

President's letter

Nicholas Dorman

After a year that has flown by more quickly than I could have imagined, it is time for me to yield the seal of office to Katie Holbrow and to warmly welcome her as the new president of WAAC.

Running an election and organizing and hosting a meeting do loom large in the VP/president's life for a while, so much so that the fleeting board tenure of a single year as vice president and a subsequent one as president, doesn't feel as though it really allows you sufficient time to get your hands dirty with other issues.

Still, those milestones in the WAAC calendar themselves are an achievement, particularly in the culminating moments in the months before the meeting, when the board team unites to bring in talks and spread the word, to fund, organize, and pull off another meeting, and the members sign up to present and attend.

This year's meeting was no exception to that pattern; I'm glad to say. Although it had been a few decades since Patricia Leavengood organized a WAAC meeting in Seattle in the early 90s, I had felt no small level of concern that Seattle might be a flight too far for sun-loving colleagues from across the region. I was delighted, therefore, to see first the number of talks and then the number of attendees, steadily rise to a very respectable number as the summer progressed.

Since we conservators are sometimes sensitive to the indignity of being invisible to the world at large, it seemed like an important step to make the meeting somewhat "porous," so that non-members would also be able to enter a dialogue about preservation issues during the conference. To that end, we implemented single day rates and student rates, and I was particularly delighted when Nancy Odegaard agreed to give a pre-conference keynote talk about the work that she and Vicki Cassman, the team at the Burke Museum, and the Army Corps of Engineers have undertaken to develop and maintain high standards for the preservation of Kennewick Man over the past fifteen years.

This evening presentation enabled a partner institution to join us in hosting the conference. And, beyond that, it gave an accessible forum for University of Washington students and members of the Burke Museum's Native American Council, as well as the WAAC members, to explore the web of considerations around caring for human remains. Mindful of ethical and legal driving principles, Nancy and her colleagues gave an account of practical methods and approaches that they have deployed to protect each ancestral fragment during study or handling.

The remains of Kennewick Man lay comfortably well-preserved in the mud for about 9 ½ thousand years until their discovery in 1996 by a Mr. Thomas and a Mr. Deacy who had gone to Columbia Park for a relaxing afternoon watching hydroplane races. Little did they know that their excursion would result in such a monumental discovery. Subsequent years of institutional management of the remains have hinged upon addressing concerns of varied constituencies as well as a classic archaeological paradox that leads custodians to seek ways to rigorously ensure that the recovered body remains just as safe now that it is the subject of modern scrutiny.

Another means of reaching beyond our professional bunker is the tried and tested activity that is the Angels Project. On the day before the Seattle meeting commenced, Alice Bear led a small but very talented team over to the Kitsap Peninsula to re-house and document objects at the Black Historical Society of Kitsap County. At the time of writing, we are waiting to hear whether we have received an FAIC Angels Project grant for this great day of volunteer work, but future presidents should be aware of this terrific grant that our sister organization provides. Whether we succeed in that application or not, what is already clear is that, under Alice's leadership, a small and under-funded cultural organization

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has been given a massive boost and the preservation prospects of their collection have been greatly enhanced. To my mind this is WAAC, partnering with our fellow organizations and making a small but impactful response to the great preservation challenges identified in the Heritage Health Index.

Another highlight of the meeting was the opening of the exhibition *9 from L.A.* at the Wright Exhibition Space in Seattle. This show incorporates the monumental sculpture *Gray Column* by De Wain Valentine and features an abbreviated version of the groundbreaking exhibition that Tom Learner and his colleagues at the GCI developed for Pacific Standard Time. Again, the opportunity to showcase conservation is a valuable one in a community that has so little in the way of visible preservation resources, and it was also a great joy to work with Tom and his colleagues, with the artist, and with the collector to bring the show to life.

In these pages, you will see more about the range of presentations at the conference that made for a fascinating two and a half days. As I have written in previous letters, the great diversity of work and the very remarkable showcasing of profound professional dedication, the spirit of respectful collegiality, and the fun that punctuates the proceedings, make WAAC meetings very special. I hope that those who attended this year feel that it was a very typical meeting in that regard.

I apologize again to anyone who was dismayed by my colleague Tim Marsden's masterful but revolting PG rated video culled from security footage at the sculpture park. Several of you have, slightly weirdly, asked me for a copy but the answer is that it will (please God) never see the light of day again!!

All in all, I wouldn't describe organizing the meeting as a walk in the park (and I would have been in big trouble without my wonderful colleague Lauren Barach, who helped in so many ways) but it was enormously gratifying. There is no denying the fact that the work is a challenge when the schedule is busy already (and whose schedule isn't over-packed?). But the chance to work with the brilliant team on the WAAC board, the opportunity to play a part in the running of this special organization, and the inspiring couple of months when hard work and the generosity of sponsors and colleagues coalesce to make the meeting happen—these are utterly rewarding experiences.

So I'll conclude my tenure by saying what a pleasure it has been to serve the organization and by urging you to stand as MAL or VP. And if you do, I hope you enjoy it half as much as I did.

Nick
