

# News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

Issued confidentially to members and friends

No. 45: June, 1978

Not for publication

## CHICAGO HOUSE: The Egyptian Headquarters of the Oriental Institute



Chicago House staff for the 1977-1978 season. (Photo by Eric Krause)

by Lanny Bell  
Field Director

THE 1977-78 SEASON REPRESENTED the fifty-fourth year of the Epigraphic Survey at Luxor, pursuing Breasted's vision of recording the endangered monuments of ancient Egypt. "Epigraphy" in the sense used here refers to the accurate copying of carved relief and painted scenes and their accompanying inscriptions by the production of facsimile drawings. Breasted's foresight is proven by the present urgency of "salvage epigraphy," because rising ground water and increased rainfall (both attributable to the effects of the Aswan High Dam), industrialization and the extension of agriculture, deliberate vandalism (to obtain saleable fragments for the illicit antiquities trade), and even the boom in tourism pose an unprecedented threat to the monuments. Thus, in addition to translations of the texts, commentary on the scenes, and other critical apparatus, each volume we produce provides raw material for

further Egyptological research now and well into the future. When the original is destroyed or becomes illegible, our copy will remain to preserve its content. So far the results of our labors have appeared in eight volumes on the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, three volumes of *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak*, a volume on the temple of Ramesses II at Beit el-Wali (as part of the Nubian rescue campaign), with volumes pending on the tomb of Kheruef, the Khonsu temple (volumes I-II), and the reliefs of Seti I on the northern outer wall of the Hypostyle Hall. We also look forward to the publication this year of *United with Eternity*, a synthesis of our work at Medinet Habu, intended as a scholarly guide to the imposing temple of Ramesses III at that site.

Although we pride ourselves on our extensive and world-famous photographic archive (numbering

approximately 13,000 negatives), photography alone is inadequate for completely recording scenes and texts, except where they are extremely well preserved. Our method begins with a photograph, but this serves merely as a grid for the placement of lines in our final drawing. Only the collaboration of the photographer, artist, and Egyptologist-epigrapher, operating as a team within an elaborate system of checks and counter-checks, can insure the extreme accuracy we aim for in the completed plates.

Our present project, the Processional Colonnade of Luxor Temple, is ideally suited to the application of this rigorous method. Encrusted with salt, which is obscuring and disintegrating their delicate carvings, the walls have deteriorated markedly since their excavation in 1892-93. The problem is all too familiar in these days of ecological awareness. When the temple was buried, its fabric achieved a chemical balance with the organic occupation debris encumbering it; the removal of this deposit through excavation upset that balance, and exposed the stone to climatic fluctuations, intense direct sunlight, wind erosion, and the depredations of birds and bats. In an attempt to achieve a new balance with the environment, in which it now finds itself, the temple is ridding itself of the salts with which it is saturated; as these migrate to the surface and are not dissolved, they form large crystals or salt masses which break up the decorated surface of the stone as they are being sluffed off. In the end the temple will have a new undecorated skin.

Much of the colonnade is unpublished (including the fourteen great columns themselves), or only imperfectly so; and apart from his tomb (renowned for its contents rather than for its architecture or decoration), the colonnade represents the major monument of the boy-king Tutankhamun. The origins of Luxor Temple are obscure, but it became the "Southern Residence" of Amun of Karnak. The Egyptian name of the place, *Opet*, is used in reference to the great annual state festival of Amun, the Feast of *Opet*, when the Theban triad—Amun, his consort Mut, and their divine offspring Khonsu—visited Luxor, accompanied by the King in a great procession of priests, musicians, dancers, troops, and festooned cattle; during the reign of Ramesses III the ceremonies lasted twenty-seven days. Amenhotep III, who had built the colonnade, died before its decoration could be realized. When Tutankhamun, who called Amenhotep III his "father," resumed work on the structure after the Amarna heresy, his depiction of the newly reinstated festival symbolized the return to the old orthodoxy.

Due to Breasted's enlightened attitude and

the generosity of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Chicago House is a sprawling three-acre compound. Breasted wisely perceived that deprivation is not a necessary ingredient of archeological field life. In fact, given our relative isolation in Upper Egypt, the close living conditions, the strenuous and demanding work schedule (a six-day week of forty-two hours), the often enervating weather conditions, and the length of our regular six-month season, the premise is sound that a measure of physical comfort is absolutely essential to good work.

On the other hand, the management of Chicago House is a full-time job, an unenviable function which has traditionally fallen to the lot of the Field Director's wife. The Mistress of Chicago House must carry in her suitcase the canned pumpkin, cranberries, and mincemeat to be used for the Thanksgiving dinner. The uninspiring daily routine of planning menus, ordering food, working up the household accounts, supervising the kitchen and the laundry, with sewing and mending thrown in for good measure, is interrupted only by the preparations which must be made for receiving and entertaining guests, and other special events, sometimes accommodating as many as 70 people or more. Nevertheless, we were very pleased to be able to host the members of four Oriental Institute-Field Museum Egyptian tours at Chicago House and to receive various Oriental Institute members traveling individually in Egypt. The oasis of our garden and our tea are always available to friends and weary travelers. However, we did have to explain to a certain number of unexpected callers that we were not a public institution, when it emerged that a notice in the Luxor youth hostel apparently advised all lodgers to visit the Chicago House library.

The timing of our season, October 15-April 15, is designed to permit us to avoid the intense heat of the summer months at Luxor, when the snakes and scorpions are also most active. This year only one large cobra was seen in the garden, slowly making its way between two flower beds during the April full moon. However, the winter was cold enough to require us to wear gloves to work; and we shivered in our rooms before electric heaters or butane gas fires. The temperature dropped well below freezing one notable day, and our rooms got down to 55° at night. Over the course of the full season, the photographer working in the darkroom experienced water temperatures ranging from 50° (too uncomfortable to keep his hands in very long) to 85° (too high for optimal development conditions); an electric heating coil evaporates the water and makes the solutions in the tanks too strong; adding hot water or ice dilutes them. The heating system for the library,

studios, and offices has not worked for two years because of a lack of spare parts. Parts ordered last summer were being hand-carried to Egypt in January, when they disappeared from a flight between Athens and Cairo.

Primarily the expedition house of the Epigraphic Survey, Chicago House is also the Egyptian headquarters of the Oriental Institute and the University of Chicago. In addition, we have traditionally provided a wide variety of services to outside scholars. As the *only* American Egyptological mission with a permanent base of operations in Egypt, and because of our extensive facilities and convenient location, we are uniquely prepared to function as a research institute. Our library, with holdings of approximately 15,000 items, is one of the most important Egyptological libraries in the world; within Egypt, its completeness is rivalled only by the library of the Cairo Museum, and there is no other library of its type to be found outside of Cairo. Scholars are attracted to Chicago House library from all over the world, and many expeditions depend on it for the success of their own field work. This year it was consulted especially by members of American, Canadian, British, various European, Japanese, and Egyptian missions working in the Luxor area. Our photo lab was used by four of these groups. We act as a communications and travel center, relaying mail, telephone calls, cables, and other messages, and making our car available, when necessary; we serve as a staging area for organizing expeditions, providing work areas, storage space, even overnight parking, and lending out equipment; our experts give advice and assistance on technical or scholarly matters, including the use and repair of equipment, and we provide administrative support (including transferring and temporarily holding funds).

The original Chicago House, on the West bank of the Nile, was occupied from 1924-31; the year 1981 will mark the golden anniversary of the "new" Chicago House (opened the same year as the Oriental Institute's building on the Chicago campus). Now is the appropriate time to begin the renovation of Chicago House, to plan for a symbolic jubilee of renewal, like the ancient *heb-sed* festival. Our most pressing needs are in the electrical system. All the original wiring is dangerously brittle, and at present must withstand tremendous surges in the local current; nominally 220 volts, fluctuations between 160 and 280 volts have been measured in a single half-hour period. If too low, the lighting is inadequate; if too high, lights turn themselves on, bulbs explode, and transformers burn out. The danger to all our electrical equip-

ment is great. Our only recourse at present is to switch to our own generator when the variation becomes too noticeable, but a good voltage regulator is what is really needed. Next on the list are all the water pipes inside the house; one or more bursts every year, and at least one lead pipe has been identified as a feeder into a toilet tank. This summer our chief engineer is already seeing to the preparation of two new water tanks and the replacement of the garden piping.

Our great library, established in 1927, is now in need of a major conservation program, as many of our older, rarer, larger, and more valuable books are deteriorating dangerously. This will involve deacidifying their paper and re-binding them on a book-by-book basis. Our aging ladders, purchased between 1926 and 1931 will be supplemented by a few new ones to be ordered this year, and to our "fleet" of cars, which includes an unsound ten-year-old Landrover and a twenty-eight-year-old Chevrolet (with fewer than 35,000 miles on it), we have been given funds to add a new Landrover.

As in recent years, the funds for our operating expenses in Egypt have been supplied largely out of a grant of United States government counterpart funds, released to us under the Foreign Currency Program of the Smithsonian Institution. These funds are administered for us in Cairo by the American Research Center in Egypt, to whose Cairo Director, Dr. Paul Walker, and Business Manager, Mr. Albert Abdel Ahad, we are especially grateful for their continuing assistance. We wish also to acknowledge the cooperation and many personal kindnesses shown to us by the members of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization both in Cairo and at Luxor, especially Mr. Mohammed el-Sughayyir, the General Director for Antiquities in Southern Upper Egypt.

We are sad to report the death of one of our long-time staff members, Sadiq Abd el-Rasoul, who was known to most of our visitors; at the time of his retirement in 1977, he had worked for many years in the library. Born in 1900, Sadiq came to work at Chicago House at the very beginning, in 1924. In addition to my wife, Martha and myself, our professional staff this year consisted of Dr. William Murnane and Mr. Mark Ciccarello, Epigraphers; Messrs. Reginald Coleman, Richard Turner, and Francis Howard, Artists; Mr. Eric Krause, Photographer; Ms. May Trad, Librarian; Dr. Labib Habachi, Consulting Egyptologist; and Mr. Sallah Shehat Suleiman, Chief Engineer. For the last three weeks of our season, we were joined by the three University of Chicago students who were coming from their work at Quseir: Miss Ann Roth, and Messrs. W. Raymond Johnson

and Richard Jaeschke. And finally, a special thank-you goes to Mr. Charles C. Van Siclen III who, as retiring Acting Field Director, so ably

instructed me in the intricacies and subtleties of the management of Chicago House affairs.

#### RESULTS OF THE NEW COLOPHON CONTEST

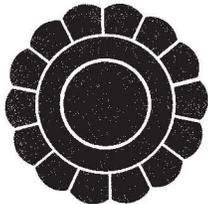
FOURTEEN ENTRIES WERE SUBMITTED for the contest for a new colophon for Oriental Institute publications, as announced in the January issue of *News and Notes*.

The judges—Mrs. C. Livingood, Prof. Carolyn Killean, Miss Barbara Hall, and Messrs. Ray Johnson and John Carswell—were very impressed with the high standard of the entries and the considerable thought and effort that the contributors had put into finding a solution to the problem. Drawings, photographs, and even just ideas were submitted; each entry was given a number, so the identity of the entrant was concealed from the judges.

They unanimously chose a photograph by Jean Grant as the winner, to be redrawn as a line drawing, with the addition of the words Oriental Institute around it.

There were several runners-up, and the judges chose the entries by Jack Brink, Carol Meyer, Briant Bohleke and Joan Barghusen as qualifying for special mention.

Our thanks to all the participants, for their enthusiasm and hard work, in helping us to decide on a new colophon.



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