

Dumbarton Oaks Newsletter

VOLUME 1, No. 3

OCTOBER 1979

REPAIR AND RENOVATION UPDATE:

We begin the academic year with the major repair and renovation work behind us! Over the summer many small projects were completed. The two offices on the north side of the west end of the second floor were prepared for the use of the Byzantine Editorial Staff. In these offices a portion of the beam repair that was a key element in the third floor repair had been made. Once the steel plates were inserted, the rooms were painted and new lighting and carpeting were installed. The Garden Library corridor ceiling was painted as soon as the temperature and humidity had been stabilized. The Founders room was set up and is currently in regular use by outside readers. There were several changes in the Pre-Columbian collection offices: carpeting was installed in place of the parquet floor which had buckled several times because of severe humidity; an audiovisual room was set up in the former fellows' study. A study-room for the Byzantine Collection has been established in one of the former photo collection rooms. During the overhaul of the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system that serves the Pre-Columbian and Garden Library wings, it was determined that excess air was available and could be brought into the Music Room providing adequate humidity-controlled air to preserve the fragile works of art housed in the Room. This was done during the summer, also.

Outside the main building other work was carried out: new lights were installed outside the Music Room; sandblasting continued on the iron work attached to all Dumbarton Oaks buildings; sandblasting was completed on the garden wrought iron; renovation work at 3203 S Street, including long-needed modifications of the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system, was begun and should be completed shortly.

More work is foreseen for the months ahead - it was learned in the summer that the beams supporting the roof of the Orangerie had rotted and the building was in danger of collapse. Six huge beams were installed to support the structure temporarily while the problem is studied and alternatives for repair are under examination. The condition of the Orangerie and the time-table for repairs (which is not yet known) will affect the scheduling of activities. Other work to begin soon is the pointing of the stonework around the main building, including the repair of broken bricks and the caulking of joints. The Byzantine collection has been particularly hard hit by the deterioration of the stone and once the work has been completed it will be possible to make other repairs inside the museum.

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BYZANTINE COLLECTION NEWS:

Three significant acquisitions were made for the Byzantine Collection this summer including two pieces of glass, a pale green fourth-century cone beaker or lamp and a tenth-century lamp with rounded body, flaring neck and bronze straps for suspension. These were purchased at the sale of the Constable-Maxwell Collection of Ancient Glass at SothebyParke Bernet, London in June. An important consular solidus of Theodosius II was also added to complement our fifth century numismatic holdings.

The transfer of the textile cabinet and relocation of the coin safes marked the near completion of the Byzantine Collection's Study Room which will enable us to centralize the textile, coin and seal reserve collections for better accessibility.

The summer opening of the Collection meant exhibition of several textiles usually in storage while those regularly on exhibition were taken down for their usual "rest" period. Three silks now hang in the main corridor and five other framed wool and linen textiles are in the exhibition room on a temporary basis.

The other physical change was removal of the objects from the three upper corridor cases in order to carry out preliminary work for three temporary exhibitions planned to open this month.

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GARDEN LIBRARY NEWS:

The Fall rare book exhibition is on the subject of printing techniques, particularly color printing, as used in floral illustration.

Diane McGuire and Ursula Pariser have examined and photographed the design of the Dumbarton Oaks gardens over the mantle-piece in the Music Room. Diane plans to use the design in her preparation for the Spring Symposium. Most of us, who regularly pass the fireplace, are only dimly aware of the decorative element in the shadows over our heads. It is a watercolor, painted in 1935 (before the L-shaped piece of the property to the East and North was given to the National Park Service). The picture shows the gardens as originally conceived by Mrs Farrand and Mrs Bliss.

There were some interesting acquisitions made, including a volume Bemerkung zu den vorliegenden Abbildungen der Viola tricolor, Vienna, ca. 1860. This volume was the personal copy of Empress Elisabeth of Austria and contains her own book plate and shelf mark. Another acquisition are three boxes for the set of Froissart's Croniques, which belonged to Mr and Mrs Bliss. The aluminum strengthened,

cotton-velvet lined boxes are designed to protect the volumes from temperature and humidity variations, preserving the beautiful vellum pages and illumination and supporting their bindings.

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PRECOLUMBIAN NEWS:

On Thursday, October 18, at 6:00 p.m., the Archaeological Institute of America will present a lecture at Dumbarton Oaks. Elizabeth Benson will speak on the "Well-Dressed Prisoners: A Study of North-Coast Peruvian Artifacts."

The Pre-Columbian conference on "Ritual Sacrifice in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica" was held on October 13 and 14th. Dumbarton Oaks fellows and staff were able to sit in on the papers and discussions.

On October 12, there was a Pre-Columbian lecture by Thelma Sullivan, of the Centro de Investigaciones Superiores del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (Mexico), on "A Scattering of Jades: The Words of the Aztec Elders".

FRIENDS OF MUSIC NEWS:

The 1979-80 season opens with a music lecture, "At Home Around the World", given by the American composer David Amram. The lecture will be on October 23, 1979. Mr Amram will illustrate his lecture with various musical instruments.

A second music lecture/recital with slides is planned for June 18 by Lavinia Snelling. Ms Snelling will play different types of lutes and tell how the lute became the favored instrument of the courts of the Orient, Middle and Far East and how it travelled to Europe.

Upcoming concerts include Lili Kraus (piano) on November 4 and 5; the Beaux Arts Trio on December 12 and 13; and Alexander Schneider (violin) and Peter Serkin (piano) on January 9 and 10.

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HOUSE COLLECTION NEWS:

The eight panels of Jacobean embroidery in the Study have been relined and the crewel work re-appliqued where necessary. Seven of the Hepplewhite dining room chairs have been re-upholstered in a fabric harmonizing with the striped material on the other eight and the set is now in the Study. Other chairs are also in various states of repair and renovation.

The pair of Chinese red and gold lacquer cabinets in the main hall (dated to the reign of the Emperor Wan Li, 1573-1619) are undergoing conservation by Ilona Bene, conservator of the Freer Gallery of Art. Many of the corner edges had chipped away exposing the white ground, thus permitting air and humidity to seep in. Astor is designing a black lacquer base for each cabinet, which will raise them off the floor and allow them to be seen to their full advantage.

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GARDEN NEWS:

Because of the large number of requests we have received we are now offering tours of the gardens. The tours are being given on an experimental basis; should they prove popular with the public we hope to be able to offer them regularly. For the schedule of tours, call the Dumbarton Oaks Information number, 338-8278.

The chrysanthemums should be in full bloom during mid-October. Make sure you take a walk in the gardens and enjoy their splendor this fall.

The new statue of a boy and a dolphin is now in place on the Fountain Terrace. The original statue, one of a pair, was stolen from the gardens last year. In order to make the replacement, a mold was made from the remaining statue.

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PROFILE: Ermanno Pecorari, Building and Security Staff

Ermanno has worked for Dumbarton Oaks for a total of 3½ years (the first of which was in 1955 when he worked evenings). In his present position, he is frequently the first person seen by visitors and guests of D. O. His skill in dealing with the public, coupled with his tact and cheerfulness, make a fine impression on all who walk through our doors.

Ermanno has a long and varied history. As a young man, he joined a Franciscan seminary but was "asked to leave" after two years. He has worked in gold mines, for a presidential family, in lumber camps, and on railroad tracks. In 1962, Ermanno and his family returned to Northern Italy where he bought land, built a house, and opened a restaurant. After two successful years, he decided that his children would have more opportunities in America and, once again, he returned. He proudly tells that two of his sons now attend American University and his ten year old is in elementary school.

"Asked to leave" the seminary?? Tell us more, Ermanno!!