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Museum seen as needed at A&M

Millions in research materials, artifacts stuffed in boxes

By NATHAN R. HINES

Battalion Reporter
Texas A&M University spent over \$71 million in research last year, but the average student has no place to see the results of that research. This is one of the reasons many researchers at Texas A&M would like to see a museum or an exhibit hall built to house their finds.

"We have thousands of artifacts we would like people to see, but they (the artifacts) are in hundreds of cartons piled in our offices," said Dr. Harry Shafer, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Texas A&M. "These artifacts represent the results of some of our research. Most of the artifacts have historic value, and the public could benefit from them. But who wants to come over to our offices and dig in boxes? We don't have enough room to work with the artifacts, much less exhibit them."

A look at the anthropology offices confirms Shafer's claim. There are boxes under desks and lining classrooms and halls. "We need a museum not only for visitors, but to teach," Shafer said. "It is much simpler to show students about something instead of just telling them. This holds true with not just anthropology but with other courses such as history."

"If a history professor was lecturing about lifestyles of certain Indians, it would be much easier for the students to understand the life of the Indians if they could see what the Indians had to work and live with."

Shafer's ideas are similar to those of many of Texas A&M's faculty. One person who shares his views is Dr. Ervan Garrison, head of the Cultural Resource Laboratory at Texas A&M.

"It would be great to have a place on campus where students could stop in during a break in their schedules and acquaint themselves with some history," Garrison said. "This would give us a place to exhibit things we have found like cannon shells from a Civil War iron-clad ship, or artifacts from an old Indian burial ground. We have these things, but there is no place to put them where the public can see them."

"We have mentioned this need to some of our superiors who seemed very excited about the idea," Garrison said, "but nothing has come from it. We are cramped for classroom space, which is the first priority, so the museum idea is placed on the back burner."

Since Texas A&M does not have a museum, it receives no federal funding for the upkeep of some of its exhibits.

"The Wildlife and Fisheries Department has many collec-

tions, one of which is the Texas Cooperative Wildlife Collection," said Robert Dowler, a Wildlife and Fisheries instructor at Texas A&M. "This collection is made up of over 30,000 mammals, 15,000 birds, and thousands of reptiles and fish. We could receive federal funds for the care of these collections if we had a museum. But since we don't, we have to use departmental funds to take care of them."

Not having a permanent place to put artifacts has kept Texas A&M from receiving some pieces of art as gifts, according to J. Wayne Stark, special assistant to Texas A&M's president for development of cultural programs.

Stark said Texas A&M has been offered many different items ranging from a very valuable art collection to antique tractors, but there is no place to put them. Stark said the items could be placed in various buildings throughout the campus, but someone has to be responsible for their maintenance and safety.

"Before we accept many more gifts, we are going to have to find someone who will be directly responsible for the gifts," Stark said. "This person or persons will have to be able to recognize art and be able to tell if someone had switched a forgery in for the original. This person will have to know when something needs to be restored, or repainted. In effect, just be responsible for any new gifts and the ones we already have."

Stark said the first problem with starting a museum is deciding what the museum will house.

"Before we start talking seriously about building a museum and acquiring items to fill the museum, we have to decide what we want to exhibit," he said. "Do we want to exhibit art or natural history, agricultural history or engineering history? Someone has to decide what is going to be shown."

Stark said a building that would house everything everyone wanted to show would be nice, but wouldn't be feasible.

Building and operating a museum is fairly expensive. The 1981 operating budget for the Texas Memorial Museum in Austin is \$354,000.

If Texas A&M were to build a museum, it would have to raise the money for building and running it.

The 66th Legislature's Appropriation Bill says that State funds can not be used to build or run any new museum, but this could be gotten around if Texas A&M tried, said Dr. James Bond, Vice Chancellor for legal affairs at Texas A&M. "I haven't done any research on the question (a museum at

Texas A&M), but from reading the bill now, I believe we are trying to keep universities from building any new museums, and if they are built, to keep them from getting state money for operating funds. But the way this is written, I'm pretty sure that if we tried hard enough we could get around the law."

Bond said one way to get around the law would be to use a museum curator's program. The museum would be in the lab. This would justify the need for a museum.

Texas A&M already has the ground work for such a program. Two museum classes are offered by the Wildlife and Fisheries Science Department.

"A museum would benefit our program tremendously," said Dowler, the instructor for the two museum courses. "There is no place on campus for the students in the museum classes to get any hands on experience."

"If A&M is serious about having a museum, there are several things that need to be done before it is even recommended to the Board of Regents," Stark said. "We need to first form a committee to study recommendations from departments at A&M as to what they feel is needed. Next, a committee needs to decide what is going to be exhibited. When this is decided, they should be able to present a plan to the regents for approval."

Most of the people contacted had different ideas as to the kind of museum they would like to see at Texas A&M. The most suggested type is one based on what Texas A&M does.

"I feel that it is a shame that this great land grant university doesn't have a museum of agriculture and engineering," Dr. Victor Treat, assistant professor of history at Texas A&M, said. "We could exhibit antique tractors and old engineering equipment. There could also be room for exhibits from other departments as to what they do and have done."

"If A&M starts a museum, I only hope they do it completely professional," said David Chapman, assistant archivist at Texas A&M. "This means having a professional curator and professional staff. If they are going to do it, do it right and have an amateur job."

The idea for a museum has not been brought up officially, said Dr. Charles Samson, Acting President of Texas A&M University. "The idea has only been discussed in the general context of the overall thrust in the area of the arts. There has not been any definitive discussions. But I can say that now, a museum is not in our present five-year plan."

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Tut's kin may have visited

By NATHAN R. HINES

Battalion Reporter
King Tut never visited Aggieland, but one of his relatives might have lived here.

This relative didn't get around to enjoy the campus, but he stayed in a building that once stood where the architecture building is now. Tut's possible relative was named ANH-

HR-H3CPJ, which is an odd name unless you are a mummy.

The "Aggie Mummy," according to the inscription on the lid of his sarcophagus, was the remains of a tax collector who worked for Pharaoh Rameses II approximately 4,000 years ago.

The mummy, more commonly called the Tax Collector, was moved to

the Houston Museum of Natural Science in June 1970.

The mummy was just one of the exhibits housed in the Museum of the A&M College of Texas.

That museum was established in 1937 and was closed in 1962. It was founded on three collections: fossil vertebrates, one of 40,000 specimens, and a herbarium of

Dr. J. M. Nance, professor of history at Texas A&M, is one of the members of the museum who is the only entertainment on campus.

"Before World War II, when people would come up for football games, they would take their dates to the museum to see the mummy and other exhibits. This was the only thing to see on campus for the statue of Lawrence Ross."

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