

News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

Issued confidentially to members and friends

No. 21: November, 1975

Not for publication

ROBERT H. HANSON:
MUSEUM PREPARATOR EMERITUS

On October 24 the faculty and staff and students of the Oriental Institute gathered in the Director's Study for a party in honor of Mr. Robert H. Hanson, who this month becomes Museum Preparator Emeritus after forty-two and a half years of service to the Institute. A few days earlier he talked about his career here, and wrote down some reminiscences of his co-workers over the years. He has always been one of the treasures stored in our basement; we are very proud to let the public get a glimpse of him now as he leaves.

Virtually no one now working at the Institute—I can think of only one exception—ever knew it without Bob Hanson. When he arrived, the building had been open less than a year and a half. James Henry Breasted was in charge. How did Mr. Hanson get the job?

The answer to the first question, I guess, is the old one of just being in the right place at the right time. A good friend knew I needed a job back in the dark days of the Depression and sent me to the old Diorama Corporation of America, where for 47¢ an hour I made models for the exhibits at the 1933 World's Fair. One day when that work was nearing completion, Mr. Senseney, the number one man, took me aside and told me about a position he had heard of at the Oriental Institute. He thought it sounded like something I would be good at, and that I should go out and talk to the people at the U of C. After being out of work three and a half years I thought it was a great idea also, so he made an appointment with Dr. Watson Boyes, then the Secretary of the Museum, and one rainy afternoon in April, 1933, I walked up the steps of the Institute for the first time. Either I convinced Dr. Boyes that I could do or learn the work, or they were hard pressed to get someone to help out. In any event, I came to work, with some misgivings, June 1, 1933—a poor young grade school boy coming to work for the prestigious University of Chicago.

The Preparator's job, simply, is to prepare museum exhibits. Not so simply, this involves restoration of antiquities, design and construction of displays, and installation in the galleries. It requires talents not taught in college.

I suppose I have always been a Handy Andy with tools and materials, and I always enjoyed the manual training and shop courses at school. I sure was never a shining light at the three R's, so I married my schoolteacher childhood sweetheart to help with my spelling and such.

It is a job for a craftsman. We all like to complain about mass-produced goods and shoddy assembly-line workmanship; we hear of factory employees who never see, or sometimes even know, what it is they are manufacturing. I asked Mr. Hanson whether he thinks his sorts of skills and dedication could no longer be found in the modern world. He surprised me a bit by denying that craftsmanship is dead: it survives in museums, both behind the scenes at repositories like ours, where unique problems are encountered and solved ingeniously, and in public where "old-fashioned" ways of doing things are demonstrated. Every so often Mrs. Jean Hanson sees in one of her junior-high students the skill combined with extra care and pride in workmanship which suggest that there might be some people to continue in Mr. Hanson's tradition—a tradition reaching back many millenia.



2 *I can still feel proud of the pieces I have restored and put up in the museum. It really is a great source of satisfaction to see something that at first was a broken, disfigured piece of some ancient man's work which I have pieced back together and cleaned and repaired so that new generations can enjoy it again.*

Mr. Hanson arrived here during the Depression, but, because of Breasted's relationship with Rockefeller, the Institute was never short of funds. Mr. Hanson compared it in that respect with the Manhattan Project of a decade later: just as the quest for nuclear fission received the utmost encouragement and cooperation of the University in the 'forties, so did Oriental research in the 'thirties. The War only delayed matters somewhat by taking people from Chicago to various forms of national service. Mr. Hanson went to the Bell Aircraft Company in Niagara Falls in 1943; he was asked back to the Institute in 1945.

He recalled his basement colleagues of the first decades, and those he has worked with over the years.

Dr. Boyes remained my friend all the years he was with the Institute. Mr. Herbert Burtch, the Preparator when I arrived, came to the Institute's Haskell Museum from the Field Museum, I think in 1924. He worked with Dr. Breasted trying to piece together a museum in the old building and was jack-of-all-trades from preparator to carpenter and photographer. He even had to use his own cameras in those days. Mr. Burtch and his wife were very good friends to me in those first years and until he passed away in 1953. Burtch was an excellent craftsman and did many beautiful restorations for the Museum, the finest being the Megiddo ivories and the Syrian bronzes and of course much, much more. His wit and fund of stories were legend and he was always fun to be with. I still miss him.

Then there was Mr. Donatello Bastiani, who restored many of the Assyrian reliefs and the Persepolis bull and capitals. He was a fine old gentleman who enjoyed his work also. He used to remark while working, "Pretty good, pretty good." He was a white-haired favorite of all the girls on the second floor.

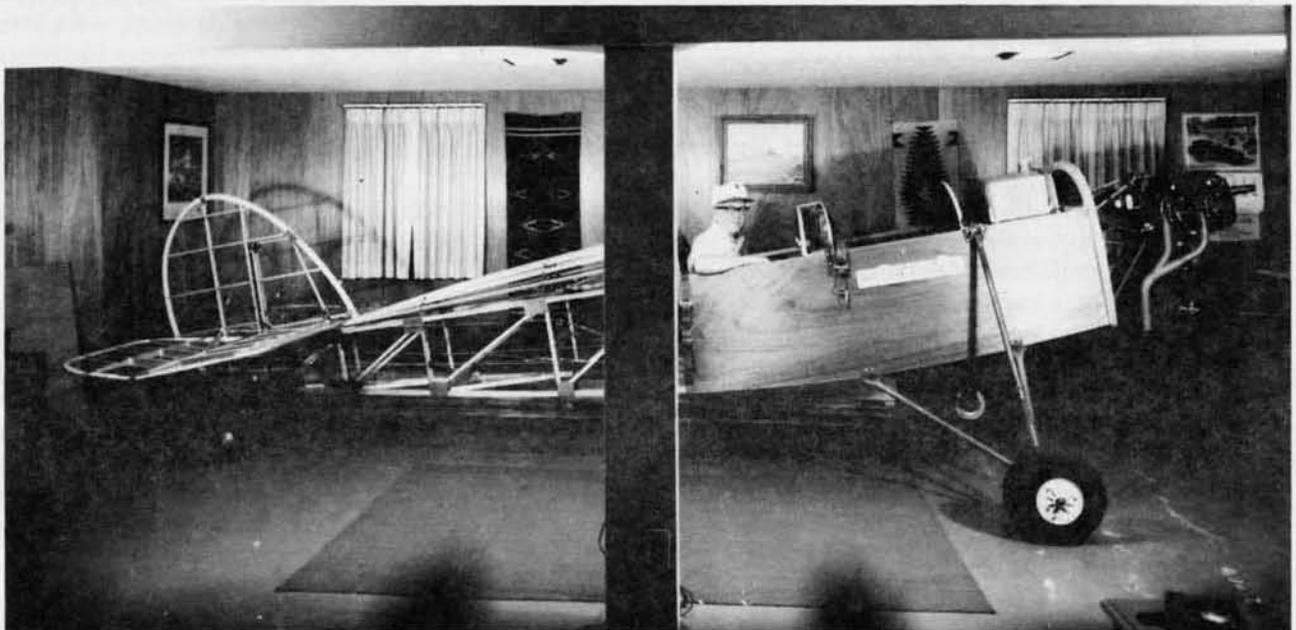
I knew Dr. Breasted and Charles Breasted, but in those days going into Room 235 was like going into the Oval Office in the White House. I know I walked on tiptoe. Charles had me make special cabinets for their telephones, so I was in and out quite a lot.

Another great worker in the basement was Mr. L. W. Hough, the world's greatest photographer by his own admission and by everyone else's who saw the excellent pictures he turned out. We had a great time working together, Burtch, Hough, Boyes, and myself.

Hough retired about 1956 and our good friend Ursula Schneider took over as photographer. She continued the high plane of excellence that was demanded to illustrate the many volumes that were being published by our professors on the second and third floors. I made many gadgets to help Ursula in her photography and she is another friend I count at the O. I.

Then there are Helene Kantor and the late Pinhas Delougaz, who brought me so many pieces to be mended and who were so gracious in their praise when the jobs were finished. They showed their pleasure with my work. Pierre always wanted the best possible work accomplished and his many good ideas helped get that done.

From his boyhood in Chicago, Mr. Hanson has been fascinated by flying. Finally, on his sixtieth birthday he started to build this plane in his garage, and five years later had his first flying lesson. He plans to fish, fly, and golf at his new home in Florida.



Since John and Mary Wilson left it seems like a hole around the Institute about the size of Meteor Crater; thank goodness we can still have a happy word with George and Maureen Hughes most any day. Who could be nicer? Just about everyone you meet at our place is great. All the years that I have known Bob and Linda Braidwood they have brought interesting and amusing conversations and cheer to all around them.

When I speak of cheer I immediately think of Betty Tieken, the volunteer's volunteer. How many years has she been mending and mending pots and jars and urns and pots and jars? I think Judi Franke is now scraping the bottom of the bin to find things for her and Carolyn Livingood to mend. Many third hands have I given those two ladies in their labors for the museum.

Mr. Hanson's own labors for the museum are impossible to miss. He has had a hand in preparing just about every exhibit in the museum. The accomplishments of which he is most proud are the restoration of the bronzes from Khorsabad, first displayed *in toto* at the Rockefeller exhibition last winter—he worked on them many years—and the Egyptian reliefs now displayed to the right of the Assyrian bull. Another task he recalls with pleasure was participating as field photographer for the Nippur Expedition, under Richard C. Haines, in 1962-3. Most recently, Mr. Hanson has been involved in a large-scale project, remodeling the Babylonian Hall.

And now I come to Dr. Swift and his wife Eleanor, the last of my supervisors. I hope my leaving does not throw too big a monkey wrench into your plans for the new Babylonian Hall. I know Judi and you, Gus, are putting a great effort into this new exhibit, and I know it will be great when it is finished. I also know that my poor old knees wouldn't stand running up and down the back stairs 47 times a day any more, so I've taken this coward's way out.

And Dr. Brinkman, the last of my directors (Breasted to Brinkman—full circle in B's). I sit here and think of all the students who worked their way up that long road to their doctorate, and some of you even became directors of the Institute. I hope you will guide it well and it will prosper for you and all the members of the staff.

A third generation now staffs the basement. I asked some of Mr. Hanson's present colleagues to characterize him briefly. Photographer Jean Grant said, "He is not just the mortar, but the mortar *and* the stone of the Oriental Institute." Barbara Hall, Conservator, called him "a superb craftsman and a sensitive artist and restorer, and his skills and experience will be greatly missed in the Oriental Institute." Mr. H. Torres, Assistant Preparator, used four simple, powerful words. "Mr. Hanson is understanding, knowable, resourceful, and creative."

But the last word belongs to Robert H. Hanson.

I have always enjoyed the work I was doing for the Institute and count myself among the favored few whose work has been a lifetime of pleasure. You all of the Oriental Institute have been the best of friends and I thank you for that. I hope I have repaid in kind. Our best regards to all.

—Peter T. Daniels

★ Robert McC. Adams has been named the Harold H. Swift Distinguished Service Professor. He is Professor in the Oriental Institute and in the Departments of Anthropology and Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. He joined the faculty in 1954, and served as Director of the Institute from 1962-68 and as Dean of the Division of the Social Sciences from 1970-74. Harold H. Swift, uncle of Museum Curator Gustavus F. Swift, was for many years chairman of the University's Board of Trustees.

From a Correspondent in Nippur

"... The dig is going reasonably well at the moment. We all just came back from a trip to northern Mesopotamia that was a great success. So far not much has come out of the ground, but then we've been working with a very small crew because of Ramadan and the holidays. Next week we expect to find the Golden Boat, tablets, a mummy or two, and a girlfriend for Ray Tindel."

Winter Members' Course—Advance Notice

Judith A. Franke, Assistant Curator of the Institute Museum, Assistant Director of the Nippur Expedition, and Ph.D. Candidate in Anthropology, will offer an eight-week class, "Archeology of Mesopotamia," starting February 2, 1976. As usual, the class will meet Mondays 10:00-11:30 A.M. with a repeat lecture Tuesdays 5:30-7:00 P.M. Members may attend either session or both for a fee of \$30.00. Further details will be included in the next *News & Notes*.

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

*cordially invites you to attend
an illustrated lecture*

“ETHIOPIA: PAST INTO FUTURE”

by

Gene B. Gragg

The Oriental Institute

Sunday, December 7, 1975

2:00 P.M.

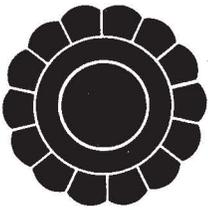
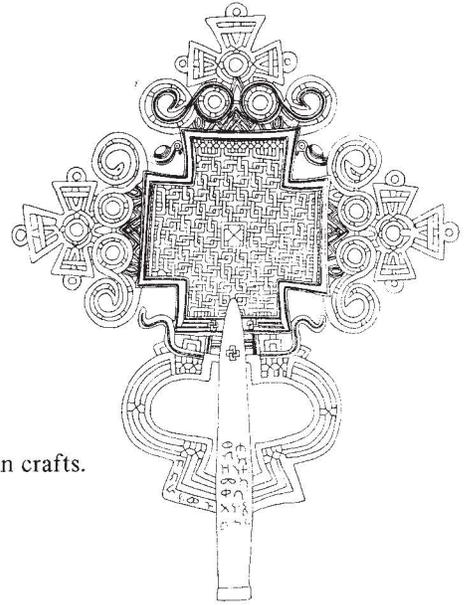
The James Henry Breasted Lecture Hall
1155 East 58th Street

The lecture will be accompanied by musical examples and a display of Ethiopian crafts.

Light refreshments will be served afterward.

Admission is free. Museum Halls and The Suq will be open as usual.

(The Quadrangle Club is closed Sundays.)



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FIRST CLASS