THE HISTORY OF THE

WILCOX MUSEUM

and of

THE DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS

AND CLASSICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

at

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

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Foreword

In the Centennial year of the University, the reader of this history of the Wilcox Museum and of the Department of Classics and Classical Archaeology will quickly realize how central a role the Department has played in the life of the University from its earliest days to the present. Prejudiced perhaps by my fond recollections of courses with Miss Grant and Mr. Walker in the early 1930s and by my acquaintance with all members of the Department in recent years, I feel certain that the Department will continue to play a key role among the humanities and in the College of Arts and Sciences during the second century of the University. The present flourishing state of the Department—with its increasingly wide course offerings, its dedicated staff, and its rapidly growing student members—makes this future seem assured.

George R. Waggoner

HISTORY OF THE WILCOX MUSEUM

"The statuary for the Greek Department is being unpacked and set up." This simple statement, appearing in "University Notes" in the Lawrence Daily Journal of April 6, 1888, marks the establishment of the Classical Museum in the south room of the second floor of Fraser Hall, where it remained until the closing and demolition of the building in 1965. A similar item next day, followed by a lengthier treatment in The Kansas City Star of April 9, lists the important pieces of sculpture—five full-sized casts, among them the Venus of Melos, a figure from the Parthenon, the Emperor Augustus, several reliefs, and busts of Roman emperors. The formal dedication and opening came on June 5 at Commencement that year. This event the reporter for the Journal characterized as "a comparatively new feature of the University, and certainly a creditable and very essential feature." There were five addresses: Chancellor Lippincott spoke for the University, A. M. Wilcox and D. H. Robinson, in charge of the Greek and Latin Departments, described the collection, Professor Marsh represented the English Department, and Professor Rossington, Art, while music from the choruses of the "Oedipus Tyrannus" was provided by the Dean of the School of Music. Robinson, in his report to the Regents for the '87-'88 biennium, referred to the opening as being "the most note-worthy University event of the last two years, if not in the entire history of the institution, and the most promising of true culture," and, in anticipation of a catalog, a printed list of objects was prepared, enumerating the objects on display—114 single objects and groups, including models, maps, charts, and plates. Faded photographs, presumably taken on that occasion, show the early arrangement, with Professor Wilcox presiding over a small class of primly-clad and decorous young "ladies and gentlemen," as the students of that early time were termed. They were seated at a long, oak, wooden-pegged

table, which served the Museum during its entire history, with the Augustus behind them, the Venus at their right, and facing them at the east the most imposing piece of the collection—a full-sized replica of the great "Theseus" of the Parthenon, perhaps the first considerable purchase of the young Departments. It is pleasant to imagine that this "Theseus"—listed with 19th Century politeness as "the reclining young man of the Parthenon"—was the first full-sized Greek hero to enter the State of Kansas. For over eighty years he presided over the collection and came to see the big room, which at the beginning he shared with four associates, filled with twice that number, and the classrooms to the east and west peopled with many of his confreres—Apollo and Diana, the Discus Thrower, Laocoon with his snakes, dignified Sophocles and Demosthenes, Fauns and Muses, and a whole avenue of sculptured busts leading up to his domain. The last addition of a sizable cast was in 1940 when the French Department, called to move from the third floor to Strong Hall, generously contributed their handsome Victory of Samothrace to the Museum.

The acquiring of plaster replicas of famous works of sculpture is out of fashion now. Ease of travel abroad and availability of genuine antiquities are two of the contributing factors, and the great firm of P. Caproni and Sons of Boston, long the suppliers of such copies to high schools and universities, is no more, but in the 1880's such copies filled a real need. Professor Robinson early realized this need, and in his report to the Regents in 1879-80 spoke of the youthfulness of the State and the comparative poverty of the people. "There are few homes of culture," he said, "adorned by valuable works of art, and no public galleries to awaken and foster a love of the beautiful. The University is probably the only place where such an opportunity can be afforded the youth of our State, for many years to come."

Professor Wilcox, who had come as Head of the Greek Department in 1885, likewise

recognized this need, and in his biennial reports. to the Chancellor and Regents stressed it emphatically. “The best way to learn Greek sculpture,” he said, “is through casts, which at the same time, illustrate Greek mythology and teach us so much of the intellectual, moral, and religious life of the Greeks.” He spoke often of the many visitors from all over the State who visited the Museum, and of its value in that respect. “Here they should see,” he said again, “the noblest and best models that ever influenced men to the cultivation of pure and lofty taste.” With some dismay he witnessed the more rapid growth of the rival University of Missouri, and made this the foundation for his repeated pleas for funds. “We ought to do at least as well as Missouri,” and “The University of Missouri has twenty-six full-sized casts—we but six,” and “We need the Hermes of Praxiteles (this he secured in 1895) and the glorious flowing marble of the Fates” are typical statements.

In leafing over the old catalogs of the University—quaint records they seem to us now, with the early students listed by name, sample examinations given, and pictures of the new buildings displayed as they were added to the expanding campus—one is struck by the rapid growth of the scientific collections and the generous donations constantly made to them in contrast to the tardy appearance of similar items for the languages. Professor Robinson had made a start of such a collection for the Latin and Greek Departments, but the recording of such additions jumps noticeably after 1885 when Professor Wilcox joined the faculty. He must early have been appraising the large south room on the second floor as suitable for a museum, and when the construction of Snow Hall (dedicated in 1886). left this room and the adjoining ones free of the scientific collections that had been housed in them, there is no doubt but that his enthusiastic and determined partisanship did much to secure this space for his growing collection. The move was made, as we have seen, from the rooms in the north of the building

during the Easter recess of 1888. A course in Greek Archaeology had been introduced by Professor Wilcox as early as 1886, and he now gave lectures, some regularly. on Friday nights, in the Museum.

In summer vacations he devoted much time and study to visits in eastern museums and was never at a loss to state what was needed to bring his collection up toward the standard set by these more plentifully endowed institutions. “We have but the nucleus of a collection here,” he would sadly say, but the remark was often made that he could always manage to squeeze out something from his meager· budget for the purchase of some long-desired object. Though he was frequently disappointed in his requests for casts—”Six years have· passed. without a single acquisition” he once complained—his carefully hoarded funds could be spent for slides, or better yet, for the great. folios. the French and Germans were gradually bringing out as the “age of excavation’s” opened up around the Mediterranean. He could often be seen .in his black alpaca “work-coat,” a little black skull cap on his balding head (he was always afraid of catching cold), at the long oak table in the corridor, his brown eyes alight with enthusiasm, his slender fingers carefully checking over the plates in the latest heft or auflage, ready to enter them in the Accessions Book which he and Mrs. Wilcox kept in their own handwriting. These great publications, completed over the years, on ancient sculpture, architecture, vase and wall paintings, such as Brunn-Bruckmann, Denkmaler Griechischer und Umischer Sculptur and Furtwangler-Reichold, Griechische Vasenmelereiare almost irreplaceable now. Several of them, the series on Delphi, Olympia, and Baalbek among them, were later turned over to the Library for- greater safety and accessibility.

In the wake of Schliemann’s spectacular discoveries at Troy and Mycenae, electrotype copies of Mycenaean objects—masks, a dagger, the Vaphio gold cups—made striking. additions

to-the displays, and a number of genuine antiquities, some Greek vases. of the Corinthian and black-figured styles, now very valuable, came into the collection, probably as a result of faculty visits to Greece. The Greek Symposium, begun as far back as 1890 as a regular fortnightly class by Mr. Wilcox at his hospitable home on Vermont Street, was an important contribution to Department activities. There, after talks on literary or artistic subjects, Turkish coffee and loukoumi might be served. by the Professor and Mrs. Wilcox, dressed in Greek costume. He scheduled talks in the Museum, too, at various hours in the day to attract students from other departments, and, with his long bamboo pointer in his hand would 'go the rounds of the' rooms, followed by his little flock. "Why do they call me Zeus?" he would often ask in genuine puzzlement.. If he passed over the Romans rather cursorily in these surveys, and lingered longest on his beloved Greeks, such partisanship was as attractive as it was amusing at times. As book-buyer and curator of the Museum he retained close ties with the Department after his retirement in 1915, almost until the time of his death in 1929, occasionally helping out in the courses in Greek and Roman Sculpture and Architecture which he had developed and, which were for many years the only courses in the history of art designed for College students. The formal naming of the Museum as The Wilcox Museum on the Commencement following his death was a fitting tribute to the one who had inspired it, and worked to equip it. In the words of Professor Sterling, who had been associated with him for so many years, and who followed him as curator: "It will be a perpetual memorial to him."

For the Roman side of the collection, a new source of genuine antiquities had been opened up in 1907, when the disastrous eruption of Mt. Etna caused the Italian government to put on sale some-of its superfluous antiquities for the benefit of the homeless people. Professor R. V. D. Magoffin of New York University was then in Italy, and was able to acquire for less

than $200 a rich collection of Roman objects—about two hundred items in all—ex votes, bronze and ivory toilet-articles, terra cotta lamps and vases, funeral inscriptions, fragments of Pompeian wall painting, and many kinds of building materials. Of the numerous pieces of colored and veined marbles, chiefly from the great palaces of the Emperors on the Palatine, Professor Magoffin writes: "I think this can be considered a 'very good collection. I am sure you have varieties here that will be found in no other University in America except Johns Hopkins." His letter to Miss Oliver, whose course in Roman Private Life was to be served by many of these objects, de-scribes vividly his collecting activities—hiring carrozze to reach likely places around Rome where antiquities might be picked up, finding marble workers to polish the pieces of marble, paying them for working overtime, and hoping the packers "would not keep out something—It isn't unusual!" A whole case-full of stone funerary inscriptions became one of the most valuable possessions of the Museum. Beside their value for courses in epigraphy, such inscriptions shed light on social and economic conditions in the past, and, like the ex voto models of parts of the body dedicated to the gods after recovery from illness, have a certain poignancy in their testimony to the transitoriness of human life. Nine of them were published by Professor L. R. Lind in the American Journal of Archaeology for April, 1955. Among the larger pieces shipped by Professor Magoffin were two great terra cotta amphorae for wine. They were found in the sea near Ostia, sea shells still clinging to them, and are similar to those that recent under-sea explorations have recovered from wrecks of Roman trading vessels.

From 1929 to 1943, Professor Sterling carried on the duties of curator. He weathered the depression years, and was a valiant supervisor of the refinishing of the now dingy casts—a baffling job, since few helpful suggestions were available for casts made before the development of washable finishes. Chemists and painters were consulted, and the final machine spraying was

a dubious and annoying ordeal. Since his death, bringing the old records up to date, labeling and cataloguing the numerous Roman objects, which had been stored for lack of display space, and checking over the folios from which plates had been removed for framing were some of the more pressing problems. Mary A. Grant was in charge from 1944 to 1960, followed in the 60's by Stephen Glass and Ned Nabers, wisely chosen as young archaeologists to develop and expand the archaeological side of the Department's offerings. This they have done, cooperating with the Museum of Art in giving courses in ancient art for the Department of Art History. The chief handicap in developing wider use of the Museum throughout the years has been lack of time, since the duties have always been added to a full teaching schedule. The chief pleasures have been "research" on the articles themselves in an attempt to make attractive displays with as much human interest as possible, and occasional discoveries of unsuspected wealth in the collection—finding a postcard from the Terme Museum in Rome which showed a terra cotta relief almost identical with the Museum's example, or a dealer's advertisement, at quite a fabulous price, of a bronze statuette of Hercules similar to the one in the Museum.

Though funds have been limited, additions of antiquities have been regularly made. Coins have been especially available, and there have been several generous bequests. The Alice Rohe collection of Roman and Etruscan antiquities, given by the terms of her will to the Museum of Art, was passed over to the Wilcox Museum in 1958 by Mr. Maser as more suitably housed there, and money for a display case and an inscription was added. Professor Lind, in his stay in Italy, in 1954, made the acquaintance of a jovial priest, Father Don Antonio Carucci, who had a hobby of collecting antiques, and whose small apartment on Via Candia near the Vatican was crammed with the fruits of his collecting. On his return to America, Professor Lind brought a valuable group of the Father's Bucchero and painted vases and lamps, found mostly at Cerveteri.

The Endowment Association of the University purchases these for the Museum.

A number of unexpected single gifts have added variety and interest to the collection—some-Roman "tear bottles," samples of papyrus, and Pentelic marble from the`-Parthenon by Ann Wilder, a Babylonian clay tablet by Miss Burnham of the English Department, a terra cotta Cupid by Mrs. Motrin, from whom. the Museum had purchased a Tanagra figurine. Negotiating. for copies of Greek coins and gems in the locked and guarded rooms of the British Museum provided an interesting experience for one faculty member, though the Middle West "a" in '"plaster casts" was a stumbling block in acquiring such "plaheter cahsts." The surreptitious spiriting of a Greek inscription under his overcoat by A.W. Lundberg. from excavations for a new oil refinery near Monte Testaccio in Rome, and the quite bold-faced transportation of a Fifth Century red-figured Greek kylix from Vulci through the Naples customs in a shopping bag supply some of the objects, at least to the customs-violators, with an air of excitement and near-romance. The latest major acquisition, apart from Roman coins, was the purchase, in 1963, of a marble Syria-Roman Funerary Stele of the First Century B.C.

As for the room itself (marked B in the old catalogs and numbered 208 later as the Classical Museum)—it, together with the adjoining rooms have provided housing for the Latin and Greek Departments through the rest of the life of Fraser Hall. Innovations almost too daring for the eyes of the thirties were the painting of the walls a deep Pompeian red, the better to set off the white of the statues, and the tinting of the Prima Ports Augustus. by Bernard "Poco" Frazier, following hints of color remaining on the marble original in the Vatican. A serious crisis arose in Room 206 when a new office was formed at the north end, necessitating some cutting and replacing of the Parthenon frieze. The making of a workroom (later changed to an office) at the south end of 210, however, only served to provide a more striking background for the

Laocoon. Mr. John Maxon, then Director of the Museum of Art, very generously helped with suggestions for new lighting fixtures and other improvements. Display cases have been steadily added for the growing collections.

The benefit to the language courses in Latin and Greek, as well as to such courses as Greek and Roman Sculpture and Architecture, Mythology, Greek and Roman Private Life, and Classical Archaeology, of meeting regularly in these congenial surroundings has been incalculable over the years. The main room has served many purposes besides. Lawrence Art Clubs and Literary Societies held meetings there when their programs turned toward ancient art and literature; the German Department used it when they gave their annual Christmas plays, and the Spanish Department served coffee there for visiting teachers on Cervantes Day. It provided an attractive gathering place for theatre patrons during intermissions, when plays were still presented in Fraser Theater. The bronze Discus Thrower of Myron came in for his share of attention at the time of the Relays. Art students often came to sketch the Emperors and other worthies in the long corridor, and to see the actual fragments of Pompeian frescoes with decorative bands and figures still fresh upon them, and to supplement them with the framed pictures of wall paintings on display. And the rooms were a place of nostalgic recollection when alumni came back at Commencement, often bringing their children to "see the statues" which they remembered vividly. One imaginative small boy, who had, asked a faculty member planning a trip to Greece to bring back a suit of armor from the Armorers' Street in Athens, was appeased by a visit to see the likeness of the Shield of Achilles which hung. in the hall, with its City at Peace and City at War, and the vineyard with silver poles and clusters of black grapes on the gold background. Some measure of the meaning of the collection to students of the Humanities in the past, for whom Fraser was almost synonymous with the University, may be gathered from

Theodore O'Leary's words in his moving tribute to the historic old building when he first learned it was to be demolished. In The Kansas City Star of March 4, 1962, he described his "Sentimental Journey" to Lawrence, thinking as he drove, of the old classrooms and offices, the theatre, and the Classical Museum, "where as a small boy I had seen my first busts and statues: Plato, Socrates and Homer looking out soberly at me; the full-length Dying Gaul, brave in the presence of his last anguish; the noble Emperor Augustus. Only the snake exhibit in the basement of Dyche Museum had fascinated me more." Later that day he visited them, "and there, where they had always been, were my old friends, Plato, Socrates and Homer, as sober and intent as ever. The Dying Gaul was still bowed in his final agony."

The unhappy duty of superintending the packing of the collection for storage fell to Ned Nabors, who, however, saved out certain choice pieces for use in his courses in ancient art. He, together with Austin Lashbrook, Chairman of the Department, will have much to say about plans for reopening in the new Humanities Building, scheduled for sometime in 1968. Then the display cases with their terra cottas and marbles will again be seen, and the venerable casts, with the recent restorations and refinishing of "Poco" Frazier hopefully still fresh upon them, will carry on the tradition begun almost a century ago.

February 7, 1966 Mary A. Grant