomes curator of the new combined collections. While the two merge administratively, they remain distinct entities.

1929—The museum experiences its first major theft, when an exhibition case of ancient gold coins is stolen.

1930—Lincoln Hall undergoes a major expansion in 1929-30, and the museums are given twice the amount of space they have had until now. They now occupy the northern, western and southern parts of the fourth floor. The western elevator is installed, which allows easy access to the museums. H. N. Couch leaves the university for a job at Brown (letter from Charles Seltman to Oldfather, Nov. 10, 1930, in Seltman 1929.01, 1920.01 file). Oldfather officially takes on the

curatorship of the Classical Museum (Naslund, p. 6), with Eugene Vanderpool acting as Assistant in Charge of the Museum (letter in the same file).

1931—George Mylonas, a soon-to-be-noted Classical archaeologist, spends two years visiting in the Classics Department after receiving his PhD from Hopkins in 1929. In the fall of 1931, Mylonas gives the museum a collection of painted potsherds illustrating the development of Greek vase painting from 3,000-700 BCE. (He got his job at Washington University in St. Louis in fall, 1933). In 1932-33 he is part-time in Classics and part-time in Architecture. It was remembered that Mylonas was curator of the Classical Museum for a year. Naslund's history (ca. 1970) places this in 1939-40, when Mylonas came back to the U of I for a year (he had a joint appointment in Classics and Art as a tenured as Full Professor, but decided to return to Washington University in 1940). Naslund also mistakenly believed that Mylonas had given the potsherd collection to the museum in 1939. It seems uncertain now whether Mylonas acted as curator in 1939 or perhaps earlier when he was here in 1931-33 (or perhaps both!) Mylonas collection of potsherds in under the acquisition number 1956.02 (!)

1930-1948—The Great Depression, followed by World War II brings financial support for the museums to a halt. The 1932 budget is \$300 for the Classical Museum and \$380 for the Museum of European Cultures. Through 1944, the combined budgets of the two museums never passes \$1200. Very little material comes into the collections and funds for maintenance and improvement are virtually nil.

Early 1930s—The plaster cast sculptures in the Auditorium are removed from there and are placed in the Architecture Building's Hall of Casts, where they are used as models for art students.

1937—After 26 years as Curator of the Museum of European Cultures, Neil Brooks retires from the University of Illinois.

1937—The University receives a massive collection of statue casts owned by Lorado Taft. Some of them are placed in the foyers of the Auditorium, others replace some of the Gregory casts in the Hall of Casts. But many of the Taft sculptures, including an extensive collection of casts of ancient Egyptian works, are stored in the basement of Lincoln Hall. Some of the Gregory pieces apparently join the Egyptian casts there.

1939—George Mylonas returns from Washington University in St. Louis to become Professor of Classical Art and Archaeology in a joint appointment with Classics and Art. He may have acted as curator of the Classical Museum during this year. At the end of the year, however, he decides to return to his position at Washington U.

1940—Florence A. Fletcher, a graduate of Oberlin College and Columbia University, is appointed custodian of the Museum of European Culture. She will eventually be named Curator. She reorganizes the exhibits and heads the museum until health reasons cause her to retire in 1953.

1945-53—The Post-War budgets for the two museums begin to rise slowly. By 1953, the Classical Museum’s budget is \$1425 (\$1000 for wages) and the Museum of European Culture’s is \$3660, which includes Florence Fletcher’s half-time salary of \$2800. During this period, neither museum has an acquisitions budget, and donations are fairly low.

1945—In a memo, “Needs of the Department of Classics for the Next Ten Years,” William Oldfather makes a plea for the restoration of the “annual appropriation of \$5000 for the purchase of reproductions and occasional originals of the subject-matter with which the Professor of Classical Archaeology, spoken of above, would have to deal. This was provided by the enlightened policy of that great president, Dr. E. J. James, in days when the total resources of the University were scarcely a tithe of what they are today.” (Oldfather was being a bit inaccurate here—the \$5000 budget covered the Classical, European and Oriental Museum budgets—Classics received \$2000/year during the best days.) “These appropriations were reduced under President Kinley, and essentially abolished under President Chase. In consequence, a Museum, which for a short time bade fair to rank at the very forefront of similar collections in our sister universities, now languishes in semi-desuetude, and its present state of impoverishment rends all the more difficult the effort to secure a man of real distinction to take charge of instruction and research in Classical Archaeology. Such a man would naturally be the Curator of the Museum, but a full-time and well-paid Custodian, working under his direction, would, of course, make the Collections much more useful than they can possibly be at present.”

1945—William Oldfather, chair of the Classics Department and longtime Curator of the Classical Museum, drowns in a boating accident on May 27. There is no permanent chair of the Department of the Classics for the next four years. Acting Chair Ben Perry appoints Alexander Schulz, a graduate student in the Department of the Classics, as “custodian” of the Classical Museum. Schulz will oversee the museum for five eventful years.

1945—Albrecht Goetze, a noted Assyriologist from Yale University, spends the summer studying the ancient Mesopotamian tablet collection and produces a catalogue describing the contents and date of each tablet.

1946—Edith Porada, an authority on ancient Near Eastern seals, has the Museum’s seals brought to New York, where she studies them. The seals are then sent to scientists at the American Museum of Natural History, when the type of stone of each seal is determined.

1947-1949—For two years Henning Larsen, Dean of LAS and Head of the English Department also takes on the position of Acting Head of the Department of Classics and nominal Curator of the Classical Museum!

1948—With the help of Professor Revilo P. Oliver of the Department of the Classics, Schulz is allowed to inspect the set of plaster casts of ancient Egyptian sculptures from the Lorado Taft Collection that are stored in the basement of Lincoln Hall.² He chooses 69 of them, which are then loaned to the museum by the College of Fine and Applied Arts. He also is allowed to choose a number of casts from the College’s Hall of Casts to display in the museum, and he

² Oliver was a noted white supremacist. See “Revilo Oliver: The White Supremacist Within” (Pharos: 2019), <https://pharos.vassarspaces.net/2019/09/06/revilo-oliver-the-white-supremacist-within/>

selects about thirty, including the old Gregory casts of Laocoön, Polyhymnia, and the Amazon of Phidias, as well as a number of Taft's classical casts. During the fall of 1948 Schulz and a number of community volunteers refinish the Museum's entire collection of casts, and renovate the gallery for the first time in years.

1949—John L. Heller comes from the University of Minnesota to become Head of the Department of Classics and Curator of the Classical Museum. He keeps Schulz on as custodian until the summer of 1950. Schulz begins working on an inventory of the Classical Museum.

1945-53—Fletcher undertakes a complete inventory of the European Museum, working with Schulz on a similar inventory of the Classical Museum. The numbering system they develop, and the inventory are used as the basis for registration issues well into the 1960s.

1953—In November, Fletcher takes a leave of absence for health reasons.

1954-61—The position of Curator of the Museum of European Culture is held open for Fletcher for a year. In 1954, she officially retires, but she is not replaced. John Heller takes on curatorship of both museums, but they remain distinct entities. Heller makes sure that the museums do not lose the money for Fletcher's salary, which is used to hire part-time workers.

1961—Heller is allowed to hire William P. Donovan as an Assistant Professor in Classics. But two-thirds of his duties are the curatorship of the Classical Museum and the Museum of European Cultures (still distinct). Upon his arrival Donovan was allowed to close the museum for renovation. A classroom and office spaces were built along the west side of the museum. The western corridor was made the home of a new exhibit on the history of writing, from Sumer through the Renaissance.

1962—The two museums are officially merged together to form the Classical and European Culture Museum.

1966—William Donovan leaves the UI for a position at Macalester College. Convinced of the value of the museum, LAS Dean Robert Rogers hires Oscar Dodson, a retired rear admiral and numismatist, to be the first full-time director of the Classical and European Culture Museum. He is joined by a museum preparator and a secretary. He also is given funds for four graduate students and 4 undergraduates to work part-time in the museum.

1968—An ad hoc Committee on Museums (of which Dodson is a member) submits its report to Chancellor J. W. Peltason. It argues that the Classical and European Culture Museum should be refocused into a "museum of man," and that its area of responsibilities should be expanded to include "classical art and archaeology, European culture, American culture, anthropology, and ethnology. In sum," the report says, "this should become virtually a new museum into which present holdings in classical art and archaeology and European culture would be absorbed." The report also recommends that the museum be given a new building and that adequate room for storage and research, critical to the museum, be found.

1968-70—For the first time, permanent and temporary exhibits are developed that focus on non-European aspects of the world.

1969—Shin Tek Kang, a Sumerologist, joins the staff part-time to examine and publish the Sumerian clay tablets from ancient Umma and Drehem (ca. 2100-2000 BCE). He publishes two volumes of the texts, representing about half of the 1000 tablets.

1970—The Friends of the Museum is established.

1971—With the encouragement of Dodson and the support of the University President, the Board of Trustees approves the renaming of the museum as the World Heritage Museum.

1973—Georgette Meredith (later, van Buitenen) succeeds Dodson as Director of the WHM (1973-1981), the first one to have a professional museum background. She immediately begins a program for the conservation of the collection, especially the coins, which are badly corroded, and several wooden artifacts that have become infested with insects. She also develops a new registration system that will bring all the systems of the earlier museums into a single organized system. This is the system still used today for registering the artifacts.

1978—The museum begins its first project to computerize the museum's inventory.

1979-80—In the face of a serious budget crisis, the acting Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Lloyd G. Humphreys, looks into the possibility of closing the museum and dispersing the collection or, at least, significantly cutting the museum's budget. A committee of four scholars, John J. Bateman, chair, James Dengage, Eugene Giles, and Richard Mitchell, are asked to work with Director van Buitenen to evaluate the collections of the museum. They find that major parts of the collections are of substantial value for university teaching and scholarly research, as well as public display. Humphreys then appoints an ad hoc committee to look into ways in which the museum budget can be cut from ca. \$70,000 to ca. \$22,000 and still function. David Bright is appointed chair of the committee, which includes John J. Bateman, Eugene Giles, Richard Mitchell, Pola Triandis and Jerrold Ziff. The committee concludes that the museum must continue to have a full-time director, as well as a half-time Assistant (for exhibit preparation) and at least 1.5 FTE Student Assistants, to be funded by various units on campus. The committee rounds up TA-ships from Classics, History, Anthropology, Art and Design and Continuing Education (a life-saving commitment for the museum that extends for several years!). The Director's job is made an entry-level position, with a salary of \$17,000, well below van Buitenen's salary.

1981—With the new reduced budget, the University hires Barbara Bohen as Director. The Museum is closed during the summer and fall for renovations.

1982—The Museum reopens on March 7, with the inauguration of "Parthenon U-C," a new exhibit focusing on the Parthenon Frieze casts. Bohen quickly proceeds to renovate the other galleries of the Museum. She reestablishes the Friends of the Museum organization. The Friends had initially been established in 1970, but had remained very small. The new organization expands very quickly under the leadership of Pola Triandis.

1984—The Museum receives permission from the University to raise funds for a new building to house the collection. This is a startling transformation, since four years earlier, the administration had considered closing the Museum permanently! The Museum also applies for accreditation from the AAM (but is not successful).

1987—The Museum Board is established to support the Museum in the greater community.

1988—The World Heritage Museum Guild is established to support the educational programs of the Museum.

1990—William R. Spurlock, an alumnus of the University, former Executive Vice-President of Eli Lilly & Co of Indianapolis (retired 1965) and already a long-term supporter of the U of I, sets up a multi-million dollar bequest for a new museum building for the World Heritage Museum. Because of the enormous donation, the new museum is to be named in honor of him and his late wife Clarice.

1991-1996—Over the next few years a number of major supporters add their donations to cover the expense of the new building.

1994—The Spurlock funds become available after the death of William Spurlock on October 3, 1993 at the age of 92. Planning for the new museum begins.

1997—Douglas Brewer is appointed Director of the Museum, takes on the final development of the museum plans, and oversees the hiring of a greatly expanded staff to prepare for the move, develop the registration system, create the new exhibits, and organize the new education programs.

1998—The World Heritage Museum closes its doors for good in May, to complete an inventory and to pack the collection for the move. Groundbreaking for the new Museum building takes place on July 9. In addition, the museum takes in the first two of three major collections from elsewhere in the University—the ethnographic materials from the Museum of Natural History (most notably, a number of Native American collections, the Crockerland Expedition collection, and materials from Papua New Guinea); and the Bevier Collection of Historic Costumes. During this period it was hoped that the Museum would be able to raise funds that would allow it to take on the traditional Natural History collection as well, but this did not come to fruition.

1998-2000—The Museum staff and some 35 undergraduate students spend two years inventorying and packing the artifacts.

2000—The collection is moved out of Lincoln Hall. 98% is moved over a four-day period in May. The large sculptures are moved in June, after a platform is built on top of the elevator that allows the crates to be brought from the museum down to the first floor. About 30,000 artifacts come from Lincoln Hall. The collection of the Laboratory of Anthropology, established in 1972 as an element of the Department of Anthropology, is incorporated into the Museum, and these artifacts soon arrive at the new building.

2000-2001—Mounting the exhibits in the galleries is delayed by problems with the flooring in the building.

2001-2002—The gallery exhibits are prepared and installed.

2002—On September 26, 2002, the Spurlock Museum opens to the public. The new building contains many facilities that enable expanded and enhanced museum operations, school programs, public events, and campus collaborations. In its first eight years, the Spurlock Museum staff collaborates with over sixty different entities. This includes University departments, cultural centers, and student organizations; regional libraries, museums, schools, and galleries; and international educational institutions and foundations.

2004—The Museum Board raises funds to enable the acquisition of almost 400 artifacts primarily from Papua New Guinea.

2007—Wayne Pitard, Professor of Religion, succeeds Brewer as Director

2008—The Artifact Imaging Center, a state-of-the-art photographic laboratory, is established at the Museum.

2009—The Museum achieves accreditation by the American Association of Museums (now the American Alliance of Museums), an honor held by only 5% of museums in the US.

2010-15—The Museum begins a series of collaborations with museums, universities and research institutes, both in the US and internationally. Projects are undertaken with the University of Southern California, the Cyprus Institute, the University of Birmingham, UK, the Ecole du Louvre in Paris, the Dunhuang Academy in China, the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

2013—The Museum opens “First Impressions: Ancient Mesopotamian Cylinder Seals,” the first permanent computer interactive exhibit at the Museum, with two games designed to teach visitors to identify the characters carved on the seals.

2014—Attendance at the museum and its outreach programs reaches 51,067 during FY14, a 152% increase from FY08.