

MUSEUM NEWS

CAIRO REGISTRARS VISIT THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

From November 6 to 8, 2009, Oriental Institute Museum Registrar Helen McDonald and Assistant Registrar Susan Allison attended the Third International Registrars Symposium hosted by the Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums at the Hilton in downtown Chicago. Amid numerous informative sessions there were opportunities to meet colleagues from around the world, including the registrars from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. They recently completed a multi-year training program funded by the American Research Center in Egypt.

We invited our colleagues from Egypt to the Oriental Institute for a tour of our registration and collections storage areas. They arrived with many questions about how we do things at the Oriental Institute and how we deal with certain problems that arise. We were just as eager to learn about their registration process. The Egyptian Museum recently completed a migration to new database software, something the Oriental Institute Museum will do in the coming years. We showed them our current database in the DOS-based program dbase3 and discussed its structure and how it is used in the course of our work. We also mentioned some

things we anticipate the new database will do (like hold photographs of each object for recognition purposes). We are delighted that the Egyptian Museum is sharing its database authority lists with the Oriental Institute. The authority lists, which include lists of terms used in database fields such as object classification and material, will help us standardize terminology and organize information in the database. This will give us a head start on the migration process and make our terminology compatible with other museums.

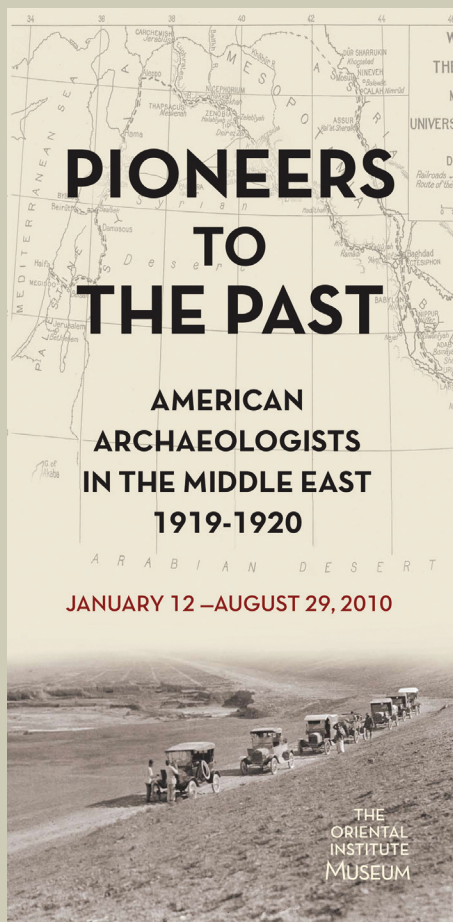
We took an all-encompassing walk through our storage areas, showing the Egyptian conservators how far along we are with unpacking the collection since building the new wing and installing climate control. Our Egyptian colleagues saw our new Delta Designs cabinets and we talked about the archival materials used for re-housing. We also looked at those areas of storage where temporary shelving holds boxes still waiting to be unpacked and cabinets containing old boxes awaiting replacement with new archival materials. Recent re-housing grants and a forthcoming application to re-house our metals collection were all discussed. We shared with our colleagues that upgrading collections housing is a long-term process; we cannot open a cabinet without seeing something we could improve. The Egyptian collection, particularly the organics storage area, was, of course, of particular interest, but we also talked about the Khorsabad Relief Project and how this involved several of the collections staff (Conservation for cleaning, Registration to register pieces, Preparation to uncrate, re-crate, and move heavy blocks around, and Photography to photograph and process images).

We hope to continue developing a professional relationship with the Egyptian Museum that will benefit both museums.

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Left to right: Susan Allison, Assistant Registrar, Oriental Institute; Yasmin El Shazly, Head of Documentation, Egyptian Museum, Cairo; Helen McDonald, Registrar, Oriental Institute; Dalia Galal, Loan Registrar, Egyptian Museum, Cairo; Dr. Hanane Gaber, Head Registrar, Egyptian Museum, Cairo