



# CHICAGO HOUSE BULLETIN

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## IT'S FOCH TIME AGAIN!

By Carlotta Maher, Assistant to the Director

The difficult task of maintaining one's dignity atop a moving donkey was confronted bravely by sixty-five members of the Friends of Chicago House Weekend in Luxor. Among the distinguished guests in the trotting herd were the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, Robert J. Pelletreau, and his wife Pamela Day Pelletreau. In front of this plodding mass of donkeys, a security van with red flashing lights rolled sedately along, leading the way downhill from the workmen's village of Deir el Medina.

The reason for this incongruous scene was the ninth annual fund-raiser for Chicago House, and the group was moving from its tour of ancient tombs to a welcome lunch in the simple surroundings of the Habu Hotel. All riders arrived intact, in spite of only one fall (the distance is, after all, not far from the top of a donkey to the ground), and only a handful of cowards were observed slinking onto the group bus, thereby avoiding animal contact entirely.

The history of the annual FOCH tour goes back to the season of 1984-1985, when the U.S. government program that had provided Chicago House with operating funds expired. Chicago House, having worked quietly and privately for sixty years, suddenly had to go public in order to survive. The first step was to acquaint the Cairo community with our work, and thus the Friends of Chicago House, FOCH (pronounced "folk") Tour, was born. The weekend event has alternated between Presidents' Day in February and Thanksgiving; it now seems to be settling on the November date, when the weather is dependably warm and an early breakfast may be eaten *al fresco*—an amazing concept for those of us from Chicago!

The 1993 weekend began on the evening of November 25th, with Thanksgiving dinner at the Mövenpick Jolie-Ville Hotel. The schedule noted that turkey would

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## THE DEATH SUITE, REINCARNATED

By Ellie Smith, Photo Archivist

Chicago House staff members no longer have to play hide and seek for hours on end to find a photograph or negative. At last, the Photo Archive has found a new home in a room that was until recently referred to as the Death Suite!

The Chicago House Photo Archive's extensive photographic coverage of ancient Egyptian monuments ranks among the finest in the world. Begun in the 1920s, this collection also provides a continuing record of the Survey's epigraphic work and is an unparalleled research source for scholars of all nations. Over the last seventy years the collection has been stored wherever there was available space: in an odd assortment of wooden and metal cabinets, file drawers, and boxes. Finding a negative was sometimes an exercise in painful search and triumphant discovery. But no longer!

The new Photo Archive now occupies a suite of three rooms next to the expanded library. New metal cabinets have been installed and their contents are now clearly identified for convenient use by our staff and members of other expeditions. The first room houses our growing collection of over 20,000 prints, which document the recent history of Theban tombs, temples, and other sites in Egypt. In addition to the images taken by Survey photographers, the Archive also houses photographs from other institutions as well as photographs by early Egyptologists such as Seele and Schott.

Another benefit of our new and expanded Photo Archive is that we now have the luxury of following strict photo-archival technique. Unlike the past, we now are able to keep our 16,062 (and counting) photographic negatives separate from our prints. This second room also enables us to store nitrate, acetate, and glass negatives filed in separate cabinets, thereby avoiding potential chemical damage to fragile negatives.

The third room is the Photo Archive office. Located in the northeast corner of the building it commands a view of the darkroom building and our newly restored tennis court. It also contains the largest computer at Chicago House, which has the speed and capacity to hold and sort

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**Photoarchive** *(continued from p. 1)*

our large database registry of the Photo Archive.

Prints and negatives should be stored in a cool and climate-controlled environment, but air-conditioning is not a practical solution in Luxor, due to sporadic electrical power and to the complete closure of the Chicago House complex during the summer months. Instead, our new Photo Archive solves this problem in an exemplary manner by taking advantage of a section of the house that is renowned for its chilliness. The rooms that the Photo Archive now occupies were once a series of small guest rooms, affectionately referred to as the Death Suite by Chicago House staff members, but not so affectionately by guests who stayed there. Located on the northern side of the building, they are always cold and dark, not much cheered by the pale sunlight of a Luxor winter. Undoubtedly uncomfortable for visitors, they offered perfect conditions for the conservation of our photo collection.

In addition to the Chicago House collections, the Photo Archive also contains other vital material. For example, Chicago House is the proud custodian of the Labib Habachi Archive; a major collection of negatives, manuscripts, and drawings amassed by one of the most

important Egyptian Egyptologists of this century. Dr. Habachi was Chief Inspector of Antiquities at Luxor for many years and in his retirement years continued his own Egyptological work while residing at Chicago House. After his death, his personal papers, as well as a raft of photographic negatives accumulated throughout his long career, were bequeathed to the Epigraphic Survey for consultation by future generations of scholars. Our staff members are still sorting, identifying, and conserving the mass of material he left behind.

Another important collection housed by the Chicago House Photo Archive is the unique corpus of 800 glass plate negatives which the Survey purchased in 1987 after they had been discovered in a Luxor attic. These plates, made between 1880 and 1930, contain images of Egyptian monuments, landscapes, and portraits. With the assistance of the Friends of Chicago House Tour of 1988 and an award from the Getty Grant Program of the J. Paul Getty Trust, photographer Sue Lezon has been systematically cleaning and printing these plates using printing techniques from the turn of the century in which the plates are first exposed in Luxor sunlight directly onto printing-out-paper and then toned in gold for permanence. The Epigraphic Survey is offering for sale thirty of the most outstanding photographs in the collection for

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Artwork by Margaret De Jong, Staff Artist

**FOCH Weekend** *(continued from p. 1)*

actually be served at every table which might seem an odd statement except to those who attended FOCH 1991, when, due to a slight hotel oversight, only one turkey appeared on the buffet table to feed 150 hungry people. Many FOCH members that year enjoyed their dinner of Thanksgiving shrimp! This year turkey was available in great abundance, enhanced by cranberry sauce lovingly carried from the U.S.

The first event on Friday morning was a tour of the completely renovated Chicago House complex. Director Peter Dorman gave a general explanation of the mission of the Epigraphic Survey, and staff members at stations throughout the library and darkroom gave more detailed insights into their specific work for the Survey.

Friday also brought tours of Luxor Temple led by Peter and Senior Artist Ray Johnson, supplemented by epigraphy demonstrations at the facade of the Colonnade Hall, the completion of which will end the Survey's work in the Colonnade. This year's group included many newcomers to our circle of friends, and the "Chicago House Method" of recording inscriptions through the coordinated talents of photographer, artist, and Egyptologist, was new to them.

On the gastronomic front, we are proud to note that FOCH members have never been subjected to the dread box lunch. Staff members and the cooks in the Chicago House kitchen have always prepared special buffet lunches which would appear magically at appointed spots on the FOCH itinerary. But this year we did even better when Mr. Mohammed Montasser invited everyone on the FOCH Tour to join him for lunch on his Nile cruiser, the Montasser I. It was extremely pleasant to enjoy a delicious sit-down lunch, beautifully served, while floating along the Nile, if only for an hour or two. In the afternoon, herded on mercilessly by our Egyptologists, we staggered on to Karnak, where epigraphers Richard Jasnow and John Darnell unveiled the mysteries of the temples of Ramesses III and Khonsu.

After a brief rest at the Jolie-Ville, the intrepid group reappeared at Chicago House with its dancing shoes on!

One unchanging feature of the FOCH tour is the black tie dinner and dancing under the stars in the courtyard. Almost all the gentlemen, even those like David Maher coming from the States, brought tuxedos with them. The party ended far too early for the dancers, but right on time for those expecting to tour the next morning. (Word is that next year the dance will go on longer, with a later start the next morning—by popular demand. Even Egyptologists may occasionally relent.)

The final FOCH day got under way as soon as breakfasters could be pried loose from the legendary Jolie-Ville buffet. The tourist ferry, attended by an Egyptian Coast Guard boat filled with frogmen in honor of the Ambassador, sped the group to the West Bank. There the group crawled down into the tomb of Senenmut—the 1927 excavations of which were published by Peter Dorman for the Metropolitan Museum—and followed John Darnell into Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri. Next stop was the tomb of Userhat, where Debbie Darnell explained the brightly decorated scenes (featuring a memorable vignette of army recruits getting their haircuts), and the always beautiful and intriguing tomb of the vizier Ramose, where Ray Johnson pointed out New Kingdom and Amarna styles side by side on the same wall. Then the famous donkeys transported the group to lunch and a tour of Medinet Habu, where the Survey started its work in 1924 and is now documenting the small temple of Amun.

In the late afternoon, after crossing the river again, the hardy survivors made a final stop at the beautiful Luxor Museum, where Survey members stood by to discuss the displays and the famous Luxor cachette of statues. Hot, tired, and amazed, the last stragglers made it to the House for a final tea or cocktail before the evening flight to Cairo and the start of the Egyptian work week on Sunday. Once again the FOCH tour was a huge success: Chicago House gained friends and financial support; and those friends left with a new knowledge and appreciation of ancient Egypt gained from those who live with it every day. **END**

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**Photoarchive** *(continued from p. 2)*

sale in a limited number of portfolio volumes entitled *Lost Egypt*. In September these photographs were exhibited in Chicago at the Richard Gray Gallery and this month they are on display in the Sony Gallery at the American University in Cairo.

Is our work finished now that the photographs and negatives are comfortably installed in their new quarters? This question must be answered with an emphatic NO! The Epigraphic Survey's ongoing documentation work produces approximately 600 new negatives each year that must be numbered, added to the database and properly housed. Furthermore, a large portion of our existing archive remains in the form of somewhat old and unstable nitrate negatives which must be carefully dupli-

cated onto new negative film. And, in the near future, we hope to begin scanning our photographs into the Photo Archive database, thereby transforming it into an even more powerful conservation and research tool. These are only a few examples of the kinds of projects towards which the Chicago House Photo Archives must now turn its attention. We are pleased to be preparing the archives of this organization—begun with so much foresight so many decades ago—for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

[Since 1989, Ellie has worked at Chicago House as a volunteer, contributing her formidable talents to the organization of the archives, the rehousing of thousands of negatives and prints, and the painstaking entry of the handwritten photo registry into a computer database.]

**END**

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**ADDRESSES OF THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY:****October through March:**

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