Preservation...

Professionalism, Part II

By David Dewey

In our previous article, we mentioned that the standards used to care for a museum's collection define it's professionalism. This time, we'll look at one of the accepted standards.

Since nothing is forever (Although the exception has been accepted to be "Death and Taxes"; but now they're changing the tax codes and re-defining what can legally be defined as death!), a suitable length of time to safely preserve an object must be defined. Most conservators (those who preserve, not usually restore objects) like to follow procedures that are believed will allow the object to retain it's original conditions for 100 years. This is a somewhat arbitrary number, based on the belief that, within that time period, new technology will introduce methods to continue the object's preservation. Of course, 100 years from now we cannot know what preservation technology will be like, nor what value society will place upon the collection.

OK, you're thinking; but our stuff is outside and in use much of the time; what can we do? If our mission is to maintain an operating museum, then we can establish standards that will permit us to operate the units in their preserved state for the next hundred years. This requires researching at what rate parts normally wear out, how often units need to be run to keep seals intact, what spare parts to have in reserve, and anything else that causes deterioration. Operation of the equipment then follows these guidelines. There may be some pieces of equipment that will be seldom used because of their level of significance to our collection.

Obviously there are many factors that are out of our control; unexpected breakdowns, accidents, availability of fuel, etc. What defines our professionalism is how we handle what factors we can logically control, and the consistency we use in following our standards.

As far as I know, we will be on the "cutting edge" of the museum community by establishing such standards; the idea of an operating museum is still in it's infancy, and we're helping write the book.
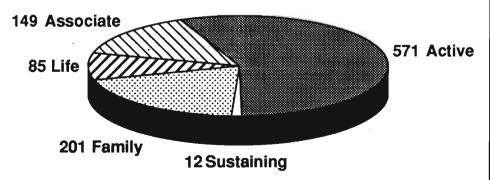
Now some more "buzz word" definitions.

Interpretation: As defined by Freeman Tilden in 1957, "An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information." He also adds, "Interpretation is the revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact," and: "Interpretation should capitalize mere curiosity for the enrichment of the human mind and spirit." WOW!

Docent: This is an old word, first utilized by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1907. A docent, traditionally, is a person (normally a volunteer), trained to interact with visitors in an educational manner. Today docents are also volunteer personnel who do specialized work that assists the museum in its educational pursuits (this can cover a wide variety of work, including feeding the other volunteers!).

Membership Report
as of October 20, 1992

149 Associate

85 Life

571 Active

201 Family

12 Sustaining

Total FRRS membership is 1,018.
Of these, 30 are Charter members.

New Life Members
The following people have recently joined the ranks of FRRS life members. Thank you all; we're glad to have you aboard.

David Bergman
from Canoga Park, CA

Leigh Bradbury
from Monterey, CA

Graham J. Cruz
from San Diego, CA

David R. Neighbors
from North Highlands, CA

Andy Petersen
from Beaverton, OR

Colleen Thompson
from Santa Paula, CA