

THE CONSERVATOR AS COLLECTION MANAGER:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROFESSION

Panel Discussion  
Lois Olcott Price/Moderator

This topic was chosen to explore an observed tendency of the last several years for the most experienced conservators to become increasingly involved in collection management functions at the sametime they are spending significantly less time treating individual objects. This function is assigned to less experienced conservators and/or technicians who work under varying degrees of supervision.

By collection management I mean those activities that tend to influence the welfare of the collection as a whole or that influence conservation policy. These activities include surveys, environmental monitoring, physical plant renovations, exhibitions, loans, aquisitions, staff education, fund raising, budget making, etc. This shift from bench to management has raised a number of questions:

1. How is this practice affecting the quality of treatment given to individual items?
2. How is increasing distance from the bench affecting the conservators who experience it--either voluntarily or involuntarily?
3. Do we need a new type of conservator specializing in collection management? Should the current training programs reflect this growing tendency?
4. Is this an inevitable development taking place because the conservator is now regarded more as a professional and less as a technician?
5. Is this ultimately a positive or a negative development? For the collections? For the profession?

I hope that we will be able to explore this topic beginning with our own personal situations and then broaden the discussion to speculate on its long term consequences for the field of conservation.

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