First off, I must thank museum staff members Susan Spencer and Tabitha Schmidt; Tabitha for asking me to take up this project, and Susan for many hours of labor in finding illustrations and putting together the power point presentation of them.

In celebration of the Museum's 75th Anniversary, which will begin this December and continue through 2009, we are looking back at early history and in particular investigating collection formation. How did over 33,500 art works get here? I'll begin with a negative admission. There's a huge amount I do not know about the collections and will never know, but over the years I've read or heard a lot of interesting stories. Stories aren't any fun unless they're shared. So here we are today.

Please remember this is an idiosyncratic personal look at museum history, and illustrated are some of my favorite things, not necessarily the most important things. Here's to a future someone who will later amplify this text which is narrowly selective and biased. Many wonderfully generous patrons and superb art objects go unmentioned.

You also should know this is a pastiche of plagiarisms you will be hearing, mostly without verbal insertion of sources and quotation marks. The text with bibliography eventually will be available to docents and guides in the Tour Office.

A LOOK AT FOUNDERS

In the beginning was the money. Historians, Will and Ariel Durant wrote that “Money is the root of all art.” The Museum and its treasures would not exist without the gifts of Mary McAfee Atkins and William Rockhill Nelson. Quiet and reclusive Mary, who died in 1911, had been born in Kentucky in 1836. She was a school teacher who married late, her husband making his fortune in milling and real estate speculation. After his death she made 8 trips to Europe and fell in love with art. On her death she left a fortune of around $300,000 to the city for the building of an art museum.

Four years after Mary's death, William Rockhill Nelson died in 1915. His will and trust provided around 15 million for the establishment of a collection of fine art in Kansas City, a collection only. He believed the city should provide funds for a museum building. He'd already given to the city a collection of copies of famous old masters, a few of which survive and are scattered around town. [Botticelli's Primavera, Conservation Office. Botticelli's

Mary McAfee Atkins

William Merritt Chase, 1849-1916
William Rockhill Nelson, 1907
34-316
“Madonna of the Magnificat,” and Raphael’s “Sistine Madonna”]

Today in KC there is no one quite comparable to this flamboyant man’s stature and importance when he lived here. He’d had a checkered career until he moved to Kansas City, established the KCSTAR, and began working tirelessly for the city’s improvement. He said, “When I came to KC it was incredibly commonplace and ugly. I decided if I were to live here the town must be made over.” [1933 handbook p. 3]

And so important did he become to the city that on his death in 1915, the school students were dismissed, most businesses stopped for the day, and the post offices closed. Here he is looking every bit the tycoon he was, in the portrait he owned by the American painter William Merritt Chase. It must be admitted the artist has flattered Nelson with the removal around 100 pounds. A trustee of Mary’s estate was also appointed a trustee of the Nelson family funds, and it was Herbert Jones, the vital link, who pulled together the two funds and the two projects for a collection and a building.

The mansion Nelson built is where the Nelson-Atkins building stands today. Oak Hall had a ballroom, theatre, and stables. Around the house Nelson built smaller homes, some still standing. He rented them out so that he could control the quality of his neighbors. Directly east he built a home for his daughter Laura when she married. You have been reading about it! [The museum is presently suing the city council to use what it owns as it wishes; formerly rented to the Rockhill Tennis Club] When first built the estate was several miles outside the city limits. Living out here in the boondocks, Nelson was sometimes referred to as “The Baron of Brush Creek.”

It would be Nelson’s widow, Ida, his daughter, Laura, and his son-in-law, Ira Kirkwood, whose funds would be also be added to the project. Nelson’s widow Ida continued to live in the big house, and she left funds for the museum project. After her death, daughter Laura and husband Ira Kirkwood moved across Rockhill Road to live in Oak Hall. But both of them died young, in their 40s, and their property came to the museum project. Please note sometime on the first floor near the north door the two stone plaques, one to the couple and one to Ida.

The Nelson family did not collect art in a big way. But besides Chase’s portrait
of Nelson, there would eventually come to the museum a number of paintings including these two Impressionist works, pictured above, by Monet and Pissarro.

Who was going to spend Nelson’s money and choose the art? Here are the first 3 trustees who took up their duties in 1926. They were successful KC businessmen: William Volker, H.V. Jones “the crucial link”, and J.C. Nichols [REARRANGE according to screen appearance] the prominent real estate developer who shaped much of our city. Ultimately it was the responsibility of the trustees to make purchases, accept gifts, and create suitable housing for them. Keep your eye on Nichols who has shaped so much of the KC landscape you see every day. He was the most actively involved and vociferous of the trustees, as you shall hear.

The 1930s were the most auspicious time imaginable for the trustees to be buying art. The worldwide Depression greatly distressed the market and its dealers. They were most eager to sell works of art, so much so that they often shipped them at their own cost to the trustees for consideration. Or, I should say to the KC Art Institute, just across the street from the big hole in the ground. There, while the trustees were making up their minds, the art was often on exhibit, although Harold Parsons who helped the trustees assemble the European collection despairs of the environment there as an “inferno.” [C] No air conditioning.

The information contained herein focuses on collection formation, rather than the building, which is another whole lecture topic. But mention should be made of the architects; two Canadian brothers William and Thomas Wight who also designed the KC Life Insurance Building, City Hall, and Jackson County Courthouse. [C]

By 1933 the building is ready to open and the exterior appears as it does today. The Great Depression is in full swing. With lots of money to spend the trustees have been able to acquire the very best craftsmanship and materials available for the building. Here is a bit of trivia for
1933 Opening Gala Invitation

It is the fall of 1933. Kansas City society waits breathlessly by the mailbox in hopes of an invitation to the preview Opening. On Sunday evening, Dec. 10, 1933 2,500 carefully selected guests attended the gala event. [Nichols supervised the guest list... C.] It was a glamorous white-tie affair. Among the guests were Judge Harry Truman and his wife Bess. Attending from all around the country were journalists, art critics, collectors, museum directors, and presidents of the Universities of OK, KS, and MO. It being the Depression, there were many art dealers eager to sell more art to the trustees. Exaggerated tradition says a full Pullman car load of them came from NY, gambling all the way across country.

The next day, Monday, the public opening was held. 7,960 came and KC’s new symphony played. This ceremony was broadcast across the country to more than 40 radio stations by NBC. Further select groups came during the following weekdays, and the next Sunday the doors were again open to the general public, from 1 to 5. According to the KC STAR the building was packed during this 4 hour period by 11,000 persons “on an art rampage.” [C]

What treasures were to be seen? Only the east side galleries and Kirkwood Hall were finished. There wasn’t room to show all that the trustees had acquired, mostly in just 3 years. From the earliest accessions in 1930 to the Opening the trustees had been on a veritable “orgy” [W] of spending. Over 4,438 art works were accessed in that 3 year period. [Registrar;] Such a prodigious number acquired in such a short time may well be a record in the history of museum collecting.

What were some of the things the 1933 public would have admired? Certainly admired would have been Kirkwood Hall, as one of the grandest interiors in town. At first the area was called Tapestry Hall, but later Kirkwood after Nelson’s son-in-law and daughter. The set of eight 17th century Flemish tapestries were at the Opening, and have been exhibited there almost continuously for 75 years.

1933 Opening Gala Invitation

Making a Masterpiece: 75th Anniversary of The Nelson-Atkins Museum
By Lee Pentecost, Docent
Education/Tour Programs/October 2008
Also almost continuously exhibited are these two bronze figures over 4,000 years old that were among the very first group of objects that the trustees accessed into the collection in 1930. This was a year before the ground was broken officially for the building. The trustees had personally advanced $6,000 out of their own pockets for a Louvre dig at Tello in Iraq. Eventually they reimbursed themselves from museum funds. It seems appropriate that these images represent divinities who themselves are laying foundation pins for the construction of a new building. [W] Their purpose was “perhaps to secure the structure for eternity.” [Poltorak, Ancient Art Docent Handbook, 1989.]

During the 1920s, the decade that the trustees began their work, there were three extraordinarily exciting archaeological discoveries. Eventually, art was acquired from all three. These were King Tut’s tomb in Egypt, the royal grave-pits in China at Anyang, and the royal grave pits in the ancient Sumerian city of Ur in modern day Iraq, and King Tut’s tomb in Egypt.

During the 1928-29 excavation season at Ur, archaeologist Leonard Woolley made the discovery of the royal “death pits”. Over 74 women were in the graves of the king and queen, each with her own golden poison cup. This jewelry was worn by some of them. The trustees would help finance some of the continuing excavations at Ur. At the time of the Opening, many historians considered Ur to be the Cradle of Civilization. [Kramer, “Civilization Begins at Ur”]

Not on view at the Opening, but a later acquisition there are three gold sequins from Tut’s tomb that would have ornamented clothing.

WHEELERS AND DEALERS, EUROPEAN ART

While the trustees were prodigiously buying, they wisely knew they needed help. They were businessmen, not art experts. For purchasing European art, the director of the Cleveland Museum recommended to them Cleveland’s own independent advisor.
He was Harold Woodbury Parsons who didn’t see any conflict in taking on the Nelson's needs as well as Cleveland’s. He was also working with other museums and collectors. In spite of that Parsons ably assisted the Nelson in forming the European collection for 22 years. [1930-52; C, p. 24] By the time of the opening he had brought together a “more than respectable” collection, according to TIME magazine coverage, of European paintings and sculptures from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, and also from the ancient world: Egyptian, Greek, Etruscan, and Roman art works. Here he is holding one of his ancient finds, a Roman sculpture in the Greek tradition. The Phrygian cap worn by the beardless youth was the ancient artist’s way of indicating the subject is from the Near-East. It is speculated that this could be a representation of the handsome Trojan prince Paris who carried off Helen of Troy.

Parsons had established a network of dealers and collectors in Europe and the United States. He lived in an apartment in NY and one in Rome, and on a 75 foot yacht harbored in Genoa from which he made buying forays into Europe. [C p. 24]

“Dear Harold Woodbury Parsons was also helping a lot of other people...principally himself.” [Wilson, draft of Sickman eulogy, Nov. 10, 1988.] It was not uncommon for such agents to take payments from both ends of the deal. CHECK THIS: It has been conjectured that this wheeler-dealer of the art world was the basis for a fictional art dealer in the novel [????] Somerset Maughn. [IS THIS IN BURTON DUNBAR’s INTRO?? CHECK]

Here is the KC STAR’s drawing of Parsons bringing more treasures to KC. When TIME magazine covered the museum Opening, Parsons was noted for the works he had found, some of “world importance.” (Time, Dec. 18, 1933. p. 2.)

Cited by TIME was Titian’s portrait of one of the most important 16th century politicians in Europe. Here is French born Antoine de Granville wearing the ministerial black costume of office in the service of the HRE Charles V. He was then in his early 30s. A year after his portrait, he became chief minister of the Empire, and remained in the thick of European politics throughout his life. He became a cardinal and, prime minister to the Spanish Regent in the
Netherlands. He will be King Philip II of Spain’s closest advisor and negotiate his marriage to Queen Mary of England (Bloody Mary). He will be Vice Roy of the kingdom of Naples.

Titian is considered to have developed the 3/4 length state portrait [Pope-Hennessey] and he was considered “the greatest of Venetian painters.” [Jean Churchman docent handbook] The trustees “were thrilled to have such an important painting, but thought it was very expensive, costing nearly $100,000. [C, p. 25] J. C. Nichols was always worried that the Depression might get worse and art prices might go down further, devaluing what had already been acquired.

About the mention of money in this talk- It may be the last taboo in our society. In the last few decades or so people have begun to talk very openly about their gastro-intestinal systems, their sexual orientations and intimate practices. However, in polite social settings there still is some reticence to speak of money, salaries, and expenditures. I’m able to give you figures that were published in the media. Of course the art market in the museum’s early years was so deflated, and now is so inflated, that comparisons of values are often meaningless.

Also commented on with approval by TIME was this elaborate French masterpiece painted by Poussin for one of the most important politicians of the 17th century, Cardinal Richelieu the prime minister of France. The ancient demi-god Hercules is at the center of the painting, and it is now known that the Cardinal was using that powerful ancient deity as a symbol of himself. [“Richelieu: Art & Power,” passim.]

J.C. Nichols wrote he wanted paintings with “broad appeal” and “story telling qualities.” and he wasn’t building “a collection just for highbrows.” [C pp. 26-7]

Paintings come to the museum in a variety of ways. For this great masterpiece, Vincent van Gogh’s Olive Orchard, a petition was involved. It was painted during the last year of van Gogh’s tragic life on the hospital grounds of St. Remy in Provence. His style was then “at its most agitated and expressive” [NAMA website 2008] A year before the 1933 Opening, the NY office of the dealer Durand-Ruel sent the painting to KC on approval, and the trustees put it on exhibition at the KCAI’s Epperson Hall. The public could see it. The trustees thought it was far too expensive and wouldn’t meet the price, so the dealer ordered its return to NY [Curatorial file correspondence]

It is to the credit of Effie Seachrest, a former art teacher who had opened a gallery in the city, that the Trustees were persuaded to purchase” it. [C] Her portrait is by local artist Daniel
MacMorris, painter of the ceilings in Rozelle Court, the south vestibule, and the faux coffering of Kirkwood Hall’s ceiling. He also designed the bronze zodiac medallions in the floor around the fountain in Rozelle Court.

“Miss Effie” (1869-1951) was born here and taught the 3rd grade at Linwood School. During that time she wrote a series of children’s stories about artists, and they were published. [Could they be republished?] She retired early, but then began to hold art appreciation classes at her sister’s tearoom. Next she opened “The Little Gallery in the Woods” in their home. There she sold on consignment fine art from outstanding Paris and New York dealers. The art appreciation classes now were held in the sisters’ gallery-home, but when attendance reached as many as 100, they were moved to larger homes and clubs. She taught classes for more than 20 years and championed modern art movements, becoming a KC taste maker.

When Miss Effie learned that the Van Gogh painting was going to be returned to Durand-Ruel, she mobilized her adult students to agitate for its purchase. A petition was signed by almost 100 and submitted to the trustees who knew many of the signers. So negotiations were reopened, and J.C. Nichols, the primary wheeler-dealer of the trustees, finally managed to reach an agreement with Durand-Ruel. The trustees offered a bit more and the dealer asked a bit less. “Olive Grove” became part of the collection for $25,000.

In 1966 the museum organized a special exhibition “Homage to Effie Seachrest” featuring the Van Gogh painting and many art works that Miss Effie had sold to members of the KC community.

Although J. C. Nichols has been called a penny pincher when it came to spending Nelson trust funds, [W] he felt a great responsibility to make the very best deals and to spend the money as wisely as possible. Nichols was very much the “hands-on” trustee when it came to making purchases. Considerable credit for the collection formation must also go to him.

In 1957 another important purchase entered the collection because of a petition. Until then the trustees had not been able to purchase a Monet because of the clause in Nelson’s will saying his money was not to be spent on the works of any artist who hadn’t been dead for 30 years. The year of the Monet’s death 1926, was at last 30 years away. Now was the time, but trustees resisted buying this painting until the Art Institute next door presented a petition urging its purchase. Actually this is 1/3 of Monet’s huge work, the right hand side of a triptych.
Parsons wasn’t the only source for European art shown at the Opening. Among the many other dealers present perhaps the most impressive was Sir Joseph Duveen who the year of the opening had been raised to the peerage by King George V, becoming a baron with the title Lord Duveen of Milbank. At that time he was considered “possibly the greatest art dealer in history” [S] and certainly one of the most spectacular. [Behrman, “Duveen”] Kansas Citians were excited by his title and his presence in the city.

Although he didn’t like public speaking, he was persuaded to give a luncheon lecture to 1,000 women. [C] He stayed as a houseguest in the home of J.C. Nichols. Mrs. Nichols was infuriated when his lordship declined the use of her bed linens for the silk sheets he had brought with him.

Every museum wants a Rembrandt, and two years prior to the opening Duveen had provided this portrait along with a Dutch landscape by Hobbema. [Dunbar, p. 6]. The subject is unknown but it has variously been suggested that it is of the artist's son Titus or one of Rembrandt's pupils who became an artist himself. The art world seems to be continually reassessing what is and isn’t a Rembrandt, and since its accession this painting has twice been authenticated by the dreaded Dutch Rembrandt Project which continues to reexamine the many attributions and works of that famous artist around the world. The trustees paid Duveen the then “enormous” sum of $250,000 for the portrait.

As a gift on the occasion of the opening, Duveen threw in Carpeau’s “Flora,” a marble reduction of that artist's work for the Louvre apartments of the Empress Eugenie.

On touring the new museum Lord Duveen gushed, “it is stupendous; incredible....”It will make Kansas City international.” [C]

Just for the occasion of the opening there was a special loan from the Louvre of Whistler’s celebrated painting “Arrangement in Grey and Black: portrait of the Artist’s Mother,” 1871

Making a Masterpiece: 75th Anniversary of The Nelson-Atkins Museum
By Lee Pentecost, Docent
Education/Tour Programs/October 2008
Considered one of the highlights of the early collections was this Athenian statue. The museum’s Opening handbook states, “The heroic lion of the late 5th century BC, is one of the most important documents of that period in America. It shows all the majesty and simplicity that we associate with the age of Phidias and comes no doubt from a victory monument.” However, it now has been dated later, to the Hellenistic period around 325 BC and is thought to be from a funeral monument. Still, it continues to be called one of the finest ancient Greek lions extant.

At the opening the lion and other ancient objects were installed in what we call the “American Rotunda” on the 2nd floor of the east wing. The West end of the building was closed to the public.

**PROVENANCE STORY #1**

The premiere European art work in the museum is *St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness* by Caravaggio. The artist was a revolutionary innovator of 17th century Baroque art.

How did it get here? What is its provenance? A French word, provenance means “origin.” Specifically in the art world it means the history of a work of art from its creation to where it is today. Many masterpieces lack a complete provenance, but this one’s complete. Let’s trace the 400 years existence of this masterpiece.

The provenance begins around 1604 with the commission of Ottavio Costa, who is the richest banker in Rome. Initially the patron intended the painting as a gift to serve as the altarpiece of what had been the tiny parish church in his hometown Coscenta. That’s in northern Italy near Genoa. His family was building there a new and larger parish church, and the small one was being turned into an oratory (small chapel for prayer). The chapel was supported by a lay confraternity dedicated to St. John the Baptist. A major function of the confraternity was to fund funerals for the poor. Without proper Church rituals the deceased would have been condemned to time in purgatory. So this somber painting was to preside over rites for the dead and is appropriately somber in mood. [Curator Roger Ward, docent lectures]

SHOWN on your right [LEFT?] is the tiny chapel’s baroque interior, as it would have appeared with the painting installed. The room is little more than the width of a one-car garage.
But Costa reneged on his gift. Now he wanted it for himself. Instead he commissioned and sent a copy to the chapel, the painter unknown. When Costa died in 1639, he had stated in his will that the painting was to remain in his family forever, “in perpetua.” Accordingly it passed on to his descendants. However, the last family member to possess it had joined the Knights of Malta. That famous military and hospital Order required that upon death, all possessions of its members went to the Order. Costa’s surviving heirs sued and a tedious lawsuit dragged on for years between the Costa family and the Order. Finally in 1705, the Sacra Rota at the papal court took over the case, and it ruled in favor of the Knights. So the painting was shipped to the Order’s headquarters on the island of Malta. [Rowlands] John the Baptist was the patron saint of the Knights. Perhaps that influenced the Sacra Rota in its decision. [Pentecost’s idea.]

Curiously during his short life Caravaggio [DIED 1610] had been in Malta [1607-8], a few years after painting our St. John. In the Knight’s great church he had painted a large mural of St. John’s beheading, his only signed work. Briefly Caravaggio himself was an honorary member of the order (1608) until imprisoned and expelled for misbehavior.

In the early 18th century a British visitor to the island fortress of Malta was an English milord, James, the 5th Baron Aston of Forfar. (Died 1786) [Rowlands, opcit.] That was the century when the “Grand Tour” was at its peak and taken mostly by rich and/or noble Englishmen as part of their education. Somehow he acquired the painting. It is not known just how the Order was induced to part with it, but during the 18th century the Order was at low ebb. The Knights on the island of Malta were corrupt, spending their time dueling, drinking, and chasing women. [http://www.local histories.org/malta.html]

Aston shipped it home where it was housed in northern England. There the painting stayed in obscurity, passing down to various members of this Catholic family, until in 1952 it was put on the market through the London dealer Agnews which had purchased it from the family a year earlier, 1951. The dealer briefly lent it for exhibition at the Royal Academy, and then to a Caravaggio show in Milan. Suddenly the world took notice.

In the 1950s Baroque art was just starting to come back in fashion. The Met considered purchasing it, but was at the same time thinking about Caravaggio’s “Concert,” and so declined. Director Walker of the Natl. Gallery in Washington turned it down against the advice of his wife whom he usually trusted, and later spoke of his regret at not buying it for the nation. Walker said it was the most important picture he didn’t acquire when he might have. “I made a mistake which still haunts me.”[C, p. 68, n. 9] Meantime back in London the painting was again at Agnews on Bond St. In the spring of 1952 one of the museum trustees was vacationing in London. Milton McGreevy, his wife Barbara, and young daughter Jeanne Green were walking along Bond St. They decided to drop in at Agnews, and there was the painting.
Milton immediately put a reserve on it, and so it came to Kansas City. [Rowlands, pp. 215-226. Curator Ward, docent lectures.]) It is the museum’s most significant acquisition since the end of World War II. [C, p.64.]

Now what do you think it cost? It’s hard to believe but for this great work the trustees paid $67,000. That’s roughly the cost nowadays of a Land Rover Range Rover ($71,200 in 2003. Consumer Reports April 2003, p. 6).

PROVENANCE STORY # 2

For 74 years this statue has caused giggles and dismay to some teachers and school children. It is one of the most important Renaissance Italian sculptures in the US. The colossal work weighs some 3 tons and is cut from just one piece of stone and not pieced. It is fully signed by Mosca of Florence, and the statue’s overblown heroic nude forms show Michelangelo’s influence on the sculptor. The two artists were contemporaries working in the same town. The marble is from Michelangelo’s favorite quarry at Carrara. Correspondence between Mosca and Cosimo d’Medici [CHECK de?], first Grand Duke of Tuscany, indicate that this ruler of Florence commissioned it. Cosimo had been at odds with the important Florentine Strozzi family who had fled to Rome where they were wealthy financiers and bankers. So it is believed that this was Cosimo’s make-peace gift. The huge work was shipped to Rome where the Strozzi family placed it in their palace courtyard, and there it sat, mentioned by the Renaissance art historian Vasari and in writings by travelers, until sold and shipped to the museum. [Assoc. Curator Rowlands, Eliot, “Atalanta and Meleager and the Calydonian Boar,” paper presented to the Midwest Art Historical Assoc., spring 1989; abstracted by Lee P.]

PROVENANCE STORY # 3

The value of a work of art is enhanced if it is importantly associated with history, or been commissioned or owned by someone famous. This unusual object meets all of these designations. As the plaque on it says in French, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte commissioned it. Made of Imperial Sevres porcelain and gilt bronze, the clock is in the form of the big Column in the Place Vendome, Paris. Napoleon had ordered that monument built from the 1,200 melted down bronze cannons he had captured at the Battle of Austerlitz. It commemorated what many considered to be his most famous victory. The big column’s design was based on
that of the ancient Emperor Trajan’s in Rome. At the summit of the clock’s little column stands Napoleon, dressed in ancient costume and holding a statue of the ancient goddess of Victory.

The inscription on the base tells us that the clock is the Emperor’s gift to the wife of Michel Ney on New Year’s Day 1814. Ney was one of Napoleon’s favorite and more famous generals. From humble background as a barrel maker’s son, Ney had risen to the top of the military and Napoleonic society. Legend says that while covering the Moscow retreat, he was the last French soldier to leave Russia. Napoleon called Ney “the bravest of the brave,” and made him a duke and a prince. (Of Moscow, see inscription) After Napoleon had been exiled to Elba, but returned to France, Ney ignored his new allegiance to the restored Bourbon monarchy, and rejoined Napoleon. In 1814 the clock was presented to his wife. That New Year’s Day present was made around a year and a half before the Battle of Waterloo where Ney and Napoleon fought the European allies and were defeated. Ney had 5 horses shot out from under him. Napoleon was again exiled. Later that year the restored monarchy arrested Ney for treason and he was shot. Around just a year and half after this clock was presented, he and Napoleon together fought at the battle of Waterloo 1815 where Ney had 5 horses killed from under him. Napoleon was defeated and went into final exile. Later that year Ney was arrested by the restored Bourbon monarchy, tried for treason, and shot.

Not only does there survive Napoleon’s commission of the clock to the Sevres factory and its price (2,400 livres), but also the list he had made indicating the persons to receive New Year’s day presents in 1814 .. [”Taste of Napoleon,” NAMA Bulletin, Vol. IV, No. 10, 1969, pp. 100-101.]

PROVENANCE STORY # 4

How did this work arrive? The provenance is not complete, but the museum’s medieval cloister was sold to the museum from the collection of William Randolph Hearst. You movie buffs remember him - his life was the inspiration for one of the ten best films ever made, “Citizen Kane” starring and directed by Orson Welles. Hearst was a media and publishing tycoon, political manipulator, and omnivorous art collector. In California he was building San Simeon where he already had installed a European cloister. In the early 1940s Hearst was feeling some financial pressures, and put this one on the market. It never had made it to California, but was stored on the East Coast still in its shipping crates from France.

The 14th century cloister is thought to originally have been part of an Augustinian monastery northwest of Paris. When the monastery was suppressed this arcade was disassembled, then partially reconstructed in a private garden at Beauvais. There it remained until 1930 when it was again dismantled and shipped to the US.

On arriving at the museum it was discovered the boxes weren’t marked and the stones not identified. The staff had to guess what went where as they laboriously put it back together for the museum’s 15th anniversary. By that time the west end galleries of the first floor were finished and open to the public.
Like the cloister the ornately etched matching horse and rider armor also belonged to Hearst, and was bought by the museum at the same time. For some 66 years it has been a favorite art object of generations of Kansas City children. Made in 16th century Italy during the Renaissance, it is uniquely complete. There are so many little pieces that could have been lost. Sometime, look at the number of them in the articulated fingers. At the time it was made in Italy it could have been sold for the equivalent price of today’s small corporate Lear jet.

[Christina Nelson docent lecture]

**AFRICAN ART**

As a change of pace we'll make a detour to see some artworks not from Europe. It’s not known whether any African art was exhibited 75 years ago at the Opening. There is no mention of it in the first handbook. The Registrar tells me that the trustees had purchased some very minor objects and added a few more during the 1930s.

This lack of focus was “typical” of US art museums at the time. It reflected the general ignorance of Americans on the subject. According to former African Curator Joyce M. Youmans, the first trustees “...did not adhere to one of the major tenets of their acquisition policy, that calling for representation of all eras and civilizations. Glaring omissions revealed their biases...” [She cites also the lack of interest in contemporary, Southeast Asian, and Oceanic art.] 75 years ago and earlier, museums often stashed their holdings of African, Oceanic, and other exotic cultures in back galleries far removed from the museum entrances. Often these were referred to in their publications as the “primitive” collections. “Primitive” is now a politically incorrect word.

Not until 25 years after the opening were some important African works acquired. The 17th century Benin kingdom brass plaque was a purchase decision made by Director Laurence Sickman. [1958] “For the next two decades the collection of African art “was to grow almost exclusively by gifts.” Generous local collectors became increasingly interested. In 1982 when Marc Wilson became Director, he instituted an official policy for collecting African art. . [Curator

In the 16\textsuperscript{th} century the Benin kingdom’s [Nigeria] technology produced fine works cast in brass. The plaque was once attached to a palace wall. It shows a chief who is coming to the royal court to perform his annual dance of fealty before the king. During the performance he will twirl the ceremonial sword he holds, which had been a gift to him from the king. Or it might represent the king himself who also danced with a similar sword before the altar of his ancestors. It is fortunate now to have in the collection one of the swords, this one of iron.

**NATIVE AMERICAN**

75 years ago at the Opening, in contrast to the minimal showing if any, of African art, there were plenty of Native American works to see in a large ground floor gallery dedicated to it. [On the south side of the building where the Ford Learning Center and classrooms are today.] At that time when the first 3 trustees had so much money to spend, the subject of Indians was pervasive in American popular culture. Examples: movies, novels, pulp fiction, children’s stories and playing activities, etc. Audience members my age, when you were in grade school didn’t you or a friend have a fringed Indian costume, headband with feather, and a small bow with blunt arrows?

Idealized representations of Indians are on the exterior reliefs of this building. [Charles Keck]. The large bronze doors at the south and east entrances feature scenes from Longfellow’s “The Song of Hiawatha.” whose verses were recited by American school children. Indian art was easily accessible. Before the Opening in 1933 the trustees were able to acquire some 300 objects, mainly of Great Plains material, from the Heye Foundation. From Fred Harvey they purchased lots of South-West pottery and Navajo textiles.

At the Opening and often thereafter has been exhibited this “outstanding” [NAMA website 2008] Cheyenne eagle feather headdress which people commonly like to call a chief’s and a “war bonnet.” It dates around 1875. It again will be shown when the 2\textsuperscript{nd} floor galleries have been rebuilt and reimstalled. This department has been greatly enhanced by recent gifts and bequests from local collectors. It’s Opening will be celebrated during the festivities of the 75\textsuperscript{th} anniversary.

**ASIAN COLLECTIONS**

In order to consider the Asian holdings, we return again to the earliest years of the 1930s before the building opened. For advice on acquisitions from the Orient, Harold Woodberry Parsons introduced the trustees to Langdon Warner, a field researcher and lecturer on Asian studies at Harvard and the Fogg Museum. Warner also had experience in museum
management, and had assisted in forming other collections of Asian art, notably at Cleveland where Parsons also advised. An expert on Japanese art rather than Chinese, Warner found in time for the opening most of the wooden artworks from Japan now exhibited on the big staircase between the 2nd and 3rd floors.

This area is dominated by the impressive religious statue of the Amida Buddha of around the 12th-13th centuries. Several years before the Opening, Warner found it in Nara. Looks are deceiving. It appears to be cast in heavy bronze metal. However it was made for a temple without much money, and consists of inexpensive interior armatures of light wood, the surface clad in thin carved slabs of wood, and then lacquered black and gold. It is made in 3 sections, each of which is very light weight and can be carried by two men. After it appeared at the Opening the big Buddha was seldom exhibited because of its 9 foot height until this part of the building was finished in 1976.

Almost all the wooden sculptures exhibited in the same area were also provided by Warner for the Opening.
Warner also bought a number of things for the museum from C. T. Loo, the preeminent dealer of Chinese art and artifacts during the first half of the 20th century. He had offices in NY and Paris. For the Opening he lent many art works, hoping they would gain the trustees’ approval. And they frequently did. For many years thereafter Loo was a source for the Chinese, South Asian and Indian collections. Former Director Laurence Sickman called Loo “the Duveen of Oriental dealers.” [Sickman, in C].

In 1931 Langdon Warner agreed to make a buying trip to the Far East for the trustees. It was probably the greatest time in Chinese history to buy art. As the political and social structure edged toward collapse, and RR building, road construction, and other engineering projects tore up the countryside, 1,000s of tombs were disturbed and looted

When Langdon arrived in Beijing, he looked up a former student of his who had gone there a year earlier to continue his studies in China.

Here is Laurence Sickman who has just graduated cum laude from Harvard, and is on his way to China for the very first time. He is 25 years old. He received a post graduate Harvard-Yen Ching Universities’ joint fellowship. [Yen-Ching was a University in Beijing. [Sickman was the 2nd recipient of this newly created fellowship. The allowance was generous, and he was able to live in a fine old home with four servants. He hired scholar-artists in calligraphy, painting, poetry and language. [Wilson, draft eulogy Nov. 10, 1988] It was a fascinating time to live in Beijing. Sickman was able to study with the literati and socialize with the international glitterati. [Wilson’s terms.] He studied Chinese painting and painted some himself. [Some are in NAMA] The imperial palace was open to the public with its 1,000s of art objects collected over more than that number of years. Sickman’s required schedule of studies was not very demanding. He could wander almost at will through northern China for weeks, and did so. When his former teacher arrived, he and Warner traveled together extensively making purchases. However, Warner wanted to return to his Harvard work. He recommended that the trustees rely on this young man with practically no credentials whom they had never even met. Warner pointed out that this unknown wouldn’t cost the trustees anything since he was
supported by the fellowship. [C]; this of course must have appealed to the trustees.

Sickman often told the story that when he arrived in China the first work he had purchased for himself turned out to be a fake! Yet he personally assembled most of the Museum’s celebrated Chinese collection, and his aesthetic judgments were extraordinary. The collection he formed has been called by APOLLO magazine “one of the most distinguished in the world.” (Denys Sutton, “The Lure of Ancient China” Apollo XCVII, March 1973, p. 10) and by the NYTIMES “one of the finest single curatorial achievements in museum history.” [John Russell, art critic, July 31, 1983]

By the 1950s, Sickman would be considered the most knowledgeable authority on Chinese art in the US, and the book he wrote on Chinese art was the most influential book written on the subject in the English language. [Wilson, eulogy draft, op.cit.] For years it was a staple of education.

This remarkable scholar was born in Denver [1906] where his father was an engineer. As a child Sickman was exposed to several Japanese prints his family owned, and he loved visiting Denver’s Chinatown where he acquired a few cheap knick-knacks. He was a brilliant student and “head boy” (top ranked) at his prep school. As a teenager he settled on a career as a curator of oriental art. [Wilson, draft of eulogy, Nov. 10, 1988] In searching for higher education, he discovered that Harvard had the only in depth Asian Studies program in the country at that time. Once there, among his interests there was Buddhism. He studied the religion and the ancient texts...in four different languages. [Wilson, draft of eulogy, Nov. 10, 1988]

He returned in 1933 for the opening and this large gallery greeted the guests with some of the treasures he had found. How impressed the public must have been to see the Buddhist temple ensemble of architectural elements. Sickman liked to tell the story that in Beijing a cable arrived from J.C. Nichols that stated only “Buy large things.” [Laurence Sickman’s Temple,” in KCStar, May 11, 1988. C. Sickman docent lectures]

Sickman found out that a Buddhist temple within the confines of the Forbidden City itself was in collapse, and informed Warner. The temple staff had sold the porch ceiling to a carpenter’s guild, and it was
lying in the guild courtyard about to be cut up and recycled into coffins since the Chinese favored cypress wood for that purpose. It doesn’t rot and is impervious to insects. [Wilson draft eulogy Nov. 10, 1988.] So Sickman saved this architectural work that had been built in 1444. The gilt heavenly well, now in the porch ceiling’s center, had been in the temple’s interior.

To further fill Nichol’s request for big items, the large lacquered screen in the hall was purchased. It belonged to a Manchu duke [4 clawed dragon rank sign] and shows the military on autumn maneuvers which mainly consisted of hunting. The hunt takes place outside the Great Wall, and the emperor -Kang Hsi? - is present. [Sickman to Pentecost] a great emperor, Kang Hsi organized the army and organized the autumn and spring maneuvers."

C. T. Loo provided the hinged grill-work wood doors with fine bronze mounts, and also the large Buddhist mural installed on the back wall, which is from a different temple complex. It is remarkable that this fragile early 14th century mural has survived. It is made of reinforcing sticks, other vegetation, pebbles and mud. [Wilson lecture, April 9, 1997.] The mud surface was polished, whitewashed, and then water colored. [Ibid. but CHECK Garland’s Getty project]. Like the temple porch ceiling, it also arrived in many pieces requiring reassembling here. At the Opening the whole ensemble of architecture and mural was exhibited as you see it now.

As Warner returned to Harvard, he left his unspent money from the trustees at a Chinese bank for Sickman to continue using. The procedures Sickman was to follow were often difficult. Since he was still mostly an unknown to the trustees, he was to write a report about a desirable object and send it with photographs to Warner at Harvard. There the information was further studied by Warner before being forwarded to the trustees for approval. Many of the Chinese dealers didn’t want to tie up their inventory for such a drawn out period, and wouldn’t accept a reserve from Sickman. Since the purchase of some items just wouldn’t wait, on occasion Sickman borrowed money from friends in Peking and his mother who was living there with him.
These difficulties Sickman overcame through a good friend he made who also was in Beijing, the German art dealer Otto Burchard, Ph.D., Heidelberg. He has been called the foremost European dealer in Asian art during the 1920s and 30s. He had an art firm in Berlin and a dealer in NY. Like Sickman he had an infectious and all consuming passion for Chinese art. Most useful was his wide range of contacts and informants. [Picus, Robert P., “Charlotte Horstman at Eighty-Two...” in “Orientations, Vol. 21, No. 11, pp. 82-89.] Unofficially he served as an excellent advisor to Sickman on many of the purchases.

Here’s how they solved the problem of money. If a seller would not accept a reserve from Sickman, Burchard would purchase the art work outright with his own money and ship it with Sickman’s report to Warner at Harvard. Warner would vet it and if he approved, send it on to the trustees for the collection. If Warner disapproved of the artwork, Burchard then forwarded it to his dealer in NY who would put it on the market. [C, p. 32] It was a most useful collaboration, and the museum had in this unofficial way another pair of expert eyes searching for treasures. Of course, whenever Warner turned down works that had been sent to him, Sickman was greatly dismayed and regretful. After all, both Sickman and Burchard had judged them worthy of the museum. Particularly Warner seemed not to like objects of the Ming period. Said Sickman, Warner thought “Ming was a dirty word.” [S, Formation lecture 1978]

After Sickman’s fellowship was over and he returned as Oriental Curator to the Museum in 1935, the need for Warner’s pre-approval lessened, to be used only if S or the trustees particularly wanted it.

Among objects that Burchard discovered for Sickman are these superb 15th century porcelains. One day some of the “country gentry” [Sickman’s often used sardonic term for tomb robbers] showed Burchard these Ming Dynasty wine vases that had been “liberated” [i.e. taken from a tomb, Sickman’s sardonic term, Sickman lectures] Burchard desired them but delayed the purchase. Later he returned only to discover that the “gentry” had quarreled over ownership. During their fracas one of the porcelains was broken. Accordingly the price was reduced. Burchard had the breaks repaired in Japan. It is extremely rare to have a matched mirror-image true Chinese pair of this quality and time. Very few have survived. The dragons with five claws signify imperial ownership, and Emperor Hsuan Te’s name is on the shoulders of the vases. [Sickman lectures]

One of Sickman’s most important purchases for the trustees was this jade called a Pi (“bee”) that symbolizes heaven, immortality, and the male forces of the cosmos. This ritual
form has been made in China since pre-history to the last Emperor (deposed 1911). He used one ceremonially at the solstice ceremonies at the Altar of Heaven.

The jade arrived in time to be exhibited at the Opening. If it is not the most famous jade in the world, as has been claimed (Director Wilson lectures; Sickman lectures) it definitely is one of the most famous.

The seller was carrying the jade from one possible buyer to the next. For fear of losing this extraordinary object Sickman detained the seller hour after hour with tea, obligatory etiquette, and patient negotiation. [S, collection Formation lecture] Sickman said “Our big jade disc...took hours to buy.” He and the seller drank “gallons of tea.” [C] At last Sickman “wore him out” and the deal was concluded. [S, Formation]

During Sickman’s lifetime, [died 1988] the jade was considered the most famous object of all the museum’s holdings, and it was the most published, said Sickman [lectures] It is hard to find a respectable book on the subject of jade that does not include it.

One of the sculptures that Sickman and Warner examined together in China was this highly important religious statue representing the all compassionate Bodhisattva Kuan Yin. Hard to believe, it was dismembered and lying on the ground in the dealer’s courtyard. Snow covered it and was brushed off for their viewing. Sickman thought it was splendid, but to his regret Warner didn’t care for it, and thought it was a later date, Ming Dynasty. [You have already heard of Warner’s antipathy for Ming.] Warner turned down the purchase, after which along came the dealer C.T. Loo who did buy it, and then sent it on loan to the museum for the Opening. It was greatly admired but the trustees had to pay Loo much more than Sickman and Warner might have paid earlier. Sickman’s research would show that the sculpture was earlier than Warner had thought. It is NOT Ming but older, dated to the 11th and 12th centuries. [Sickman lecture on formation of the Oriental Collection]

This work is one of the finest Chinese Buddhist sculptures surviving, and has been
much published and praised. It has been “internationally heralded as the finest sculpture of its kind outside of China.” [NAMA website 2008] The former Met Museum Director Thomas Hoving said “(it) may be the most breathtaking Chinese sculpture in the country.” [Thorson, Alice, “Art 101” K.C.Star, her review of Hoving’s book “Art for Dummies,” Nov. 9, 1999, H4.] Earlier in “Connoisseur” magazine which he edited, he wrote that this work was “a spiritual and aesthetic triumph, one of the best in existence” and that it was one of the 30 most “sublime” art works in public institutions in the United States. [July 1984 issue]

At the Opening preview, as the visitor turned away from the temple, at the other end of the large gallery was this exotic view of a large ceramic tile ensemble on the exit wall. It was taken from the tomb entrance of Prince Ding who died in 1854. He was a member of the Ching Dynasty, but a son by a lesser concubine, [Sickman docent lectures]. Therefore the use of the imperial yellow color on his tomb was limited. When Sickman was in China in the early 30s, he was contacted by an American 1st lieutenant stationed there who had ties to KC. J. M. McHugh knew that a collection of art was being created in KC for a new museum. He also knew of a princely tomb being dismantled and or left to rot because the family could no longer afford the upkeep. He contacted Sickman and sent him a black and white photograph with red pencil indicating the tile work he was able to obtain. His gift was accepted, and as shown in other slides the tile gate surround was dismantled, the pieces wrapped in cloth and tied with rope.

The bundles were loaded onto fourteen camels that were kneeling back to
front along the sidewall of the street, and here they are, ready to depart on the first leg of the long journey to KC. [Email from Asst. Curator Elizabeth Williams to docent Diane Federman Aug. 21, 2008.

Among other art works lent for the Opening by C.T. Loo is this pair of 3rd century chimeras, fabulous beasts which served as tomb guardians over 16 centuries ago. Placed at the Opening as you now see them, in front of Prince Ding's gate, they were greatly admired. Trustee J.C. Nichols who liked to bargain, thought their price was too high. He believed Loo would lower it rather than have to pay shipping the heavy stone sculptures back to New York BUT Loo called Nichols’ bluff. Back they went after the Opening, to the disappointment of many here.

Important in the Museum's formative years were two women staff members, Lindsay Hughes Cooper and Ethelene Jackson. During World War II when most of the male staff was in the military, Lindsay would be acting Oriental curator, and Ethelene Jackson would be acting Director. (Mind you! At no increase of salary!) These two women persistently nagged the trustees, especially Nichols about the loss of the chimeras. After 11 years of their complaints, he finally agreed to buy them in 1944. Unfortunately by then Loo had upped the price by 50 percent. [Churchman, “Laurence Sickman and the formation of the Chinese Collection at The NAMA,” undated 10 page handout, p. 8] The price was paid and the beasts returned to stand by Ding’s gate ever since.

Chimera is a western [Greek] word that has been assigned conventionally to these composite animal forms, in this case here lion body and head, bird wings, and goat horns and beards. To the Chinese what we really have here is a two-horned Bixie (pronounced BEE-shee), meaning “Averter of Evil” and a one-horned Tianlu meaning “Heavenly Emolument” signifying wealth in the next world. The damaged horns on their heads are now just worn knobs. Some scholars believe that these beasts with horns and of this size were reserved as imperial prerogatives, while those lacking horns were standard for the tombs of princes and nobles. ["Son of Heaven: Imperial Arts of China, Robert L. Thorp translator, Seattle 1988, p. 187.

Unidentified men in front of the Tomb gateway

Chimera (one of a pair) Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 C.E.) 44-26/1
The important work, Procession of the Empress, was first seen by the KC public in 1941 when it was placed on the wall of this newly opened gallery. Director Marc Wilson has called it “the greatest sculpture outside of China.” [His lecture April 9, 1997.] It was acquired jointly by the museum and the Fogg Museum at Harvard, in 1934, but it took Sickman quite a few more years to personally reassemble it from the many pieces into which it had been hacked.

Buddhism was no longer prominent in China, and its sites much neglected. Many temples were decayed ruins or rebuilt as schools. Very few people except archaeologists went to what had been over 1,500 years ago very important Buddhist sites such as the Lung Men caves. Sickman had first visited the Buddhist complex in 1931 when he saw this work in situ, carved out of the living rock of a cave interior and not yet damaged. Photographs and a rubbing were made of it. On a later visit in 1933 he saw that the relief was being destroyed by thieves. His complaints to the disintegrating Chinese government to secure the area did no good. So he tried to rally some members of the Beijing foreign colony to finance guards at the cave. That idea was dropped since, what government there still was, suspected the foreigners in Beijing might be raising a force to take over. So Sickman then decided to track down as much of the relief as he could. Collecting the fragments took time. They had been widely scattered to various Chinese cities, and one head was located as far away as Germany. There were lots of chips. Sickman sent “boxes of rubble” to the museum. [Lindsay Cooper, docent lecture] In 1935 when he returned to take up the curatorship, he had a sandbox built in the museum basement. He began pushing the stone fragments around in it until the image matched as closely as possible his rubbing and photographs. The sandbox was necessary since the violently ripped-off pieces were of uneven depths. While pushing them around he found that the work could only be read if illuminated from the left where the cave entrance had been. Bad cracks and gouges were filled in with plaster of Paris. He never could locate the lower left head, and it is a plaster replacement.

It was soon realized that the restored relief was too fragile to travel back and forth between the Boston area and Kansas City, so the Fogg Museum relinquished its half ownership. [Churchman, “Laurence Sickman and the Formation of the Chinese Collection at the NAMA,” undated 10 p. handout, approx. P. 6.] In the cave there had been a matching relief on the other side of the cave entrance showing the Emperor and his

During the Cold War, some 30 years after the Empress relief was installed here, the Communist Chinese government set a price on Sickman’s head claiming he had looted China to form the Museum’s Asian collection. Wall posters specifically referred to him as pillaging this relief. Nonetheless, after Nixon “opened” China, Sickman was among the first museum directors and Asian scholars to travel there. He met with Premier Zhou Enlai whom he greatly impressed so that KC became one of the few venues for the great Chinese Archaeological Exhibition, “Archaeological Finds of the Peoples Republic of China,” 1975. Prior to this the Chinese had agreed that the Communist government’s first exhibition of Chinese art outside of China would be only in Washington, D.C. [Volunteer Voice, winter 2001.] Met Director Hoving was miffed when he learned the exhibit would not come to New York but here, and even more miffed when he learned that Sickman persuaded the Chinese to add an additional venue in San Francisco before leaving the US. The largest Chinese population in the US lived there, and Sickman believed that they should see some of the great treasures of their ancestors.

When the exhibition was in KC, it was accompanied by a large staff of Maoist Chinese. During their stay here, Sickman discreetly kept the Empress relief covered up. He humorously recalled that he didn’t want to remind the Chinese of its existence, and that he might still be wanted dead or alive for a good sum of money.

The Chinese show was greatest special exhibition ever held at the museum, and was greatly anticipated. But a horrible glitch arose a few days before the Saturday night Fellows opening. The Chinese staff balked on having it when they learned that the first viewers would be privileged wealthy citizens. They threatened not to open at all. The Education Department staff decided to round up KC school children as the first viewers, but discovered that on such notice no classes of students could be persuaded to come on a Saturday morning. The solution was to place rushed calls to the Boy and Girl Scouts, the Blue Birds, and other children’s organizations. On Saturday morning groups of these scrubbed, well-behaved children marched through the exhibition, wearing their uniforms. The Chinese were pleased that children were served before the capitalists. When the children left, museum staff and volunteers were busy cleaning away all the smudges on glass display cases before the evening guests arrived. I was there with other volunteers, keeping the children moving along through the exhibit, and returned for the festive evening opening.
Sickman acquired many great masterpieces of Chinese painting. I’ll mention just three favorites that are great masterpieces and have good stories:

During Warner’s trip to China he and Sickman traveled to Tientsen to see the deposed Emperor Puyi who was living there under the supervision of the Japanese. Japan hoped to make him a puppet ruler of Manchuria as they conquered China. Of the thousands and thousands of imperial treasures still housed in the Forbidden City, Emperor Puyi had managed to retain some paintings. Warner got entre to him through his English teacher. This English woman knew the Emperor needed cash, and that Warner was buying art. Through her Warner and Sickman were introduced to the Emperor. Sickman said “We bought 3 or 4 paintings at that time directly. They were the first paintings we acquired - [and] directly from the Emperor.” [Churchman, Laurence Sickman A Tribute, 1988, p. 29.]

Among them was the fragile, 16th century “Lotus” hand scroll in the colored, “boneless” style of Chinese painting. During negotiations the Emperor was present but not really focused on art. On occasion he casually looked over the shoulders of the two Americans examining the paintings, but he was much more interested in taking turns on his new motorcycle in the courtyard. Everyone kept running to the windows to watch him ride. [Churchman, LS: A Tribute. S, docent lectures.]

In its soft washes of color, the scroll depicts the life cycle of the lotus, that important Asian symbol of purity and salvation. The plant is seen in its life cycle, “from tender buds through the strength of full maturity and on to withering decay.” [Wilson et al, “8 Dynasties of Chinese Painting...p. 225]

One midnight there appeared at Sickman’s door a runner carrying 2 scrolls, one of them this magnificent work. The runner declared that Sickman would have to buy both as a package. This mysterious person would not say who he was or whom he represented. Sickman had to make a snap judgment to buy them then and there, fearing
that otherwise he would never see this particular scroll again. He excused himself to rush to a friend’s house in order to borrow the money. Sickman never discovered who had owned the scroll but suspected that some princely person had an immediate gambling debt to settle at that late hour of the night. [C, p. 32]

Sickman thought this work was perhaps the greatest Chinese landscape in America, and certainly it is the premier work of the Chinese painting collection. [S, “Formation of the Oriental Collection, lecture April 1978, Wilson, docent lectures] Today it is considered one of the greatest surviving Chinese paintings in the world. The artist Xu Daoning was one of the great maverick geniuses in Chinese art with a very distinctive style. Director Marc Wilson has said on KCPT that the painting’s stature is equivalent in western art to one of Michelangelo’s works. [I saw this but don’t remember date???CHECK scribbles in docent handbook.]

A bit of trivia: In the painting can be seen the first depiction anywhere in the world of a rod and reel, one of a multitude of inventions China gave to the world. [Wilson, docent lectures]. The fragile silk and ink masterpiece is now over 900 years old. It was painted about 17 years before William the Conqueror invaded and took over England [Battle of Hastings, 1066]. At the moment it’s not on exhibition, but look in the bookstore where you can glimpse a replica high up on a shelf. [See Marc Wilson et al, “8 Dynasties, pp. 21-24.]

Above, one that almost got away. In the 1930s Sickman saw and desired this hand scroll. It was sent to Warner for vetting, but he didn’t think it fit to pass on to the trustees. It was sold and disappeared. Thereafter the work eluded Sickman’s persistent to acquire it. At one point C.T. Loo had it on consignment, but its anonymous French owners canceled the sale and took it back. Loo said he would - but never did - tell Sickman anything else about the owners.

In 1963, more than 30 years after Warner turned down its purchase, Sickman was in NY on a very hot summer day. He walked along Madison Avenue and saw in the window of Parke-Bernet gallery a catalogue advertising an upcoming auction. It was opened to a small illustration of the hand scroll he had so long desired. The auction was ill attended. Sickman guessed that collectors and museum staff members were out of town due to the summer heat. He bought the painting for “trifling sum” [C, p.87] of $3,800. [Wilson lecture, “LS and the China Connection,” Nov. 11, 1988.] Overjoyed and somewhat in amazement he said, “The things I seek are seeking me.”

This important painting well may depict a real garden party held over 800 years ago in the spring [willow tree just leafing out]. The host was one of the richest men in China and a
patron of the artist. The host was himself a painter, as well as a poet and government official. Invitations to his famous entertainments were highly coveted, and commented on. There would be “singing girls” [high class courtesans] wearing the most beautiful garments, concubines who would inveigle verses from a poet in exchange for one of their own, and some of the guests attended costumed as the immortals. Note the man approaching the gathering from the right with his attendant. Hot wine was served in light lacquer cups which were floated to the guests on the garden waterways. Note servant boys heating it up at far left, and a hopeful guest sitting on a bank waiting for a wine cup to float by. The guest was supposed to write a poem after its consumption.

This was a very old Chinese tradition based on an historic spring garden party held long ago in 353. That host was a revered calligrapher who wrote about the event, and it became a frequent subject in Chinese art for 100s of years. ['Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion," by Wang Xizhu, 353.]

But back to this party painted by Ma Yuan, some of the activities documented were rather bizarre. A particular feature of this garden was the large saddle shaped rock in the background. It is recorded that a boat with ropes attached to it was placed between the pine trees. Guests were invited to get into the boat. Retainers placed the ropes over tree branches and pulled on them. As the guests were elevated and rocked back and forth they cried out “We’re flying, we’re flying” like the immortals! [Wilson, docent lectures]

My tales of the formation of the Asian collection are excessive, but with good reason. Sickman had a passion for art and was never happier than when he was a young man in China. More than any curator I’ve heard since volunteering here, he loved reminiscing about that period of his life, and the treasures he had found for the museum.

Sickman finally met the trustees for the first time when he came to KC for the Opening. Still supported by his fellowship until 1935, Sickman returned to China, entrusted by the trustees to find many more objects. When the fellowship expired, the trustees made him Curator and he came back to the museum. His working arrangement with the trustees was a rotating one: two years here, than 1 year in China, the cycle to be repeated. The need for Warner’s advice diminished unless S and the trustees particularly wanted it. Now Sickman also supervised the Japanese and South Asian acquisitions. [Sutton, p. 10]

There are still more tales to tell about this remarkable scholar. Along came Pearl Harbor. During the years of World War II many of the museum’s male staff members joined the military. Sickman went to India to serve for a short stint under Lord Mountbatten. [Wilson dology draft, op.cit.] India was then still part of the British Empire. This gave Sickman the opportunity to study Indian art. The allies made bombing runs into Japanese occupied China. Sickman was posted with the Army Corp air force which was growing out of Chenault’s Flying Tigers, the volunteer American aviators who came to China’s defense when the Japanese invaded in 1937. Because of his extensive travels there,
Sickman worked in Army Intelligence, reviewing aerial reconnaissance to advise bombing runs on where to drop their deadly loads - and where NOT to.

In 1944 towards the end of the war Sickman acquired this small treasure, *Vairocana and Eight Bodhisattvas on a Garbhadhatu Mandala*. He had first seen it in 1935 when his fellowship was finished, and he was returning to Kansas City to be curator. He had stopped off in India, and in the back of the shop of a Mughal gem dealer was this unusual Buddhist object. Knowing little of Indian art, he puzzled over it and didn’t make a purchase, but he studied up. World War II put him back in India, and again he found himself at the same dealer’s. There in the same place in the back of the shop was the little triptych. It had sat there in the same spot for 11 years as if waiting for him. Better yet, the price was reduced!

Made of fragile sandalwood in the 8th to 9th century, it is a rare and important document of Buddhist art along the trade routes. [S, Oriental Formation lecture] The central figure is the Vairocana Buddha surrounded by other buddhas, saints, and guardians. At the bottom is a priest in what appears to be a scene of his consecration, and the work may have belonged to him.

Until the war Sickman had largely ignored Indian art to focus on Chinese. Many of the museum’s Indian works had been provided by Loo, some of them lent for the 1933 Opening, and continuing thereafter. After the War, Sickman felt confident in adding to this area because of his studies and Army posting in India.

Several days before the official Japanese surrender, Sickman was on an allied plane that flew into Beijing to receive the surrender of the Japanese command there. The image, left, is labeled “Over the Hump,” as the flyers called the dangerous barrier of the Himalayan Mountains between India and China. It was a nerve wracking approach to the city and landing there, not knowing whether the Japanese might shoot them down. However, the high command was lined up on the tarmac to greet them and to surrender their samurai swords to the Americans, rather than the Chinese whom they had dreadfully mistreated. Sickman was carrying a satchel filled with $250,000 cash that belonged to the US Army Quartermaster. [C, “LS and the Formation.” p. 7, undated. I think this was a handout at his memorial lecture by Marc Wilson in 1988 but am not sure.]
Sickman’s assignment was to secure the secret papers of the Japanese command. Japanese money was now worthless in China, and the dollars in the satchel were to bribe their cooperation if necessary. [Wilson eulogy draft, opcit.]

Sickman interrogated the Japanese general staff for several days. But during this very brief stay he managed to see again his old friend Burchard who had spent most of the war in the Russian embassy. Burchard had managed to continue his contacts with dealers, and to obtain fine things. From him, Sickman acquired this stunning Tang Dynasty sculpture, presumably once one of a pair. Sickman also saw another old friend, the French consul who also had sat out the war in Beijing. He had married C. T. Loo’s daughter. The French consul owned some great Ming paintings and needed money. Sickman paid for all these treasures with the Army money in the satchel. He flew back to India with the plane’s bombay compartment filled with art works and samurai swords. On landing he immediately cabled the trustees so he could replace the money he had borrowed very irregularly from the Army.

After the War but still in the service, Sickman was posted to MacArthur’s occupied Japan. Now his assignment was to find and return Buddhist art looted from China. Japanese collectors were selling some great Chinese works from their collections. There Sickman was able to acquire the Gung Shen hand scroll, the wonderful monochrome North Sung painting of dragons fighting in the sky, and the Sung Dynasty hanging scroll of Buddhist Temple in the Hills. All were great Chinese masterpieces whose real worth S didn’t realize at the time. [S, Formation lecture]. It has been proposed that his inattention to Japanese art available just after the War was because of what he had witnessed of that nation’s horrifying atrocities in his beloved China. [Ardiss, Stephen, “Hills and Valleys Within: Laurence Sickman and the Oriental Collection,” in “Oriental Art,” Vol. 24, No. 2, 1978, pp. 228-230.]

In the 1960s, Sickman, now the museum Director, since 1953, was sitting downstairs at his desk and looking at the mail. Out of an envelope fell a photograph of a Ming Dynasty bed. It came from a retired military officer now living in the south-west US. He wanted to know if...
the museum might be interested in the bed that he had acquired while in the Far East. To get it, Sickman hopped on the first plane he could find. Although seen in old illustrations of Chinese furniture, very few fine hardwood alcove beds have survived. This is the only one in the US. [Docent lectures] and it is certainly the best Chinese bed in America. [Wilson lectures]

The Chinese Decorative Arts gallery opened in 1967, and now the museum has one of the premiere collections of Chinese hardwood furniture in the world. It is surpassed only by that in the Taiwan museum among whose holdings are art works brought there by Chang Kai Shek when the Chinese Nationalist government fled there from the Communists on the mainland.

In the early 1930s only few foreigners in Beijing collected classic hardwood furniture and they had stimulated Sickman’s interest. Most collectors were interested in later Ching furniture, heavily carved and often colored.

Sickman recognized the importance of Ming Dynasty hardwood furniture. Sickman’s focus on this type of art work inspired other museums to turn their attention to collecting Ming furniture. [See Piccus citation in next paragraph.]

In 1970 the collection was greatly enhanced by his and Marc Wilson’s purchase of the Charlotte-Horstmann collection. Sickman had known her in China when she was his friend Burchard’s translator. She was also learning about art. Horstman was Chinese-German. Her father was of an old aristocratic family who ran a German-Chinese hotel in Beijing. She became a dealer there herself. In 1972 she sold the majority of her personal furniture collection to the museum. Today some of the individual pieces are as highly valued as the total purchase was when she sold it. [Piccus, Robert P., “Charlotte Horstmann at Eighty-two: 20th Century Evolution of Western Interest in Asian Art,” in “Orientations”, Vol. 21, No. ; Chua, John, “Classical Chinese Furniture in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art,” in “Arts of Asia,” Vol. 23, No. 1, Jan-Feb. 1993]

Let’s turn a moment to one of the Indian galleries. The photo is from the Opening handbook, showing some of the Indian temple porch roof and objects. The view is still about the same as it was for the first museum visitors at the Opening, except now there are glassed vitrines cut into the walls to hold more art.
Dominating the room as it has for 75 years is the large bronze figure of the god Shiva Nataraja, his form as Lord of the Dance. The dealer C. T. Loo sent it on loan for the Opening. The trustees bought it and 7 more Indian bronzes shortly thereafter. From 1941 to 1951 Loo provided 13 more sculptures. Sickman's early expertise was in Chinese art, but in 1935, his fellowship concluded and returning to KC to be curator, he stopped in India and bought 9 objects for the museum. The collection expanded in depth after World War II since he had been stationed in India and had gained more expertise on Indian culture. [C]

Before leaving the Asian collection here's some other information about Sickman. In 1953 he became Museum Director in 1953, and after 20 years retired in 1973. As Director Emeritus he continued to assist the Asian collection with his expertise until his death in 1988. He had received many honorary degrees and marks of distinction. There were many university offers to teach and research, but he declined them all except for some guest lecturing. He wanted to stay with the collection he loved, and it is his monument.

Today the museum has accessioned more than 7,500 Chinese art works, more than 2000 Japanese works, and 945 art works from India and South East Asia. [NAMA website 2008]

Pardon me for overdosing you on the Asian art works, but Sickman loved sharing his adventures with the public, and so do I.

AMERICAN ART

Thomas Hart Benton's most famous - or infamous - easel painting is *Persephone*. The artist didn't use the face of the hired model, but that of his wife Rita who was about to bear their daughter Jessie. [A bust of Rita was sometimes exhibited next to this work, and Curator Taggart pointed out the resemblance.] In his older years Benton admitted that he'd grown to look like the character Hades. The original title, “The ‘Rape of Persephone’” was shocking since in 1939 the word “rape” wasn’t used in the media. Among Benton’s controversial remarks to reporters at that time: That he wanted his pictures to hang in whorehouses and saloons, not museums which were “graveyards.” [He lent “Persephone” to the nightclub owner Billy Rose and it hung for awhile in “The Diamond Horseshoe.”] The typical museum was “a graveyard run by a pretty boy with delicate wrists and a swing in his gait. The pretty boys run the museums because it’s a field most
living men wouldn’t take on. It’s a field where you take care of the dead...You’ve got to have a sort of undertaker’s psychology to go into the museum business.” In this vein he made other homophobic statements about museum staffing. [Adams, Henry, “Thomas Hart Benton,” Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York 1989, pp. 303-4.] It might be noted that Benton’s early sexual experience was with a black haired girl who had a red silk robe. [Ibid.]

The artist’s inflammatory remarks were considered a slur against the museum’s first director Paul Gardner, and resulted in Benton’s dismissal from the KCAI staff.

Let us move on to some of the art works in the American Department. There are approximately 600 consisting of paintings, sculptures, and works on paper. They date from colonial times, the 18th century through to just after World War 2. [NAMA website 2008] Originally American decorative arts were included, but now those objects have been placed under the care of a Decorative Arts Department.

When the museum opened there were portraits and landscapes to see, but the trustees’ focus was not on American art. The general attitude was that European art was superior. Harold Woodberry Parsons wrote in the NYT that the Museum was not following a strict plan for purchases “but has bought haphazardly as fine paintings become available.” There was no one major American art dealer or advisor that helped the trustees form the American art collection. [Conrads, as below p.15] Over the years there have accumulated many works by George Caleb Bingham and Thomas Hart Benton, as might be expected since both these important artists were active and lived in this area. Controversial and outspoken Benton had claimed that the typical museum was a graveyard run by a pretty boy with delicate wrists and a swing in his gait,” and that he wanted his paintings to hang in whorehouses and saloons. But on his death in 1975 he bequest to the museum was 18 of his paintings and more than 25 works on paper. [see Adams, above, op.cit.]

On the screen is a 19th century painting from the famous series George Caleb Bingham painted on the American political process. It seems timely to view it since our national elections are imminent. The artist himself was a politician who served in the Mo legislature, and was a presidential electoral delegate. In this painting he shows a young politician with his satchel full of propaganda, who is trying to persuade residents of Arrow Rock, Mo. to vote for him. The Arrow Rock Tavern in the background still stands. The dog to the left may represent the Whig platform on the slavery issue which was to resist agitation and “Let sleeping dogs lie.” [Conrads, p. 124.] Note: that the chair bottom under the central plump and complacent looking citizen. It is fraying, and he may soon be in for a fall. [Ibid.]
Unfortunately there is not time to recognize the many donors who have built up the American collection. But one organization has to be mentioned. Some of the 20th century works came from the FRIENDS OF ART, your membership organization. The group came together a year after the Opening to try and fill the museum’s lack of 20th century art due to the 30 year clause in Nelson’s will. The Friends was an entirely separately incorporated organization for over 50 years. The dues money was used to purchase art works which it owned until deeding them over to the museum. For many years it was the Friends gifts that were the modern holdings.

The formation of a 20th century collection is a risky business. There are NO 100s of years of scholarship to rely on in making choices. Alfred Barr, former Director of the Museum of Modern Art, said that one does well in selecting modern art to hit the mark one time out of 10.

The Friends annual purchase meeting was a KC event for decades. Members gathered in Atkins Auditorium to examine the choices which had been set up on the stage. Of course staff had pre-approved all of them. The Friends then voted - sometimes raucously and irregularly - on what to purchase and give to the museum. For example, at the 1958 purchase meeting more written ballots were cast than there were members present! [Pentecost, “50 Years of Collecting...]

In 1946 the Friends considered which of 14 paintings to purchase and decided on what now is one of the museum’s strongest paintings of social criticism. Joseph Hirsch painted it just a year after the end of World War II. As black veterans returned to civilian life, there was a wave of lynchings across the nation. Hirsch’s work was often didactic, and he said he wanted to paint contemporary art that was meaningful to the man on the street. His observations are often biting criticism of society.

This seems a rather bold Friends purchase, because in 1946 KC was very much segregated. [Pentecost, “50 Years of Collecting: The Friends of Art at the Nelson,” a retrospective exhibition Dec. 15, 1984 – Jan. 15, 1985; an unofficial catalogue. p. 9] Curator Margie Conrads writes in the new volumes on the American collection that “the “Lynch Family” was “the first contemporary painting with social significance to enter the collection.” The purchase “... was perhaps influenced by the fact that during the year KC had been in the public eye after Cab Calloway [famous black musician] had been beaten and arrested trying to enter one of the city’s white-only dance halls.” [Curator Margaret Conrads, Edt., “American Paintings to 1945,” NAMA, Vol 1, 2007, p. 18.]

Note the baby’s prophetically raised fist in what will become many years later the Black Power salute. The price? $1,200. [Pentecost, “50 years..., p. 9]
Ten years later in 1956 the Friends had seven works to consider and chose five. Among them the standout now is Marsden Hartley’s “Himmel of about 1914-15. [$2,000] Hartley was “the first American artist to wholeheartedly adopt the vocabulary of Synthetic Cubism, yet the vibrancy of his work sets it also in the Expressionist tradition.” [Pentecost, 50 Years of Collecting: The Friends... p. 16] It is one of a series of military “uniform” paintings that reference Hartley’s relationship with a young German officer who was killed in the first months of World War I. When these strident works were first shown in Steiglitz’ small NY gallery, Georgia O’Keefe said the exhibition was “like a brass band in a small closet.” [See Pentecost, “The Art of Love”, FILL IN] In the 1950s homosexuality still was very much kept in the “closet.” One wonders, had the Friends known of Hartley’s relationship with the German officer, would they have been as liberal in choosing this as they were in purchasing the Lynch Family?

Now we look at some holdings in the MODERN & CONTEMPORARY DEPT which supervises European art works dating from 1900 “ad infinitum” and American works since World War II.

MODERN & CONTEMPORARY

It was the FRIENDS again that the museum has to thank for this great early modern masterpiece and others. One of the organization’s most important purchase meetings was held in 1954 when nine 20th century European works were considered. Five of them were by famous German Expressionists. This group of five may constitute one of the Friends’ best bargains, because the total package cost was $14, 200. The paintings were by Beckmann, Nolde, Kokoschka Hofer, and Kirchner. All of these painters had the distinction of being labeled “degenerate” by the Nazis. In persuading the Friends to acquire them, Director Laurence Sickman spoke of the desirability of keeping the group intact as a rounded view of the whole movement. [Pentecost, “50 Years of Collecting p. 13]

On the screen is Emil Nolde’s “Still Life of Masks,” oil on canvas, 1911. It is one of the most published and exhibited modern works of the museum’s holdings. Nolde was one of the most important and individual figures in the history of the German Expressionist movement. His works are characterized by dramatic contrasts of intense color and primitivistic visages with frightening expressions. He was intrigued by the art of faraway cultures and his painting
portrays from the left, the profile face of a Solomon Islands canoe prow, two European carnival masks, and a decorated Brazilian human trophy head. The last mask on the right is derived from a Nigerian mask. This work was one of the least expensive of the group of five. It cost only $1,200 [Ibid., pp. 13-14]

The Friends 1964 purchase meeting was the most controversial and fractious one ever held. Instead of working through dealers, the Selections Committee and staff advisors had directly approached the painter Rothko who sent 2 canvases from his studio, probably reluctantly. “It is a risky business,” he once wrote, “to send a painting out into the world.” Rothko was a prominent painter in the New York School of Abstract Expressionism.

Placed on the Atkins stage his two works seemed obscurely dark and very similar, so much so that the audience could only identify them as the “vertical” one and the “horizontal” one. They were ill lit, and Joyce Hall who was sitting towards the back of the auditorium asked if those were really paintings down there. Long heated arguments broke out about the choices, the actions of the Selections Committee, and the worthiness of the artist. The 355 members who were present finally cast 185 votes for the vertical work, 26 for the horizontal, and 144 for NO purchase. Following the balloting the chosen vertical gift continued to be maligned. It was mockingly renamed “the Blackboard.” Before the vote was taken, Curator Ted Coe had labored painfully to convince the membership that either work would fill a hole in the collection. After the vote a member quipped “This is the first time in the history of the Friends of Art that we have filled a hole with a hole.” A prominent Friends member, who was and still is, dedicated to support of the Nelson, felt that with this purchase the Friends organization was on the wrong track. He proposed the formation of a new support group and even a new museum of modern art. And several decades later he built one just two blocks west of the Nelson! After the meeting Curator Coe said the outspoken comments were so stressful that spent much of the night in the men’s room.

There followed considerable press coverage including letters to the KC Star editors from outraged museum goers. In his presentation of the two selections on the stage, Coe had said that Rothko’s “paintings hum and whir and seem to move back and forth in space,” which prompted the response of local artist Jack O’Hara that the purchase was “Ho-hum.”

Accompanying his “ho-hum” statement was O’Hara’s cartoon published in the Kansas City Star. It depicts a puzzled
John Q. Public figure, his hand cupped to his ear, listening intently to the somber canvas. O’Hara raised the question, “If a Rothko can hum, can a Whistler whistle?”

The morning after the purchase Rothko and Coe had a telephone conversation during which Rothko said “I’ve never allowed my pictures to be handled in this way...” [I was fortunate to be there. See Pentecost, “50 Years of Collecting.....”]

By 1986 the museum had acquired sufficient funds outside of Nelson’s endowment and so at last could purchase contemporary art with no attention paid to the limiting 30 year clause. The art market had changed and dealers disliked sending away art works on approval. The staff found that contacting the dealers and setting up the purchase meetings were too stressful and time consuming. So the museum persuaded the Friends to give up its independence of 52 years [C] during which it had provided most of the modern collection. The Friends had also provided food service, information desk, a sales and rental gallery, trips abroad and nationally, film series, most of the docents, and other volunteers for innumerable projects. The Friends became the Museum’s general membership and volunteer organization.

To my knowledge, the only other art accession that created an uproar comparable to the Rothko purchase, consisted of the 4 huge Shuttlecocks by Claes [rhymes with “moss”] Oldenburg and his wife Coosje van Bruggen. Oldenburg was one of the best-known artists associated with the international Pop art movement of the 1960s. His large outdoor sculptures were prominently displayed in a number of cities and sculpture parks.

For the Sculpture Park project the artists were commissioned to create something specific for the grounds setting. They visited KC and studied the area. Varieties of their intriguing preliminary possibilities exist on paper and will be exhibited during the Anniversary Year. The final concept was to imagine the museum grounds as a huge badminton court, with the building that bisects it serving as the net. At that time the museum grounds were city property, and media coverage alerted the public to the project. Many were disturbed by the thought of the 18 foot high birdies visibly interrupting the open sweep of the lawns thought of as city parkland. Viewed against the beloved neo-classical building’s exterior, they were considered a desecration. The fact that the expense was covered as a gift from the Sosland family didn’t muffle the protests. [Abouhalkah, Yael T., “A lot is happening behind the scenes in shuttlecocks dispute” in Kansas City Star, Feb. 25, 1993, C-13.]

But times and tastes change. At present the Shuttlecocks are a recognized part of KC’s scenery. Director Wilson has noted that nowadays many bridal parties in full formal attire are photographed with them. [lecture comment] And children with their unfettered imaginations seem always to have liked them.
Sometimes in collecting there are unusual serendipities. Things just arrive. The most prized 20th century painting in the museum is this abstract expressionist work, Woman IV by de Kooning. It is much published as one of the artist’s most important works. It came to the museum with some other modern works as a gift from the collection of the famous writer William Inge (died 1973). He was Kansas born and educated, a KU grad, and he had become a winner of the Pulitzer Prize and an Academy Award. [Among his best known works are Picnic, Bus Stop, Come Back Little Sheba, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs, and Splendor in the Grass.] Accompanying this painting was another by de Kooning and other prime works by Rivers, Golub, Guston, Motherwell, and Hartigan. William Inge said, “New York doesn’t need them, Kansas City does.” [Thorson, Alice, “Modernizing the Nelson,” KCStar, June 14, 1992, K, p. 1.]

Let’s turn now to some of the SPECIAL PREASSEMBLED COLLECTIONS given to the museum:

PREASSEMBLED COLLECTIONS

Cricket paraphernalia: These items have delighted generations of KC children. The donor of this collection wrote to Sickman that in its entirety it would just cover the top of “a bridge table.” [Brown -Sickman correspondence, Archives] Almost all of the cricket paraphernalia now on display was given to the museum by Fanny Pomeroy Brown in 1941. Sickman and his mother had known her when they were all living in China before World War II. At that time Pomeroy was collecting cricket material for her aunt back in Massachusetts. When the aunt died Fanny inherited the collection. She wrote Sickman “…there is no use having these lovely things tucked away in a closet.” She added that her sisters were “very angry” with her for not giving them to the Met. But she thought the Met had too much and the mid-west perhaps not enough. Sickman wrote he was “most happy to accept the collection….I know that many of these cages are works of great beauty… the Chinese sense of form and design operates in everything they make.” [from Pentecost, 70th Anniversary tour p. 16. Brown and Sickman correspondence in NAMA Archives.]

“For at least 1,500 years the sport of fighting crickets has existed in China and continues there today and in cities around the world with large Chinese populations. Crickets have also been enjoyed as pets. They were owned by all classes, from peasant to emperor, and the...
wealthy acquired exquisite equipment to keep them. [Docent Bulletin, Feb. 1997 excerpted from Melvin, Sheila, “Wall Street Journal” Oct. 29, 1996.] To the ancient Chinese, white jade was the most precious substance in the world.

In contrast to the tiny area occupied by that small collection is the large space occupied by the Burnap collection. It has its own gallery to itself. Among Kansas Citians who had eagerly watched the museum being built were Frank & Harriet Burnap. He was a local stationer and printer. For the opening they lent some of their English pottery. They had begun to collect English antiques around 1925, eventually focusing on what became the largest collection of English domestic pottery in the world except for that of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. [Taggart] In 1941 they made a major gift of ceramics to the Museum, and Frank continued adding to it until his death at the age of 96. There are some 1,600 art works, most of them in storage. The items exhibited in all of the gallery cases can be changed 10 times over before the viewer will see the same work twice. [Curator Ross Taggart docent lectures.]

Objects in the Burnap collection range in date from the 14th to the early 20th centuries. The most famous work, that is to say the most published, is the tin glaze Yacht charger dated 1668 that commemorates the wedding of Anne and Willoughby Hannam. [lectures, Curators Taggart, Kuntz, Christina Nelson] Why the ship in this marital context? The bridegroom’s profession is shown. He was the captain of King Charles II’s yacht.

For over 300 years the British have on occasion declared their political affiliations on their tableware. Here is the grandson of King James II, Bonnie Prince Charlie (1720-1788), the Jacobite “Young Pretender” to the English throne, obviously made for those against the imported line of Hanoverian kings. (George II ruled from 1727 to 1760) The custom continues and today, in London you can buy a new teapot featuring Queen Elizabeth II and/or other members of the royal family.
A special collection that used to be exhibited with all the works grouped together is the Kress Collection. Now the paintings are scattered throughout the European galleries according to country of origin and chronology. Samuel H. Kress (died 1955) whose empire of 5 and 10 cent stores covered America during the first half of the 20th century, was an art philanthropist who “amassed one of the most astonishing collections” of European art ever assembled by a private individual. He and his foundation owned more than 3,000 works. Rather than building a museum monument to himself, he saw that they were distributed around the US and abroad in institutions where the public could see them. These locations were often in towns where he had established his stores.

Around 1950 the Foundation and the museum Director Paul Gardner discussed the Nelson being a recipient. It was determined that the museum’s greatest need was for Renaissance Italian art of the 14th and 15th centuries. [see Gardner, Paul (Intro.), Suida and Taggart (texts) “The Samuel H. Kress Collection of Italian Paintings and Sculptures,” NAMA 1952.] Twenty-two Renaissance paintings and 4 sculptures [C, p. 64.] came to the Museum as a long loan, and were formally given in 1961 after some agreeable trades and exchanges with the Foundation. [C, p. 87] During that reshuffling the 17th century Dutch landscape by Ruysdael and the humorous 18th century Traversi pendants became part of the Kress gift.

This painting was part of the primary loan. The Venetian school flowered into maturity during the lifetime of one man, the artist Giovanni Bellini [1432/3-1516]. He was a pioneer in mastering the secrets of oil painting introduced from northern Europe. When the German artist Durer visited Venice [1506] he considered Bellini to be the greatest living painter in Italy. [Russell, Francis, “The World of Durer,” Time-Life Books, Amsterdam, 1972, p. 94.]

Bellini created a number of ½ length Madonnas with the infant Christ. Some were placed in chapels, but they were largely images of private devotion, and on occasion were affixed to the head of a bed. [Gofffen, Rona, “Icon and Vision” Giovanni Bellini’s Half-length Madonnas, “in “Art Bulletin 57, 1975, pp. 501]

Bellini’s works contain interesting symbolism. In a number of similar ½ length Madonnas different fortresses appear over the head of the Christ Child. Here it almost floats like a crown. In the context of this painting, the castle can have a 3-fold meaning: (1) It can be a symbol of the Immaculata. Virgin Mary’s purity is like an unassailable castle. (2) It can refer to Psalm 17 (Douay Bible), The Lord is my rock, and my fortress and my deliverer,” and (3) in some cases the fortress is an actual depiction of the patron’s country real estate. [This castle site has not been identified. Rowlands, Elliot, “Italian Paintings 1300-1800, NAMA” NAMA trustees, KCMO 1996, p. 120.] At the bottom of the picture, the horizontal slab of white-streaked red stone is a reminder of the Stone of Unction on which Jesus’ body was prepared for burial. It can still be seen in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Legend claims that
Making a Masterpiece: 75th Anniversary of The Nelson-Atkins Museum
By Lee Pentecost, Docent Education/Tour Programs/October 2008

The Virgin's tears made the permanent white marks on the stone. [Graeve, Mary Ann, "The Stone of Unction in Caravaggio's Painting for the Chiesa Nuova," in "Art Bulletin" 40, 1958, p. 227.] The solemnity of this mother and child prefigure her embrace of him lying on the stone. Note how the artist has boldly signed his name in the center of the parapet, right under the baby's bottom!

When the museum was celebrating its 25th anniversary, the European holdings were enhanced by another special collection, that of miniature paintings. Mostly by English artists, the miniatures were collected by John and Martha Jane Starr. There are over 250 works. The Starrs began collecting and studying this art form when they received a miniature as a wedding present.

Much admired and published is Nicolas Hilliard's portrait of George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland, who was the Knight Champion of Queen Elizabeth the First. Hilliard was the foremost painter of her court. The Earl is wearing his famous suit of armor made for the occasions when he served as the Knight Champion of the Queen. It is adorned with Es for Elizabeth, love knots, the Tudor rose, and fleur de lys since the English throne still claimed parts of France. The actual armor with many extra pieces survives in the Met's collection, and is considered one of the most famous sets ever made. George was a Knight of the Garter, and one of the swashbuckling noblemen Elizabeth liked to have hanging around her. He was also a privateer who sacked Puerto Rico, and hoped to make it an English colony until a fever epidemic drove the British away.

This work is painted with watercolor on vellum, mainly organic and fragile materials, as are also the many ivory based paintings in the collection. Now only a few of them are exhibited at a time. The remainders are "resting" in the dark storage vaults, safe from light.

During the last century 2 English silver collections were being formed in KC by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Atha, their personal collection and that of the Folger Coffee Co. which Joseph owned. In 1954 this magnificent "presentation cup," a vessel shape that is usually double handled, was given to the museum by the Athas. It was made in London during the 18th century by Paul de Lamerie. To many silver connoisseurs the art of silver smithing reaches its height in that period, and de Lamerie is one of the greatest smiths of all time. He was a Huguenot refugee who received appointment to the king. The intricacy of his designs which riff off of the Rococo and earlier styles, the variety of his techniques - hammering, repousse, chasing, casting, and appliques - are all superb.

The large collection that Atha assembled for the Folger Co. was sold with the company to
Proctor & Gamble. That Cincinnati based corporation divided the collection in half, giving one part to the museum there, and the other to the Nelson-Atkins in 2001. [Accession numbers begin 99, but the formal presentation was in 2001. See Pentecost, “English Silver and the Folgers Coffee Silver Collection,” Fall 2001, passim.] [Pentecost thinks there are 74 works in the Folger Coffee collection] This gift further enhanced the Decorative Arts Department’s strongest concentration of works which were made during the 18th century art. [NAMA website 2008].

It should be noted that the Atha family also collected and gave to the Museum some fine American paintings.

There are some preassembled collections of modern art that need mentioning. Three are from the Hallmark Family Foundation, and the largest is from the Hallmark Corporation. Henry Moore is considered the most important British sculpture of the 20th century. In 1986 the Hallmark Family Foundation purchased 58 of his works from the collector George Ablah of Wichita. These are now joined with some Moore works already in the collection. The Foundation also provided funding for the landscaped garden setting of the larger sculptures. 13 large works are out of doors and 46 maquettes are exhibited on the upper arcade of Rozzelle Court. [NAMA website 2008]

The placement of Moore works out of doors was more discreet compared to the Shuttlecocks. Many are tucked into shrubbery areas. Nevertheless a letter to the KC Star complained that the “Henry Moore dinosaur droppings are not necessarily examples of how public land ought to be used.” [Lysander Starr, “It’s no playpen,” KCStar, Feb. 25, 1993, C-14.]

Continuing its support of 20th century sculpture, in 1991 the Foundation purchased 5 masterpieces from the Nasher Collection in Dallas, among them another Moore. But also among them was this portrait head carved in walnut by the early modern sculptor Brancusi. His extreme abstractions as seen in this work greatly influenced the development of 20th century art.

The portrait is of English socialite Nancy Cunard who lived primarily in France. A controversial liberal, journalist during the Spanish Civil War, strong advocate of equality and black causes, writer, publisher and literary patron, she helped make the “roaring Twenties” roar.
Continuing its support of modern and contemporary sculpture, in 1999 the Hallmark Foundation gave 7 sculptures by the American modernist Isamu Noguchi. All came from the Pace-Wildenstein Gallery in NY, [Curator Lisa Fanning to Lee, Sept. 15, 2008] so I’m citing the dealer as forming the collection. When the new Bloch wing of the museum was designed (opened 2007) a special exhibition area was created for these art works that, with its expanse of glass, invites the outside in.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The museum’s largest pre assembled collection as well as being the museum’s largest collection of anything, is that of photography—there are over 6,500 items. This massive gift in 2006 from the Hallmark Corporation makes this institution “one of the premier museums in the world for photography.” The photos date from 1839 to the present. [NAMA website 2008] The corporation’s curator Keith Davis came to the museum along with the collection that he had largely assembled. His recent catalogue serves as a comprehensive history of the medium. Thanks to the Corporation’s continued funding, there is no end to the collection. Curator Davis has been buying for the museum as many as 30 to 40 photographs a month. [Sr. Curator Deborah Emont-Scott, Docent Annual Meeting, Sept. 18, 2008] An important recent addition is the early daguerreotype of notorious JOHN BROWN, hero or terrorist, made around 1846-7 when he was living in the east. This was 10 years or so before his murderous attack on pro-slavery supporters in Pottawatomie, Ks. [1856] Three years later was his attack on Harper’s Ferry, 1859. The daguerreotypist Augustus Washington, who made the image, was an African-American. He knew Brown through their abolitionist activities. [Label]

OUTSIDE & INSIDE

We turn our attention out of doors to the Sculpture Park. For many years Rodin’s famous image sat near the north entrance above what is now the pool over the new garage, but at that time the museum didn’t own it. It was a gift to the City, after decades it was turned over to the museum, and with the building of the Bloch wing and landscaping of the Sculpture Park.

Making a Masterpiece: 75th Anniversary of The Nelson-Atkins Museum
By Lee Pentecost, Docent Education/Tour Programs/October 2008
Park, it’s been reinstalled outside of the south entrance.

The first focused outdoor exhibition area was created on the south-east terrace, thanks to Georgia and Elmer Pierson. A number of the art works there also were funded by the couple.

It is the Conservation Department’s determination as to what objects best survive Kansas City’s rough weather, and the Soldani Venus has been moved indoors after first weathering several years outside. Mrs. Pierson kept a sharp eye on the garden, and during the growing seasons would visit it with her houseman. The two of them would trim bushes and pull weeds together. At that time the City was supposed to maintain the grounds but sometimes didn’t.

In 1989 extensive landscaping turned the rest of the grounds into the Henry Moore Sculpture Garden, collaboration between the City Parks Dept, the Museum, and the Hall Family Foundations. As mentioned above, his large works are mostly there. Soon works by other artists were joining them, and the grounds now are called the Sculpture Park. To date there are 31 art works out of doors, and the Sculpture Park initiative is still a major focus of the contemporary staff.

Now we are in the 21st century and the most exciting work of art to be acquired in the last 8 years is the Bloch wing which opened about a year and a half ago. It is an art object in itself, designed by the internationally known architect Stephen Holl. He is an artist who paints with light, and the unique play of it inside and out has received considerable notice. It’s Opening, like the first one 75 years ago, was attended by art collectors, museum directors, artists, and dealers from around the country.

The funds were provided by 4,100 donors, and the building cost around $94 million. The total campus project with re-landscaping and major renovation of the original building totaled around $200 million. [Its difficult to make any comparison to the original building’s cost of $2.5 million in 1933.] The new wing has expanded exhibition space by 44%.

There was much media notice and publication of the new wing. The NY Times gave it two articles. TIME called it “the most anticipated building of 2007” and after
Making a Masterpiece: 75th Anniversary of The Nelson-Atkins Museum
By Lee Pentecost, Docent
Education/Tour Programs/October 2008

it opened listed it as No. 1 of the most important architecture of 2007. [A Sept. 2007 issue] The New YORKER said it was “one of the best museums of the last generation,” and noted the nighttime appearance of the 5 illuminated lenses as “magic lanterns.”

A word about collections formation today; there is a Selection Committee of knowledgeable citizens of our community who meet with the Senior Curator to discuss possible purchases as they become available. The appropriate curator makes a presentation about the art work. If the cost is exceptional, the presentation may be made to the trustees and Director for their approval. It’s a bit more complicated than 75 years ago when just three Kansas City businessmen made all the decisions.

Now remember, Pentecost’s comments have been very selective and personal. Not acknowledged are 100s of generous people whose gifts, funding, bequests and trusts have further enriched the collections. Their tales remain to be told.

Some 75 years ago J.C. Nichols said that restful sunny Rozzelle Court, not then roofed, with plants and running water was necessary for the fatigued museum visitor in order to prevent the “unwelcomed disease he called ‘museum fatigue’ and ‘museum syndrome...a real and well-defined affliction.” He told the Kansas City Star that this came from too much museum exposure when the mind was “worked up to a high pitch by one thrill after another.” [C]

“In cities of Europe and in New York where they have large museums, people become worn out...their minds are bewildered and depressed. They go home, go to bed, and are sick for days.”

During his dedicatory talk at the 1933 Opening J.C. Nichols said, “May these halls become a rallying place for high ideals and aspirations; may they crystallize a greater love for beauty, a fresh enthusiasm for living; may they be a happy democratic meeting place for all groups, all races, all creeds...” [C]
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Making a Masterpiece: 75th Anniversary of The Nelson-Atkins Museum
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Education/Tour Programs/October 2008


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