

## INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM M. SUMNER, DIRECTOR

Highlights of the year at the Oriental Institute were the approval of our proposed building project and two wonderful exhibits mounted in the museum as our contribution to the University of Chicago's centennial celebration—*Sifting the Sands of Time: The Oriental Institute and the Ancient Near East* and *Vanished Kingdoms of the Nile: The Rediscovery of Ancient Nubia*. A number of exciting events scheduled during Black History month in connection with the Nubian exhibit drew large crowds, including many people who had not visited the museum before. In addition, the National Endowment for the Humanities funded proposals for the Assyrian Dictionary and the Hittite Dictionary, each for a three year period (1992–95); both dictionary projects have been funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities continuously since 1976. The museum received an operating grant from the Institute of Museum Services for the second year in a row.

The primary mission of the Oriental Institute is to conduct research on the archaeology, history, and languages of the ancient Near East. As the detailed accounts in this report indicate, this has been a productive year for research. Among the highlights in research this year were the discovery of a cache of gold coins at Aqaba in Jordan, the mapping of a Byzantine mining village at Bir Umm Fawakhir in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, the completion of the Opet Festival drawings at Luxor after sixteen years of work, the excavation of a bakery in the shadow of the pyramids at Giza, and the discovery of remarkable wall paintings at Tell Es-Sweyhat in Syria.

In the autumn of 1991 the scope of the climate control, renovation, and expansion project for the Oriental Institute was established, based on the final report submitted by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in March 1991. The plan called for the construction of a new wing composed of a basement and two floors with a combined floor area of 17,000 sq ft, renovation of the basement in the existing building, and the introduction of high levels of climate control in all galleries and object storage areas. Space vacated in the existing basement is to be dedicated to the conservation laboratory, the archaeological research center with laboratories for field projects and interdisciplinary analysis, preparation shop, photography darkrooms and studio, object storage, a variety of work areas, and, if feasible, a multi-purpose room for public educational and other activities.

The firm of Hammond Beeby and Babka was selected to provide architectural design services and the first meeting of the building committee was convened on February 3, 1992. Throughout the late winter and spring the Building Committee, composed of McGuire Gibson, Joan Rosenberg, Margaret Sears, Matthew Stolper, William Sumner, and Karen Wilson met with Kenneth Lyon, Project Architect for the University of Chicago, and Thomas Beeby, Bernard Babka, and Dennis Rupert. On several occasions representatives of Turner Construction Company, contracted for engineering and cost estimating services, and museum climate control consultants were present. Twelve detailed variations on the schematic plan were discussed. Some plans involved enclosing the courtyard but in the end cost constraints forced us to focus on a wing to be constructed to the south of the present building. The final schematic plan was submitted by the architects for our approval on August 13th. In the autumn of 1992 the scope of the project was increased to include a third floor in the new wing for library stacks and the revised schematic plan was approved by the University Campus Planning Committee at the November meeting of the Trustees. We are now engaged in planning the campaign to raise funds for the project, which has an estimated cost of \$10.1 million.

In recent months our lives were saddened by the deaths of Martha Bell, Douglas Esse, George Hughes, and Helene Kantor; tributes to their memory are published here rather than waiting until next year's *Annual Report*.

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