

## CHAPTER III

### COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE TRANSVAAL MUSEUM

1913 - 1953

A detailed analysis of the collections management practices as applied to the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections at the Transvaal Museum will provide insight into the way a natural history museum regarded these “alien” objects within its precincts. The analysis will include features of the manner in which these collections were handled from the first deposit to final placement. It will also examine the changes that took place over time in the museum framework, the documentation framework, collection documentation, conservation and accountability for collections.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. MUSEUM FRAMEWORK

The museum framework is the formal organization within which collections management practices take place. The collections are an inseparable part of the museum and vice versa, a museum cannot exist without collections.

##### **Management**

##### Organizational change

Organizational changes in a museum have an impact on the way the collections are maintained which would include the various aspects of collections management, such as collecting, documentation and conservation.

- Change in emphases

The Transvaal Museum inherited the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections from the Staatsmuseum, a general national museum that collected historical,

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from D.A. Roberts, *Planning the documentation of museum collections*.

ethnographical, archaeological and natural history objects.<sup>2</sup>

After the Anglo-Boer War several changes took place under the new government of the Transvaal Colony. The name of the Museum was changed to the Transvaal Museum and its control passed first to the Commissioner of Lands (Department of Agriculture), auguring well for natural history, and then to the Department of the Interior. The language medium of the new administration changed to English and a new management committee was appointed.<sup>3</sup>

The Transvaal Museum was “more or less a Natural History Museum” in the opinion of the Management Committee.<sup>4</sup> This supposition had decisive (and often negative) consequences for the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections in the Museum for almost 50 years.

In 1912 the contention of the Museum was that there should be one historical museum and one ethnographical museum for the sub-continent. In Cape Town the historical Castle was regarded as the most obvious place for a history museum and Pretoria, it was felt, was the best place for the ethnographical museum. A history museum was expected to accept all objects that had any connection to the historical development of the country.<sup>5</sup> The ethnography museum, in turn, should give a comprehensive view of the ethnography of the country, similar to the Congo Museum where, according to Gunning “the ethnography of the Congo State has been collected, studied and exhibited with a thoroughness and completeness I have not met with in any other continental ethnographical museum”.<sup>6</sup> Unless this model was followed in South Africa, the collections were in danger of remaining “a collection of kafir curios, of historical curios, and will never offer to the serious student of

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<sup>2</sup> For the policy of the Staatsmuseum, see E. Grobler, “Die Staatsmuseum van die Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek en sy historiese en etnografiese versamelings” (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1994), pp. 47 - 58.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 189 - 260 and E. Grobler, Die Staatsmuseum van die Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek, die Anglo-Boerer oorlog en regstellende aksie, *Navorsing deur die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese Museum*, vol. 9: 2000, pp. 1 - 37.

<sup>4</sup> E. Grobler, “Die Staatsmuseum van die Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek en sy historiese en etnografiese versamelings” (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1994), p. 222.

<sup>5</sup> NA, UOD vol. 72, Z15/6 - 15/8, Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1912, pp. 6 and 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

history a homogeneous view of the Ethnography or History of South Africa”.<sup>7</sup> Gunning very strongly advocated that the history collections from the former Republics should be maintained by the municipalities of Pretoria and Bloemfontein. He felt that they were out of place in a general state museum; such objects, he said, should be disposed of by the Transvaal Museum. A municipal committee would suffice to take care of these objects, as “they require no **scientific** curator”.<sup>8</sup>

By 1919 the Museum Committee still felt that the Transvaal Museum was a Natural History Museum.<sup>9</sup> Although it was still collecting objects that could later form the basis of a history museum,<sup>10</sup> by 1921 the conviction was that the Museum could even “get rid of the Historical Collection & concentrate on the **Scientific** part of the Museum”.<sup>11</sup> These references to the scientific nature of the work of the Transvaal Museum throw light on the eminence attached to the research in natural history, in contrast to the “trifling” nature of the work done in the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections; the inference was that there was no need for a qualified curator.

The feeling was that the Transvaal Museum was not doing justice to the historical museum (the Old Museum), that funds were too limited to cover both the Old and the New Museum, and that it was desirable that there should be a separate historical museum, to be managed by the municipality of Pretoria – Gunning’s proposal of nine years earlier had not been forgotten. There was, however, a difference of opinion between the members of the Museum Committee on this matter.<sup>12</sup>

Not only did the Transvaal Museum regard itself as a natural history museum, but to the outside world the Museum was also categorized as such. Indeed, its anthropological, archaeological and historical collections in the Old Museum and the Kruger House were

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 18. My bold.

<sup>9</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 1 April 1919.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 28 July 1921. My bold.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 6 September 1921.

almost disregarded.<sup>13</sup>

- Museum environment change

Although the foundation stone of a new building for the Staatsmuseum in Boom Street, Pretoria, was laid on 22 July 1899, the building itself was only completed and opened by the new government of the Transvaal Colony in 1904.<sup>14</sup> The displays and study collections of the Staatsmuseum were still associated with the small market hall on Market Square. The hall was not designed as a museum at all and the staff had to cope with very adverse circumstances. Nevertheless, this was the national museum of the ZAR, known and visited as such. In contrast, the building in Boom Street was a completely new environment for the Transvaal Museum from the outset, because it was connected with a new (British) phase in the history of the Museum.

The building in Boom Street soon became too small and plans for a new building were drawn up. Work began at the premises in Market Street (now Paul Kruger Street), between Visagie and Minnaar Streets, Pretoria, in 1910.<sup>15</sup> By the time Breijer took up the post as director in 1914, the central block of the building was complete. The new quarters did very little to alleviate the space problems experienced by the Museum.

In the years after the Anglo-Boer War the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections expanded somewhat, mainly due to the personal endeavour of Gunning, who reported as early as 1908 that “room to properly store away the valuable acquisitions is very inadequate. Although very necessary, the Ethnographical and Historical collections have not been rearranged owing to insufficient space ... and have been stored out of view from the public”.<sup>16</sup> At this stage there was insufficient space for exhibition purposes, but the situation was worse as far as the study collections were concerned.<sup>17</sup> In 1909 Gunning wrote that only one eighth of the museum building was used for the staff and the study

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<sup>13</sup> See for example, South African museums and art galleries (table), *SAMAB*, 2(3), September 1941, p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> E. Grobler, “Die Staatsmuseum van die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek en sy historiese en etnografiese versamelings” (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1994), pp. 202 - 206.

<sup>15</sup> C.K. Brain, Natural history at the Transvaal Museum, 1901 - 1992, in N.J. Dippenaar (ed.), *Staatsmuseum 100*, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1907 - 1908, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

collections, and that the latter should have had the larger share of room.<sup>18</sup>

The situation at the Old Museum changed very little in the following years. Suggestions had already been made that the ethnographical collection should remain at the Old Museum for the time being as there already was a lack of space in the new building in 1911.<sup>19</sup> By 1914 most of the collections and all the exhibitions were still at the Old Museum where conditions were far from satisfactory. Some, but not all of the natural history study collections were housed in the basement of the new building.<sup>20</sup> The Museum Committee also discussed establishing an art gallery in the Museum; some felt that this should be an independent venture.<sup>21</sup>

The First World War broke out on 4 August 1914, with the result that limited space was allocated to the Museum; it had to share the facilities in the new building in Market Street with the Departments of Defence and Customs and Excise, the Library, the Post Office and the Geological Survey. This led to an endless struggle between the Transvaal Museum Committee and the Minister and Department of the Interior, who were adamant that the whole building should not be placed at the disposal of the Museum – they wanted a portion for certain branches of the public service.<sup>22</sup> In 1916 the Museum's request for more room was again refused, despite the fact that the building was erected primarily as a museum and should justifiably have been used as such.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Smuts (at that stage the Minister of Finance and acting Minister of the Interior) had already promised that the whole building would eventually be handed over to the Museum.<sup>24</sup>

By 1921 there was still no solution to the space problem. Although Swierstra was of the opinion that the Old Museum should be used exclusively for exhibition purposes, the

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<sup>18</sup> J.W.B. Gunning, *Matters concerning museums in South Africa*, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 5 December 1911.

<sup>20</sup> C.K. Brain, Natural history at the Transvaal Museum, 1901 - 1992, in N.J. Dippenaar (ed.), *Staatmuseum 100*, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 16 April 1912. A temporary art gallery was eventually opened at the New Museum on 25 September 1912.

<sup>22</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, special meeting 26 August 1913.

<sup>23</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 7 March 1916.

<sup>24</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, special meeting 26 August 1913.

Museum Committee felt that it should be abandoned when all the collections were accommodated in the new building.<sup>25</sup> There were serious doubts about whether there was enough room for the existing collections in the new building. Swierstra even said that if the historical and anthropological collections were to be moved to the new building, the Museum would resemble a curio shop.<sup>26</sup> There was insufficient space in the Old Museum for these collections too, and although they were at risk because of poor conditions,<sup>27</sup> they were not be given priority in the allocation of space.

In 1925 the natural history displays were moved to the New Museum.<sup>28</sup> The anthropological, archaeological and historical show and study collections remained in the Old Museum, where the lack of sufficient space was an ongoing problem. Besides, the Old Museum still served as storage for the natural history section; several rooms were filled with skins and hides and animal bones, and the taxidermist's laboratory also remained there.<sup>29</sup> By 1938 the circumstances deteriorated to such an extent that it became impossible to add new acquisitions to the displays without changing their arrangement. This situation was partly rectified in 1953, but the displays were still overcrowded.<sup>30</sup>

#### Divisional/departmental organization<sup>31</sup>

In his capacity as president of SAMA, Austin Roberts, who undertook a detailed documentation of birds and mammals during his career of 38 years at the Transvaal Museum,<sup>32</sup> asserted that biological research work was of primary national importance. Only in this way could a museum's status be maintained amongst the nations.<sup>33</sup> The organization

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<sup>25</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meetings 18 February and 28 July 1921.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 3 October and 1 March 1921.

<sup>28</sup> C.K. Brain, Natural History at the Transvaal Museum 1901 - 1992, in N.J. Dippenaar (ed.), *Staatmuseum 100*, p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> P.C. Coetzee, "Lesings in die museumkunde" (unpublished lectures), p. 108; Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 20 April 1926.

<sup>30</sup> Transvaal Annual Report, 1952 - 1953, p. 8. The showcases were first used for the displays during the Van Riebeeck Festival in 1952.

<sup>31</sup> See glossary.

<sup>32</sup> C.K. Brain, Natural History at the Transvaal Museum 1901 - 1992, in N.J. Dippenaar (ed.), *Staatmuseum 100*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> A. Roberts, Museums and biological research, *SAMAB* 3(10), June 1945, p. 292.

of the Transvaal Museum (see table 1) and the annual reports reveal its marked commitment to natural history. Annual reports were written for the natural history divisions/departments during the period 1913 - 1953. Reports for the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections were only compiled when those divisions were staffed, or in exceptional circumstances, such as the official opening of the Kruger Museum in 1934. Otherwise, the activities in these divisions were recounted in the director's general report.

TABLE 1  
**Organization in divisions/departments 1904 - 1953**  
 (according to annual reports)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NATURAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT/ DIVISION</u>	<u>(HUMAN SCIENCE) COLLECTIONS/ DIVISION/DEPARTMENT</u>
1904/1905	First Assistant: keeper of the Entomological collection AND..... <sup>34</sup>  Keeper of the Botanical collection Taxidermy	First Assistant: keeper of the Ethnographical collection
1905/1906	First Assistant: keeper of the Entomological collection AND.....  Keeper of the Botanical collection Keeper of the collection of Lower vertebrates and invertebrates, exclusive insects Taxidermy	First Assistant: keeper of the Ethnographical collection
1906/1907	First Assistant: keeper of the Entomological collection AND.....  Keeper of the Botanical collection Taxidermy	First Assistant: keeper of the Ethnographical collection <sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The word AND accentuates the fact that one curator, i.e. the keeper of the entomological collection, working in a natural science division, also assumed responsibility for the ethnographical collection.

<sup>35</sup> The First Assistant reported on the Ethnological Department and Curios. Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1906 - 1907, report of the First Assistant, p. 10.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NATURAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT/ DIVISION</u>	<u>(HUMAN SCIENCE) COLLECTIONS/ DIVISION/DEPARTMENT</u>
1907/1908	Director: keeper of the Mammological and Ornithological collections First Assistant: keeper of the Entomological collection AND.....  Keeper of the Botanical collection Taxidermy	First Assistant: keeper of the Ethnographical collection <sup>36</sup>
1908/1915	First Assistant: keeper of the Entomological collection Keeper of the Botanical collection Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates Palaeontology Taxidermy	
1915/1921	Entomology  Botany Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Palaeontology Taxidermy	(Still called keeper of the Ethnology collection in 1919) <sup>37</sup>
1915/1934  (1924)	Botany Higher vertebrates (Mammals and birds) Lower vertebrates and invertebrates (Herpetology) Entomology Palaeontology	
1934/1935	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Botany Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	The Paul Kruger Museum Ethnology (two separate reports)

<sup>36</sup> The First Assistant reported on the Ethnological Department and the Curios Department. Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1907 - 1908, report of the First Assistant, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 31 July 1919.



YEAR	<u>NATURAL SCIENCE</u> <u>DEPARTMENT/</u> <u>DIVISION</u>	<u>(HUMAN SCIENCE)</u> <u>COLLECTION/</u> <u>DIVISION/DEPARTMENT</u>
1935 /1936	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Botany Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Ethnology
1936/1937	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Botany	Ethnology
1937/1938	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Botany Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	
1938/1939	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	
1939/1940	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Archaeology, Ethnology, Numismatics and Philately (one report)
1940/1941	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Botany Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Archaeology, Ethnology, Numismatics and Philately (one report)
1941/1942	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Botany Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Archaeology, Ethnology, Numismatics and Philately (one report in which Historical is also mentioned)

YEAR	<u>NATURAL SCIENCE</u> <u>DEPARTMENT/</u> <u>DIVISION</u>	<u>(HUMAN SCIENCE)</u> <u>COLLECTION/</u> <u>DIVISION/DEPARTMENT</u>
1942/1943	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Botany Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	
1943/1944	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Archaeology, Ethnology and Numismatics Stamp collection (part of report of Library)
1944/1945	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Ethnology, Numismatics and Archaeology Stamp collection (part of report of Library)
1945/1946	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Physical Anthropology and Vertebrate Palaeontology	Ethnology, Numismatics and Archaeology
1946/1947	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Entomology (Heterocera) Physical Anthropology and Vertebrate Palaeontology (2 reports)	Ethnology, Archaeology, History and Numismatics
1947/1948	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology Entomology (Heterocera) Physical Anthropology and Vertebrate Palaeontology (2 reports)	
1948/1949	Higher vertebrates Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology (Genl collection) Entomology (Heterocera) Physical Anthropology and Vertebrate Palaeontology	History

YEAR	<u>NATURAL SCIENCE</u> <u>DEPARTMENT/</u> <u>DIVISION</u>	<u>(HUMAN SCIENCE)</u> <u>COLLECTION/</u> <u>DIVISION/DEPARTMENT</u>
1949/1950	Higher vertebrates (Mammals) Higher vertebrates (Birds) Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology (Genl collection) Entomology (Heterocera) Physical Anthropology and Vertebrate Palaeontology	History Numismatics & Philately
1950/1951	Higher vertebrates (Mammals) Higher vertebrates (Birds) Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology (Genl collection) Entomology (Heterocera) Anthropology and Palaeontology	History Archaeology & Ethnology Numismatics & Philately
1951/1952	Higher vertebrates (Mammals) Higher vertebrates (Birds) Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology (Genl collection) Entomology (Heterocera) Entomology (Coleoptera) Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	History Archaeology & Ethnology Numismatics & Philately
1952/1953	Higher vertebrates (Mammals) Higher vertebrates (Birds) Lower vertebrates and invertebrates Entomology (Genl collection) Entomology (Heterocera) Entomology (Coleoptera) Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	History Archaeology & Ethnology Numismatics & Philately

## Resources

### Staff

The staff at the Transvaal Museum were natural history scientists who had been trained in their specific fields of expertise and these did not include history, anthropology and archaeology. The Museum could boast of internationally renowned scientists, such as Austin Roberts, whose field research took as much as five months in a year. Another international figure was Robert Broom, whose excavations made the paleoanthropology centre at the Transvaal Museum world famous.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> C.K. Brain, Natural History at the Transvaal Museum 1901 - 1992, in N.J. Dippenaar (ed.), *Staatmuseum 100*, pp. 19 - 20 and 43.

The earliest appointment made in the human sciences was in the ethnology division in 1921. This division was staffed from time to time, but it was only in 1937 that a temporary assistant for archaeology was engaged.<sup>39</sup> Ten years later, in 1947, a temporary part-time assistant for history was appointed.<sup>40</sup> The first professional officer with a history specialization was appointed in 1953.

- Directors

The tenuous link between the Staatsmuseum and the Transvaal Museum was only severed in 1946 as the first three directors were also attached to the Staatsmuseum. Gunning had previously been the director of the Staatsmuseum. He retained his post during the Anglo-Boer War, and became the first director of the Transvaal Museum.<sup>41</sup> After Gunning's demise in 1913, acting directors were appointed on two occasions: first P.A. (later Lord) Methuen and E.C.N. van Hoepen who were to act jointly<sup>42</sup> and then Swierstra,<sup>43</sup> who was originally appointed at the Staatsmuseum in 1897 as entomologist.

Breijer's application had already been approved by the Management Committee on 11 December 1913, but he was only officially appointed as director of the Museum on 6 January 1914.<sup>44</sup> He took up his duties at the beginning of March 1914<sup>45</sup> and retired in 1921.<sup>46</sup> Breijer had been honorary director of the Staatsmuseum in 1893 and had initiated the identification and cataloguing of those collections. He had also been an member of the Curatorium.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1937 - 1938, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1947 -1948, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> E. Grobler, "Die Staatsmuseum van die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek en sy historiese en etnografiese versamelings" (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1994), pp. 254 - 258.

<sup>42</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 22 April 1913.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 12 June 1913.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 11 December 1913 and 6 January 1914.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 3 March 1914.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 15 June 1921.

<sup>47</sup> E. Grobler, "Die Staatsmuseum van die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek en sy historiese en etnografiese versamelings" (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1994), pp 75 - 76 and 91 - 92.

Swierstra was again appointed as acting director on Breijer's retirement. He was director from 1 July 1922,<sup>48</sup> a post that he held until 31 March 1946. The next director, FitzSimons, had no previous association with the Staatsmuseum. He too, was acting director before being appointed as director from 1 January 1947.<sup>49</sup>

- Curatorial staff in the anthropological, archaeological and historical divisions

All the directors became involved with the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections and objects. Although Breijer was not very interested in the history section,<sup>50</sup> Gunning and Swierstra felt some responsibility towards these collections during their tenure as directors. FitzSimons too, reported that he had handled numerous enquiries, in particular on the value of coins, and that routine work in the division of history was carried out under his supervision by a caretaker.<sup>51</sup>

- Anthropological collection

The ethnology collection was the responsibility of the first assistant and the keeper of the entomology collection. Swierstra held this post from 1905. In 1910 the Museum Committee felt that Swierstra should devote his time exclusively to entomology because of the rapid growth of this collection.<sup>52</sup> As late as 1919 Swierstra, still designated as keeper of the ethnology collection, was asked to estimate the value of a collection of curios offered to the Museum for sale.<sup>53</sup>

Although early in 1920 the Department of the Interior refused to meet the additional expenditure necessary for a post in the ethnology division, the Committee was determined to appoint A. Radcliffe-Brown<sup>54</sup> – described as a competent ethnologist.<sup>55</sup> He only took

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<sup>48</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meetings 18 February 1921 and 17 October 1922.

<sup>49</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1946 - 1947, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Swierstra held the opinion that his predecessor had neglected the South African historical objects completely. NCHMA, System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letter Swierstra to W.C. Beeremans, dd 24 November 1925.

<sup>51</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1952 - 1953, pp. 32 and 34.

<sup>52</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, special meeting 28 November 1910.

<sup>53</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 31 July 1919.

<sup>54</sup> Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881 - 1955) gained a scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1901. He came into contact with anthropology and the well-known anthropologist, A.C. Haddon, whom he accompanied to South Africa as secretary of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1905. He gave lectures at the London School of Economics and at Cambridge and Birmingham Universities and

up the post at the beginning of January 1921 and remained at the Museum until July 1921.<sup>56</sup> He did however, propose that he would attend to the collection in his vacation, which offer was accepted by the Museum Committee, who appointed him as honorary curator and also decided to adhere to his proposed policy for the ethnological collection.<sup>57</sup>

The fact that the post for ethnologist remained vacant for some time was, according to the Museum Committee, greatly to the detriment of the Museum, which they felt would suffer scientifically and financially, if not filled soon.<sup>58</sup> At the request of the Department of the Interior the post was not filled, pending the possibility of a museum enquiry.<sup>59</sup> In November 1923 it was offered to G.S.H. Rossouw<sup>60</sup> by the Museum Committee.<sup>61</sup> He resigned in September 1925. From time to time the Museum Committee considered appointing various anthropologists. For example, Schapiro (probably Isaac Schapera) and G.P. Lestrade,<sup>62</sup> but no appointments were made.

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visited and worked in Australia. In 1921 he was appointed to the new Chair of Anthropology at the University of Cape Town. He held appointments at various universities in Sydney, Chicago, Oxford, Alexandria, Manchester and Rhodes. He was one of the creators of modern social anthropology. M. Fortes, Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, F.B.A., 1881 - 1955: a Memoir, *Man*, no. 172, November 1956, pp. 149 - 153.

<sup>55</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 6 April 1920.

<sup>56</sup> For full particulars, see J.A. van Schalkwyk, Radcliffe-Brown at the Transvaal Museum, *Research by the National Cultural History Museum*, vol. 5: 1996, pp. 39 - 43.

<sup>57</sup> A copy of his policy could not be found. Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 28 July 1921.

<sup>58</sup> Transvaal Museum Sub-committee minutes, meeting 13 April 1922.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 4 July 1922 and 8 August 1922.

<sup>60</sup> George Stephanus Hauptfleisch Rossouw (1895 - ? ) studied for a B.A. and a part of the M.A. degree at the University of the Cape of Good Hope, but obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Chicago in 1919 and 1922. He was a lecturer at the State University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, U.S.A. He was a teacher at a high school on the Witwatersrand when he applied for the post at the Transvaal Museum. He left the Museum for a position at the Board of Trade and Industry. NCHMA, TM 19/24, copies of letters, Rossouw to director, dd 11 October 1923 and 30 October 1925; Box 137, TM 137/21, letter Rossouw to D. Earthy, dd 25 April 1924.

<sup>61</sup> Transvaal Museum Sub-Committee minutes, meeting 27 November 1923.

<sup>62</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meetings 10 February and 4 September 1928. In 1930 Lestrade was appointed as the first professor in "Bantoeïstiek" at the University of Pretoria.

The next anthropologist was W.T.H. Beukes,<sup>63</sup> who applied for the post in November 1932.<sup>64</sup> After months of deliberations with the University of Pretoria so as to get the best deal for both institutions, he was appointed at the Museum from 15 November 1933 to the end of February 1934,<sup>65</sup> moving to the University on 1 March 1934. The circumstances were explained as follows:

In going over to the University, Dr Beukes was not severing his connection with the Museum as he would hold the position of Honorary Curator of our Ethnological division. The specimens in our collection would be at his disposal for lecturing purposes, & in return for this privilege he would be expected to take full charge of our collection with the aid of a junior assistant.<sup>66</sup>

He remained as honorary curator until April 1938, when his work at the University of Pretoria was increasing to such an extent that he could not spend time on the ethnology collection at the Museum. The Board decided to abandon the posts of honorary curators and to release Beukes from his commitment.<sup>67</sup>

An assistant for ethnology, A.J. Swierstra,<sup>68</sup> was also appointed at the time. He was the only applicant who was in any way suitable for the post. He had already assisted Beukes, who recommended him, very effectively in the re-arrangement of the showcases and the cataloguing.<sup>69</sup> He worked at the Museum under Beukes' supervision from 1 March 1934 to 31 April 1935.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> W.T.H. (Wiets) Beukes (1903 - ) studied at the Transvaal University College and obtained a B.A. degree in political science in 1924. He travelled to Europe in 1925 for further studies in anthropology, indigenous languages and agricultural economy at universities in Britain, France and Germany. He obtained his doctorate in 1931. On his return to South Africa, he worked at the Transvaal Museum and from 1934 at the University of Pretoria, as senior lecturer and head of the department of Bantu Administration until his resignation at the end of 1951. Na, Dr Wiets kolf steeds op 100, *Tukkie* 11(3), November 2003, p. 33.

<sup>64</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 22 November 1932.

<sup>65</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meetings 20 October 1933 and 22 February 1934.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 22 February 1934.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 26 April 1938.

<sup>68</sup> As C.J. Swierstra, director of the Transvaal Museum from 1922 to 1946, is referred to as Swierstra in this research paper, the assistant for ethnology, appointed in 1934, is referred to as A.J. Swierstra.

<sup>69</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meetings, 22 February and 23 March 1934; NCHMA, Box 137, TM14/34, letter, Beukes to director, n.d.

<sup>70</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 23 March 1934; C.S. van der Waal, "Gesiedenis van die Volkekunde-afdeling van die Nasko-Museum, Pretoria 1893 - 1977" (unpublished article), p. 3.

In 1938 there was a vacancy on the staff for one professional officer who would take responsibility for both the historical and ethnological divisions. But this post could not be filled because of lack of funds. In the annual report it was regretted that a full time ethnologist could not be appointed because “... the study of ethnology is to a great extent neglected in this country and with the passage of time it is becoming more and more difficult to study the fast disappearing original culture of the indigenous native tribes”.<sup>71</sup> (No mention was made of an archaeologist or historian.)

The post for an ethnologist appears to have remained on the books, as it was again accepted in principle to appoint an ethnologist (and a zoologist) in April 1948.<sup>72</sup> At a meeting of the Board on 7 May 1948 it was resolved to appoint a mammologist and an ornithologist, but “to drop the appointment of an Ethnologist meanwhile.”<sup>73</sup> This meant, in effect, that two natural history posts were to be filled at the expense of the human sciences division. In September 1948 an application by a Miss Webb for the post of archaeologist/ethnologist was turned down by the Board.<sup>74</sup> This situation was only rectified more than a decade later, in 1959. In the meantime, in the opinion of N.J. van Warmelo, a South African anthropologist and government ethnologist, the fact that there was no curator to attend to the collection was the most critical issue.<sup>75</sup>

- Archaeological collection

For many years no differentiation was made between archaeology and ethnology, and the staff working with the ethnology collection also had to cope with the archaeology objects. Although the Museum Committee agreed to appoint Van Riet Lowe (who was still working as a civil engineer, but had a passion for archaeology) as honorary curator to the archaeology collection in 1929,<sup>76</sup> there is no indication that he actually worked on the collection. It was only in 1937 that a temporary assistant for archaeology was engaged, E.J.

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<sup>71</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1938 - 1939, pp. 2 and 7.

<sup>72</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 9 April 1948.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 7 May and 6 September 1948.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 6 August 1948.

<sup>75</sup> NCHMA, Diary, FitzSimons, 1947, letter N.J. van Warmelo to FitzSimons, dd 1 January 1946; see also Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1946 - 1947, departmental report for ethnology, history and numismatics, p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 7 June 1929.



Haughton (later E.J. Maynard), at the request of Van Riet Lowe, who was by then the director of the Bureau of Archaeology at the University of the Witwatersrand.<sup>77</sup> The next year her post was upgraded to temporary assistant-professional officer.<sup>78</sup> She also did work in the ethnology, history, numismatics and philately divisions.<sup>79</sup> Her work was interrupted from 18 October 1942 to 20 December 1943 when she joined the imperial forces and she eventually resigned on 31 March 1946.

As a result of the financial position of the Museum Haughton's post was also not filled, and according to the annual report, the lack of an officer in charge of this important division was "most regrettable".<sup>80</sup> Two applicants for the post of archaeologist were turned down, that of a Miss Harding of the County Museum, Warwick, in the United Kingdom<sup>81</sup> and a Dr Hautman.<sup>82</sup>

- Historical collection

Rossouw was the first professional officer who assumed control of the historical collection.<sup>83</sup> Although he contributed to the accessioning of the objects (cataloguing), he was primarily appointed in the ethnology section and left the Museum after little more than a year.

A long time before the history collection was regarded as significant, numismatics and philately were the two collections that were actively documented and preserved because there was generally a staff member in charge of them. T.M. Campbell<sup>84</sup> was responsible for

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<sup>77</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 3 March 1938.

<sup>78</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1937 - 1938, p. 2; 1938 -1939, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 1939 - 1940, 1940 - 1941 and 1941 - 1942, departmental reports for archaeology, ethnology, numismatics and philately, and history. (History is mentioned once.)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 1946 -1947, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 5 March 1948.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 7 May 1948.

<sup>83</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letter Swierstra to F.V. Engelenburg, dd 22 September 1924.

<sup>84</sup> Campbell, appointed as lay assistant in 1925, was placed on the permanent staff on 1 July 1935. Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1935 - 1936, p. 5.

the philately collection in the 1930s and the late 1940s. B.J. Versfeld, appointed in 1951,<sup>85</sup> was at first responsible for the philately section, but later also took over responsibility for the numismatics collection.

It was only in 1947 that a temporary part-time assistant was appointed for the history section.<sup>86</sup> This was A. Schiel, who worked in the division from 1 October 1947 tot 30 November 1951. Although Schiel did not have any formal training, he was of the opinion that his general knowledge and former experience would ensure that he made a success of his main task, which was the compilation of an index for the Old Museum.<sup>87</sup>

The Board of the Transvaal Museum also placed a work room<sup>88</sup> to the disposal of R. Gerard.<sup>89</sup> In 1949 he was appointed as honorary historian for military history and heraldry, but his designation was that of historian, Transvaal Museum.<sup>90</sup> His fields of expertise were uniforms, flags and heraldry, but he appears to have worked primarily on the flag collection of the Museum, rather than on the history collection as a whole.<sup>91</sup> He was knowledgeable on museum matters such as the risks involved in the loan of art treasures, flags, standards,

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<sup>85</sup> Versfeld was appointed as part-time typist and museum assistant grade III. Although she left in November 1953, she returned on 1 September 1954. See *ibid.*, 1951 - 1952 , p. 5; 1953 - 1954, departmental report for numismatics and philately, p. 41 and 1954 - 1955, departmental report for numismatics and philately, p. 36.

<sup>86</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meetings 5 September and 7 November 1947.

<sup>87</sup> NCHMA, Diary, FitzSimons, 1947, letter A. Schiel to FitzSimons, dd. 29 August 1947; see annexure 5.

<sup>88</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 5 December 1947.

<sup>89</sup> Raoul Gerard (1883 - 1960) was born in Paris as Raoul Gerard Oesterreich, part of a German- speaking Jewish family. During World War I he lived in England and married Dorothy Moorwood. Between the two world wars the couple lived in Davos and Lausanne in Switzerland, but travelled a great deal. Raoul Oesterreich changed his surname to Gerard, and became a Swiss citizen. His wife died in 1939. He lived and worked in different countries, studying heraldry and flags. For example, according to Gerard's visiting-card, he was attached to the L'académie d'histoire e Mexique. He died on 20 May 1960. His manuscripts and library are preserved in the Bibliotheque cantonale et universitaire in Lausanne, Switzerland. NCHMA, Diary, FitzSimons, 1947, visiting card; Swiss National Library, [www:http://www.snl.ch/](http://www.snl.ch/) and [IZ-Helvetic@slb.admin.ch](mailto:IZ-Helvetic@slb.admin.ch); Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1960 - 1961, p. 3; N a, Illusion and truth in history, *SAMAB*, 4(9), March 1949, p. 27 (note); Obituaries, *Bulletin of the Transvaal Museum*, January 1961, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> See article, R. Gerard, Museum Treasures, *SAMAB*, 5(3), September 1951, p. 71.

<sup>91</sup> Gerard was the author of the book *Flags over South Africa*, published by the Pretoria Technical College in 1952. He wrote various articles in *SAMAB*, for example, The heraldry, conservation and restoration of flags, *SAMAB*, 4(8), December 1948, pp. 209 - 219. He also wrote a report on the Villa Krüger, Clarens, Switzerland. NCHMA, TM 15/40, dd 21 October 1953.

uniforms and costumes,<sup>92</sup> and the preservation of historical flags.<sup>93</sup> He was able to advise on the correct representation of historical costumes, arms, liveries, uniforms, flags and even colours that would enhance history books and museum dioramas, so as to stimulate interest in the past.<sup>94</sup> He donated several items to the Museum, such as a series of colour plates of military uniforms in albums, photographs of a flag and various coats of arms.<sup>95</sup> Although he was overseas several times, he retained his connection with the Museum until June 1953 when he returned to Europe for personal reasons.<sup>96</sup> The Board thanked Gerard for his services at the Museum and the valuable material he had donated.<sup>97</sup>

Schiel was followed by S.P. Malan, who was temporarily transferred from his post as caretaker to assistant for history. Malan did routine work under the supervision of the director.<sup>98</sup> Like Schiel, Malan had no formal training in history. In 1949 the urgent need for a qualified assistant in the history division was felt, and the Board decided that “such an appointment should be the first priority as soon as the necessary **extra** funds were made available”.<sup>99</sup> In other words, the history post would not be filled to the detriment of the natural history divisions, which had first call on available funds.

At a Board meeting in 1953 the position of a professional officer in the history division was agreed upon and Kotie Roodt-Coetzee was appointed by majority vote to begin on 1 September 1953.<sup>100</sup> This was a watershed decision by the Board of the Transvaal Museum and a crucial step in the development of new collections management practices, particularly for the Museum’s historical collection. Indeed, it proved to be significant for the development of the Museum and museology in general.

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<sup>92</sup> R. Gerard, Museum Treasures, *SAMAB*, 5(3), September 1951, p. 71 - 73.

<sup>93</sup> R. Gerard, The heraldry, conservation and restoration of flags, *SAMAB*, 4(8), December 1948, pp. 209 - 219.

<sup>94</sup> R. Gerard, Illusion and truth in history, *SAMAB*, 4(12), December 1949, p. 350.

<sup>95</sup> Historiography Catalogue, vol. 3, H.C. accession nos. 6320 - 6339, 6803 (HKF 1473), 6548.

<sup>96</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1953 - 1954, pp. 5 and 7.

<sup>97</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 12 June 1953.

<sup>98</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1952 - 1953, p. 32; Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 7 December 1951.

<sup>99</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 5 August 1949. My bold.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 March 1953 and 7 August 1953.

The anthropological, archaeological and historical collections

From 1913 to 1953 there was no written policy on basic collections management precepts such as acquisition or accession methods, marking of objects, ownership of objects in the collection and the legal rights of the museum. Nor were there formal guidelines on deaccessioning or disposal of objects, commitment to the conservation of the collections, loans, insurance and access. Nevertheless basic collections management procedures were followed and details of these can be gleaned from correspondence files, reports, minutes and catalogues.

- Collection growth

The Transvaal Museum inherited substantial collections from the Staatsmuseum, and in the first two decades of the twentieth century the collections had grown, albeit slowly. The ethnography collection at the Staatsmuseum consisted of at least 1 522 accessions that had been entered in the ethnology catalogue.<sup>101</sup> In July 1921 Radcliffe-Brown felt that the ethnological collection “would easily fill half of the old Museum building & in a few years time the whole of it”.<sup>102</sup> By February 1924 there were 4 945 ethnology accessions in the collection at the Transvaal Museum and it is likely that some of the Staatsmuseum’s objects had not yet been re-accessioned. In October 1925 there were 3 372 accessions in the historical collection.

There was steady growth in the collections since the 1930s (see table 2). By 1945 there were 8 648 accessions in the ethnology collection<sup>103</sup> and by 1947 there were 4 649 accessions in the historical collection.<sup>104</sup> There were even more objects in the collections than indicated by the accession numbers, because often an accession comprised more than one object and frequently new acquisitions were not accessioned. The collections were in the main enlarged sporadically by means of donations, limited fieldwork and in exceptional cases, purchases.

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<sup>101</sup> Catalogus der Ethnographische Collectie van het Staats Museum.

<sup>102</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 28 July 1921.

<sup>103</sup> For numbers of accessions, see Main Catalogue of the Department of Ethnology Africa, vols. 1 and 2.

<sup>104</sup> For numbers of accessions, see Historiography Catalogue, vol. 1.

TABLE 2

**Additions made to the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections by donations, purchases and field trips 1934<sup>105</sup> - 1953**  
(according to annual reports)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>HISTORY</u>	<u>ETHNOLOGY</u>	<u>ARCHAEOLOGY</u>	<u>PHILATELY</u>	<u>NUMIS- MATICS</u>
1934/1935	1 175	1 057	5		
1935/1936	587	408	95		
1936/1937	445	86		1 090	
1937/1938	234	45	18	1 416	
1938/1939	152	17	37	21 742	
1939/1940	130	411	228	1 085	4
1940/1941	102	8	165	1 471	1 700
1941/1942	64	75	465	1 149	228
1942/1943	56	17	75	552	
1943/1944	29	67	100	1 090	54
1944/1945	38	36	1	795	9
1945/1946	69	20	12	1 600	85
1946/1947	40	28		1 652	20
1947/1948	143	52	32	1 308 (+ 35 blocs)	22
1948/1949	153	67	2		93
1949/1950	380	20	30	4 083	67
1950/1951	821	64	22	2 895	10
1951/1952	242	12	20		31
1952/1953	204	9	3	1 729	4 500

<sup>105</sup> No numbers are available for the period 1913 - 1933.

By 1933 the Transvaal Museum had a substantial stamp collection. In that year the Postmaster-General also arranged for an additional set of stamps from all member-states of the Universal Postal Union to be sent to the Union of South Africa. Two sets had already been received by South Africa. One of them was retained by the headquarters of the General Post Office, while the other was placed at the Public Library in Cape Town. The third set was allocated to the Transvaal Museum.<sup>106</sup> This meant that the philately collection received every new stamp that had been issued from time to time throughout the world. The first assignment was received by the Museum from the Postmaster-General, Pretoria, in 1936.<sup>107</sup> In the meanwhile the government recalled the Transvaal Museum's stamp collection, the idea being that it could be used as a basis for a proposed postal museum.<sup>108</sup> There is no indication of how the de-accessioning was done. A special donation of 19 126 ZAR stamps was received from the Postmaster-General in 1939,<sup>109</sup> but there is no indication that any information was provided with the stamps.

The enlargement of the collections was not necessarily a positive issue, because there were too few staff members, and then only from time to time, whose primary interest or permanent responsibility was to care for and document the collections.

- Collections policy

Additions to the collections were not managed by a collections policy that was clearly formulated and consistent. Instead a series of haphazard decisions were taken, either by the director, the various curators, the Committee or Board. Using these decisions it is possible to set down some general, albeit unwritten, principles on the acceptance or rejection of objects for the collection (there were, of course, always exceptions to the rule).

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<sup>106</sup> B.J. Versfeld, The Transvaal Museum postage stamp collection, *Bulletin of the Transvaal Museum*, no. 6, January 1961, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1935 - 1936, p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> B.J. Versfeld, The Transvaal Museum postage stamp collection, *Bulletin of the Transvaal Museum*, no. 6, January 1961, p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1938 - 1939, p. 7.

- Condition

Objects in a bad condition or of poor quality were not readily accepted, either as a donation or purchase.<sup>110</sup> Objects already in the collection were scrutinized and those in a poor condition were rejected,<sup>111</sup> but whether they were formally de-accessioned or actually removed from the collection is not clear from the notes in the catalogues.

- Complete set

If possible, the Museum wanted full sets or a comprehensive range of objects or items.<sup>112</sup> This was also a guideline endorsed by the Prime Minister in which he declared that the collection of old Republican records and curios in the Museum was becoming yearly more complete.<sup>113</sup> Swierstra in particular kept this in mind when accepting objects, and this made the donations all the more valuable, as they were not yet in the museum collection.<sup>114</sup> The completion of a set was even reported in the annual reports.<sup>115</sup> A range of objects, showing differences in one type, such as rock art, was very acceptable.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> For example, a damaged German aeroplane and a jug were not accepted as donations. Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 11 March 1919; NCHMA, System 1 No 2 TM1/17 - TM1/30, letter Swierstra to Marais, dd 17 August 1928. A box in a very bad condition was described as “hardly suitable as a Museum specimen”. Ibid., System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letter Swierstra to C. Mason, dd 13 February 1928.

<sup>111</sup> For example two wooden jugs, destroyed by insects, a wooden carving of a gemsbuck and a wooden gun made by an African, both damaged. Main Catalogue of the Department of Ethnology Africa, vol. 1, ET accession nos. 105, 106 and 118; Ethnographic Catalogue Africa, E.C. accession no. 16.

<sup>112</sup> The Board considered it a sound policy to complete the South African coin collection as far as possible. Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 16 November 1939.

<sup>113</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letter J.C. Smuts to Sir H. Ross Skinner, dd 28 November 1922.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letter Swierstra to C. J. Liebenberg, dd 14 March 1933.

<sup>115</sup> See for example, Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1941 - 1942, departmental report for archaeology, ethnology, numismatics and philately, p. 4, reporting that “with the exception of the 1893 penny, the Museum now possesses a complete set of Kruger coins”.

<sup>116</sup> NCHMA, Letterbook 5, pp. 113 - 114 and 208, letters Breijer to B. Spoelstra, dd 13 December 1919 and 16 February 1920, saying that the Museum already had a large collection of rock art from different districts, but adding “Hoe meer variatie hoe beter, en vooral, daar U zegt, dat zy uit verschillende steensoorten bestaan, lijkt het zeer belangrijk voor het Museum”. [The more variation, the better, and especially, as you say, that they consist of different kinds of stone, and that is very important to the Museum. (Translated from the Dutch.)]

- General historical interest

The Museum confined itself to acquisitions of South African historical interest.<sup>117</sup> To be acceptable, the item had to be noteworthy.<sup>118</sup> Books were accepted if they were of historical interest.<sup>119</sup> Proposed purchases of objects associated with China and Matabeleland, for example, were not accepted.<sup>120</sup> But there were exceptions (items of other than South African interest) such as the donation of a French bishop's coat, c. 1750, as a good example of French silk tapestry.<sup>121</sup>

- Specific historical events

The Museum gave preference to objects associated with events such as the Great Trek,<sup>122</sup> the Anglo-Boer War<sup>123</sup> and the First World War.<sup>124</sup> The argument that historical objects such as these belonged to the nation also was used to persuade a prospective donor to make a donation.<sup>125</sup> The Museum would then take care of the objects for posterity and display them in a glass cabinet, labelled with the name of the donor.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> A willow pattern plate used by missionaries in Matabeleland was not purchased. *Ibid.*, System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM 1/26, letter Swierstra to J.G. Robinson, dd 17 September 1925. However, a flag carried by C.F. Duncker of the State Artillery of the ZAR who was with the Johannesburg Commando at Colenso, Elandsplaagte and Dundee, was accepted as donation. Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 20 February 1936.

<sup>118</sup> A button off the shirt of Sir Pomeroy Colley, was, for example, not regarded as of sufficient interest to be accepted. NCHMA, System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letter Swierstra to J.A. Ernst, dd 12 March 1923.

<sup>119</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees meeting, minutes 17 December 1936.

<sup>120</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letters Swierstra to G.F. Engelhard, dd 27 August 1925 and to J.G. Robinson, dd 17 September 1925.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letters J. M. Gilchrist to Swierstra and Swierstra to Gilchrist, dd 25 May, 4 June and 12 October 1931.

<sup>122</sup> Swierstra admonishes a donor with regard to the object "... if it contains no history relative to any of the Voortrekker families it is of no historical value". *Ibid.*, System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letter Swierstra to W.B. van der Vijver, dd 17 September 1925. On the other hand a cloth made by "n ou landsmoeder" [a Voortrekker woman] was accepted with thanks. *Ibid.*, System 1 No 2 TM1/27 - TM1/30, letter Swierstra to A.M.E. Prinsloo, dd 18 January 1929.

<sup>123</sup> A donation by C.J. Liebenberg consisted of Anglo-Boer War post cards, envelopes, prisoner-of-war programmes and magazines. NCHMA, System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letter Swierstra to C.J. Liebenberg, dd 14 March 1933.

<sup>124</sup> Swierstra thanks a donor for "... a few old relics of the Great War, which are very acceptable to our collection". *Ibid.*, System 1 No 2 TM1/27 - TM1/30, letter Swierstra to S.M. du Plessis, dd 5 December 1933.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letter Swierstra to Reitz and Pienaar, dd 18 March 1924.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, letter Swierstra to F.J. de Lange, dd 14 February 1923.



- Availability of money

The so-called grant-in-aid was barely adequate and very little money was spent on the purchase of historical objects; there was no real provision to purchase such objects.<sup>127</sup> Even though the historical value of an item, like the gold pendant and book of signatures presented to General Piet Cronjé's wife, was unquestioned,<sup>128</sup> the Museum had no funds to make the purchase. An item was only bought in exceptional circumstances, such as a suit of skin for £5.<sup>129</sup> Swierstra was of the opinion that before considering a purchase he would have to inspect the items personally before setting a price.<sup>130</sup> Later the objects were laid before the Board for inspection.<sup>131</sup>

Money was sporadically allocated to the anthropological division. For example, a collection of curios from Ovamboland was bought for £1,<sup>132</sup> and Radcliffe-Brown was given an amount of £60 to spend on museum objects while in Basutoland during the summer vacation.<sup>133</sup> In the 1930s the spending of money on ethnological objects was motivated as follows:

Prof. du Toit pointed out the urgency for obtaining Ethnological specimens while they are still available. Many of the specimens quite easily procured 25 years ago are now hardly obtainable. They are rapidly disappearing. We should therefore use this opportunity to obtain what specimens we can ...<sup>134</sup>

A trip undertaken by Beukes to Basutoland had been worth the expense (he collected a substantial number of specimens and a great deal of information). The additional expenses he incurred over and above the amount voted, were approved. He was instructed, however,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., letter Swierstra to H.L. Greyling, dd 2 January 1924.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., letter Swierstra to A. du Plessis, dd 19 July 1921; Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 19 February 1942.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letter Swierstra to D. E. Bisschoff, dd 2 May 1933.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 4 TM1/34 - TM1/42, letters Swierstra to J. D. Steenkamp, dd 6 March 1934 and to S.W. Pienaar, dd 28 March 1934.

<sup>131</sup> A cuspidor and a fish server used by the Kruger household were offered for sale and inspected by the Board, but not accepted. Transvaal Museum Board minutes, meeting 22 June 1936.

<sup>132</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 5 February 1918.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 15 June 1921.

<sup>134</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 8 June 1934.

to stay within the budget in future and a subsequent request for a trip to Basutoland on horseback was declined because the cost would be exorbitant.<sup>135</sup>

Special attention was paid to the enlargement of the numismatics collection and coins were sometimes purchased. A set of the first coins minted in Pretoria by the Royal Mint was acquired for £20 and a variety of coins was also purchased from a catalogue from the firm Fred Rose, Johannesburg.<sup>136</sup>

- Aesthetic value and age of object

Works of art had to be of high aesthetic value to be incorporated in the Museum collection.<sup>137</sup> Whether an object was regarded as an antique was also of primary concern.<sup>138</sup>

- Space

One of the biggest factors that was taken into consideration was the lack of display and storage space. Objects could not be accepted indiscriminately without establishing whether there would be enough space to accommodate them either in the show or study collection.<sup>139</sup>

- Authenticity

The association between the object and a historical event or person had to be authenticated. If no valid evidence was provided, the Museum would not entertain the offer. Directly linked to authenticity is the need for associated information. Given this, the object would be of interest to posterity.<sup>140</sup> No money would be paid for information, the feeling being that patriotism and altruism would motivate the donors.<sup>141</sup> The Museum was, however, grateful for any information provided with the gift.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 21 March and 21 November 1935.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 15 May 1941.

<sup>137</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 2 TM1/27 - TM1/30, letter Swierstra to D.B. Marais, dd 28 January 1929. A painting could not be accepted since it had no artistic merit and it was not of sufficient interest to overlook this fact. Ibid., System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letter M.G. Weston to J.D. Celliers, dd 8 March 1922.

<sup>138</sup> A 44 year-old sewing machine was unacceptable, because it was not an antique. Ibid., System 1 No 4 TM1/34 - TM1/42, letter Swierstra to J.D.P. Ras, dd 17 August 1934.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letter Swierstra to C.L. Bradfield, dd 6 March 1931. With the display of objects in the Botha and Smuts collections, for example, limited space was a detrimental factor. Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 26 February 1935.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., letter Swierstra to M. du Toit, dd 26 January 1933.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., letter Swierstra to J. A. Erasmus, dd 8 December 1931.

Authenticity was of the utmost importance to the ethnology collection, where genuine objects were emphasized rather than copies.<sup>142</sup> Items made for trading purposes were also rejected.<sup>143</sup> Where possible, ethnology objects were correctly identified and the information recorded.<sup>144</sup> The person providing the information was also scrutinized, for example particulars given by a trader were often regarded as suspect.<sup>145</sup>

- Suitability for exhibition

As the objects were primarily regarded as part of the so-called show collection, they had to be suitable for display purposes.<sup>146</sup>

- Selection of objects

Swierstra frequently encouraged people to donate objects to the Museum<sup>147</sup> and the selection of objects was often made by him. He either saw the object itself, or photographs of the objects, before making his decision.<sup>148</sup> To facilitate the matter, objects could be sent to the Museum free of charge by post or train.<sup>149</sup> In many instances the Museum Committee

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<sup>142</sup> Main Catalogue of the Department of Ethnology Africa, vol. 1, ET. accession no. 1263, an assegai was designated worthless, and ET. accession no. 50, a wooden pot, had no special value. In vol. 2 Beukes wrote of ET. accession no. 5099 that these objects looked like imitations.

<sup>143</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, Rossouw and Beukes rejected such items. See Main Catalogue of the Department of Ethnology Africa, vol. 1, ET. accession nos. 18, 19, 20, 21, 57, 61, 62, 63 and 75. A note by Beukes with regard to ET. accession no. 1377 reads, in Afrikaans, that the others are probably imitations for trading.

<sup>144</sup> For example, *ibid.*, ET. accession no.104, a wooden jug from the Barotse was re-identified as a mortar and pestle from Luemba country by Swierstra on receipt of information in a letter.

<sup>145</sup> With regard to an item purchased from Colman Bros, *ibid.*, ET. accession no. 200, Beukes notes that Colman's information is probably incorrect, and that it was possibly Thonga [Tsonga] work.

<sup>146</sup> The Board rejected a couch that had belonged to Kruger as it was not suitable for exhibition. Transvaal Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 18 July 1935.

<sup>147</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letter Swierstra to A.M. Geysler, dd 5 December 1933. Swierstra says "Indien u van nog ander mense weet wat van die ou voorwerpe in hulle besit het sal ek bly wees indien u die mense daarop wil wys dat sulke voorwerpe beter in 'n Museum bewaar word vir die nageslag dan wat die goedjies kan opgepas word deur private famielies waar hulle somtyds spoorloos verdwyn en sodoende vir die nasie verlore raak". [If you know of other people who own old objects, I would appreciate it if you would tell them that such objects should rather be preserved in a museum for posterity, than by private families, as the objects sometimes disappear. In that way they are lost to the nation. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, System 1 No 4 TM1/34 - TM1/42, letter Swierstra to J.G. van Rooyen, dd 12 February 1934. Swierstra says it would be best if you could send the kist to me so that I can evaluate it. If that is difficult, a few snapshots of the kist, from different angles, will suffice.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letter Swierstra to C.J. Trichard, dd 2 May 1933.

or Board were directly involved in the acceptance or rejection of the objects.<sup>150</sup> Sometimes the reasons behind the decisions were given, but in other instances it remained obscure.

- Show and study collections

An approach of so-called show and study collections was followed by the Transvaal Museum. The natural history study collections owe their quality and significance to the unstinting services of the many trained scientists who, on a continuous basis, collected specimens on numerous expeditions and preserved them in the Museum. In 1921 the acting director held the view that the Old Museum has to be retained for exhibition purposes only.<sup>151</sup> Since 1925, when the natural history exhibitions were moved from the Old Museum to the new building in Paul Kruger Street, many natural history specimens were displayed by means of spectacular habitat groups in dioramas, forming the show collections.<sup>152</sup>

The anthropological, archaeological and historical show collections remained on display in Boom Street. According to a vivid and detailed published description (see annexure 2) the largest part of the collection was on display in 1933, including objects associated with the Voortrekkers (figure 13) and the Anglo-Boer War. Well-known leaders such as Kruger and Botha were also featured, as were San engravings and anthropological artefacts from South Africa, Greece, Italy, Peru and other countries.<sup>153</sup>

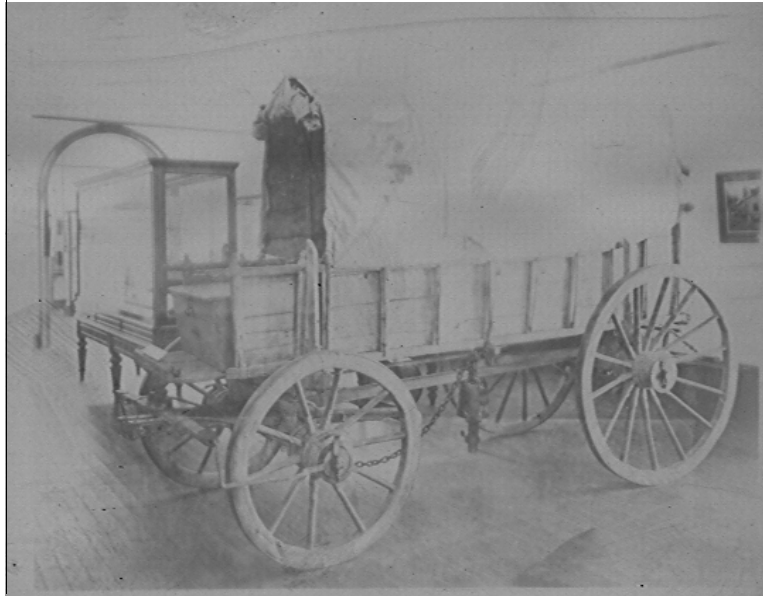
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<sup>150</sup> For example, the Kruger railway coach was rejected “after due consideration”, in August 1934, but the decision was revoked in October of the same year and the coach was accepted. On 19 March 1936 the matter was again discussed and it was decided that the exhibition of photographs and drawings would suffice. The coach was finally accepted in 1951. Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meetings 8 August and 18 October 1934, 19 March 1936 and 9 March 1951.

<sup>151</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 18 February 1921.

<sup>152</sup> See C.K. Brain, Natural history at the Transvaal Museum 1901 - 1992, in N.J. Dippenaar (ed.), *Staatmuseum 100*, pp. 48 - 51.

<sup>153</sup> S. Metelerkamp, In die Ou Museum in Pretoria, *Die Huisgenoot*, deel XVIII, no. 600, 22 September 1933, pp. 33 and 41 (annexure 2).



**Figure 13**

Voortrekker “kakebeenwa” and the case with the model of the Dunvegan Castle  
in the background on display at the Old Museum, c. 1933

(Collection: National Cultural History Museum HKF 1419)

There were also temporary anthropological, archaeological and historical displays at the New Museum. One of the first exhibits shown at the New Museum was at the temporary art gallery. The display was opened by Smuts on 25 September 1912.<sup>154</sup> Sixty two works of art were exhibited, including copies of Dutch paintings, such as the *Night Watch* by Rembrandt, that had been given to the Museum to enhance the culture of the “Transvalers” and serve as an aid to education.<sup>155</sup>

In 1917 the Museum Committee was looking for another building in Pretoria suitable for the display of the works of art in the art gallery.<sup>156</sup> Part of the gallery was allocated to the

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<sup>154</sup> E. Grobler, “Die Staatsmuseum van die Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek en sy historiese en etnografiese versamelings” (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1994), pp. 254 - 255.

<sup>155</sup> P. van Zyl, Skenking deur Eenige Hollandsche Vrienden (1912 - 1914), *Navorsing deur die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese Museum*, 2(5), 1993, pp. 149 - 183.

<sup>156</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 24 April 1917.

Defence Force and was thus closed during the First World War,<sup>157</sup> and the works of art were eventually moved to the Old Museum.<sup>158</sup> In 1948 the picture collection was rearranged under the guidance of Walter Battiss.<sup>159</sup> By 1950 the lack of space in the Old Museum prompted plans to remove the art collection to make more space for historical displays.<sup>160</sup>

In 1934 the Nel-Blom Collection, on loan from the University of Pretoria, was exhibited.<sup>161</sup> Objects from Mapungubwe, also loaned from the University, were placed on display in the entrance hall of the New Museum from 1934. These elicited great interest from the public, particularly so as the objects were accompanied by maps of the site showing the position of the layers where the objects were found. The exhibition was officially opened by the Minister of the Interior, J.H. Hofmeyr,<sup>162</sup> and later, in 1947, was considerably enlarged.<sup>163</sup>

Additional space became available at the Old Museum with the transfer of the Kruger Collection to the Kruger House. The result was that the historical show and study collection had to be changed and objects for which no space was previously available, could now be displayed.<sup>164</sup> The next change could only take place in the exhibits at the Old Museum, when six showcases presented by the Botha Committee, were suitably filled with Botha objects.<sup>165</sup> Apart from these, no showcases were received for the Old Museum, but in 1947 a number of illuminated Botha addresses and some historical photographs from the Elliott Collection were installed in two so-called multi-leaf pedestal cases. A model of a Bapedi kraal was also placed on display. At the New Museum the Mapungubwe display

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<sup>157</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Reports, 1914 - 1919.

<sup>158</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meetings 2 December 1919 and 3 October 1921.

<sup>159</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1947 - 1948, p. 4.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 1949 - 1950, p. 4.

<sup>161</sup> C.S. van der Waal, "Gesiedenis van die Volkekunde-Afdeling van die Nasko-Museum, Pretoria 1893 - 1977" (unpublished article), p. 18.

<sup>162</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1933 - 1934, pp. 3 - 4.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 1935 - 1936, p. 5 and 1946 - 1947, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 1933 - 1934, p. 3.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 1934 - 1935, p. 4.

was upgraded.<sup>166</sup> To a great extent, however, the show collections remained the same year after year.

Objects were also displayed elsewhere, such as the casts of the petroglyphs (rock art) that were exhibited in the Native Art Section of the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg from November 1936 to February 1937.<sup>167</sup> In 1945 displays of indigenous arts and crafts were held at the Technical College and the Bantu Training School in Kilnerton, Pretoria.<sup>168</sup>

The displays at the Old Museum were supplemented by new acquisitions that were regarded as potential exhibits and the donors were promised that objects would be exhibited,<sup>169</sup> but because of insufficient display space, such as lack of showcases and hall accommodation, it was impossible to put everything on show immediately.<sup>170</sup> There is evidence in the catalogues that objects were chosen for the show collection or else packed away.<sup>171</sup> Swierstra was of the opinion that it was impossible to put new donations on display, without upsetting the arrangement in the showcases and turning them into mere store-cases, which according to him, was “a very undesirable proceeding from an exhibition point of view”.<sup>172</sup>

The result was that even though potential exhibits were acquired, that were very interesting and should have been exhibited, these could not be displayed.<sup>173</sup> The archaeology collection, for example, contained some of the finest early implements found in South Africa, but the

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 1946 - 1947, pp. 3 - 4.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 1936 - 1937, p. 5 and departmental report for ethnology, p. 1.

<sup>168</sup> C.S. van der Waal, “Geschiedenis van die Volkekunde-Afdeling van die Nasko-Museum, Pretoria 1893 - 1977” (unpublished article), pp. 18 - 19.

<sup>169</sup> On receipt of a new donation, Swierstra replied that “... Daar zijn ‘n heele paar goede dingens bij die voor onze aanstaande uitstal kollektie heel goed te gebruiken zijn”. [There are many things that could be used effectively in our next exhibition. (Translated from the Dutch.)] NCHMA, System 1 No 2 TM1/27 - TM1/30, letter Swierstra to C.M. Frylinck, dd 11 March 1929. Swierstra promised donors that their donations will be put on display, using words like “our exhibition” and “show collection”. Ibid., letter Swierstra to T. Gilliland, dd 11 March 1929 and System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letter Swierstra to C.J. Liebenberg, dd 14 March 1933.

<sup>170</sup> For example “... owing to insufficient exhibition space, your uniform is no longer in the showcase, but has been stored away until such time as more space is available, when it will again be exhibited”. Ibid., System 1 No 1 TM1/12 - TM1/26, letter Swierstra to H. Grothaus, dd 8 March 1928.

<sup>171</sup> See Main Catalogue of the Department of Ethnology Africa, vol. 1, ET. accession nos. 2, 5, 6, 7, and 3.

<sup>172</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Reports, 1938 - 1939, p. 7 and 1939 - 1940, p. 5.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 1937 - 1938, p. 5 and 1938 - 1939, p. 6.

display was not as comprehensive as it might otherwise have been.<sup>174</sup> During his short stay at the Museum, Beukes re-arranged the complete anthropological collection and objects were taken from the storerooms and added to the displays.<sup>175</sup>

In practice this meant that the anthropological, archaeological and historical show collections were at least as big as the storage collections, but at the Old Museum the space available for the storage of objects was also wholly inadequate and the conditions far from satisfactory.<sup>176</sup> There is very little information available on the arrangement of the collections in storage, whether the different collections were stored separately, and how each collection was classified (if classified at all). It is known that in 1912 the coins and medals were, for example, overhauled and put in order,<sup>177</sup> but this may have the exception rather than the rule.

Storage was probably completely at random (figure 14). Objects were jumbled haphazardly and could easily be mislaid, hence the exceptionally long period of time between donation and accessioning of some objects. Objects were stored under the displays in cases. According to a list, probably dating from 1940 or later, Persian rugs, an embroidery painting on satin, a Japanese Kakemone mounted on rollers (a wall hanging in the form of a scroll), a piece of ribbon, a coat of arms, flags, flag-staffs and even a cutting from a newspaper, were stored in the ethnological display area.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 1938 - 1939, p. 6.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 1933 - 1934, p. 3.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 1937 - 1938, p. 5.

<sup>177</sup> NCHMA, Box 515, (TM)M1/2, Director, "Chronicles of the Museum" (unpublished article), dd 21 March 1912.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 4 TM1/34 - TM1/42, list with heading, Stored in corner cupboard, native section, Old Museum, case 42.





**Figure 14**

Storage at the Old Museum in the 1940s

(N.J. Dippenaar (ed.), *Staatmuseum 100*, p. 101)

Objects were found in odd places when Schiel started with the indexing and accessioning of the historical collection in 1947. For example, rifles were found in the cellar, a prisoner-of-war chess set, documents and a revolver with cartridges were found in the drawer of a writing desk, a yoke was found in the ethnographic collection and a glass walking stick was found in the small storeroom at the back.<sup>179</sup>

Objects were incorrectly identified because they were stored in the wrong place. Objects had been identified as Voortrekkerspore [Voortrekker spurs] because they were discovered in the historical collection, but they had an ethnology accession number; they had to be replaced in the ethnology collection.<sup>180</sup> The laconic question was asked in the catalogue: “Waar Mnr. Schiel die idee vandaan gekry het dat dit Voortrekkerspore is, weet ek nie!” [Where Mr Schiel got the idea that these are Voortrekker spurs, I do not know!]. A variety of objects found in a cupboard together with photographs from the Botha Collection, were wrongly identified as later Botha discoveries, and at least one of them had already been accessioned.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Historiography Catalogue, vol. 2, H.C. accession nos. 5313, 5314, 5785, 5786, 5788, 5779 and 5858.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., accession no. 5245.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., accession no. 5251 and vol. 1, accession no. 3318.

A system of parcels, primarily used for the storage of books, photographs and documents was probably developed in the late 1940s. Objects were grouped together and given a parcel number. Some parcels, in particular those from the Botha Collection also contained three dimensional objects. There were silver teaspoons, a silver teapot, ashtrays and a piece of wood in parcel 187a (a wooden box). The parcel system was not a classification system for objects, because a variety of objects were grouped together. Parcel 64, for example, contained letters, photographs, framed souvenirs and a little-used spring wagon.<sup>182</sup> (How a wagon, or even a model of a wagon could be forced into a parcel, remains a mystery.)

At the time an attempt was made to “recollect” (Schiel’s word) collections, such as placing together all the objects associated with one person, donor or family, but they were not necessarily put together in one parcel. For example, Schiel stated that the “van Alphen collection has now been recollected but had to be placed in different parcels as the respective pieces were found”.<sup>183</sup> The objects were in fact made into parcels and covered or tied together, as can be seen from the following description:

About two years ago the new director of the Transvaal Museum, Dr. V. FitzSimons, had the cellars cleared. On the shelves of the box rooms these articles are now stacked away in parcels neatly sorted out.<sup>184</sup>

A list of more than 187 parcels (some of them designated as a, b, c, etc) is to be found in the handwritten Information Book compiled by Schiel. At least one parcel (no. 7) contained as many as 951 photographs and another had a box of 2 024 photographs (no. 9). Parcel 65 contained only one item, a building plan, while parcel 136 contained only one book. As for parcel no. 40, Schiel mentions a metal drum that was already filled with documents, a coat of arms, photographs, books and newspapers, but from the description of the parcel it is evident that the “drum” was a trunk in which the documents may well have been donated.<sup>185</sup> By 1951, the director felt that the historical collection was in good order and

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<sup>182</sup> The spring-wagon in question is a four-wheeled horse-drawn buggy. *Historiography Catalogue*, vol. 2, H.C. accession no. 4839d and vol. 19, H.C. accession no. 16078.

<sup>183</sup> Information Book, opposite p. 138.

<sup>184</sup> NCHMA, file on the history of the Museum, information sheet issued by the Van Riebeeck Festival Committee, K. Roodt-Coetzee, The National Museum, Boomstreet, Pretoria. p. 3.

<sup>185</sup> See description of parcels 29 and 40 in the Information Book.

that the objects were readily accessible for study and other purposes (figure 15).<sup>186</sup>



**Figure 15**

Objects packed in parcels and labelled

(Collection: National Cultural History Museum HKF 4875)

The aim was still to display all the items in the collection, the only restraint being the lack of space at the new museum building.<sup>187</sup> In 1949 the displays at the Old Museum were rearranged to improve the situation and to provide additional exhibition space. This was very necessary as a large number of most interesting objects had been brought to light by Schiel that should have been on display. Despite the changes there still was not sufficient exhibition space.<sup>188</sup> An interesting and unique collection of historical objects could, however, be added to the show collection in 1953 by using the new display cases obtained for the Van Riebeeck Festival.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1950 - 1951, p. 32.

<sup>187</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 4 TM1/34 - TM1/42, letter Swierstra to J. Putter, dd 10 April 1940. Swierstra writes that we are only waiting for the extension of our new Museum before displaying all the objects.

<sup>188</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1948 - 1949, p. 4.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 1952 - 1953, p. 8.

## 2. DOCUMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The documentation framework is the official means, operating within the museum framework, by which information about the museum's collections is secured.

### **Management and resources**

#### Responsibility and coordination of documentation

The director and the staff member, if there was one at the time, were responsible for the documentation of the anthropological, archaeological and historical artefacts in the Museum. Although this documentation comprised only a minor part of the workload of the directors, Swierstra for example, dealt with the correspondence and FitzSimons for his part was not averse to entering new acquisitions into the acquisitions entry registers. Although documentation matters were reported to the Museum Committee and later to the Board in exceptional cases, the practical ways in which the documentation of the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections were carried out, were not recorded properly.

#### Documentation policy and priorities

No documents, such as acquisition and loan policies, manuals or structured vocabulary lists could be found on the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections. Some reference to these matters are available in letters, reports and minutes.

For many years (until the mid 1940s) there was no attempt to upgrade the standard of museum documentation of these collections. The basic documentation was done, only when staff were available and time permitted. It was however, an accepted fact that as much information as possible should be obtained on each object. This precept had been accepted by Radcliffe-Brown as regards ethnological objects in 1921 and he set it down clearly:

For a specimen to be of value there must be full information about it. (1) Native name. (2) from what material made – with native name. (3) how made – with what tools, if any (4) uses (5) locality where made (6) any other information of interest.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> NCHMA, Box 137, TM 137/21, letter Radcliffe-Brown to D. Earty, dd 20 June 1921.

When a donor sent him information, Swierstra made a point of acknowledging these details, because historical data was growing increasingly difficult to obtain.<sup>191</sup> Such information also enhances the objects from a scientific point of view<sup>192</sup> and increases the possibility of continued research.<sup>193</sup> When information was received from a donor, the particulars were not invariably written down in the catalogue;<sup>194</sup> in some cases not all the information was recorded.<sup>195</sup> Modern or “new” documentation practices such as inventory control, cataloguing<sup>196</sup> and indexing were not undertaken. Loan management was, however, carried out by means of a loans register.

## **Documentation system<sup>197</sup>**

### Design of documentation system

Objects entering the Museum to form part of the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections did in the main undergo some scrutiny in terms of the various collecting principles, either by means of personal contact, correspondence or field work. Often a reply was written to inform the donor whether the object had been accepted or rejected. The documentation process consisted of acquisitioning and cataloguing.<sup>198</sup> The process was then completed by putting the object on display with a label, which formed an integral part of the documentation system. In the late 1940s the Shaw system of indexing was accepted for the anthropological collection.

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letter Swierstra to G.O. Lunnon, dd 3 May 1933 and *ibid.*, letter Swierstra to M. du Toit, dd 26 January 1933. Swierstra thanks Du Toit for the information he had sent with the objects, as it will be of historical importance to posterity.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., letter Swierstra to T. Moore, dd 29 June 1933.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 2 TM1/27-TM1/30, letter Swierstra to J.H. Segers, dd 22 May 1930.

<sup>194</sup> Compare information received from donor with entries in catalogue: “Twee gedenk stukke van ‘n Voortrekkervrou, Mevr S.J. Neethling gebore Aucamp (1828 - 1914)”, [Two memorials of a Voortrekker woman, Mrs S.J. Neethling born Aucamp (1828 - 1914). (Translated from the Afrikaans.)] *Ibid.*, System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, note, June 1932; *Historiography Catalogue*, vol. 1, H.C. accession nos. 4018 and 4030.

<sup>195</sup> Compare information received from donor with entries in catalogue. NCHMA, System 1 No 4 TM1/34 - TM1/42, letter Swierstra to P.M. du Toit, dd 3 March 1934 and note; *Historiography Catalogue*, vol. 1, H.C. accession no. 4178.

<sup>196</sup> See glossary, second definition of cataloguing.

<sup>197</sup> See glossary for definitions of various terms.

<sup>198</sup> Swierstra stated that all objects were written into the catalogue. NCHMA, System 1 No 3 TM1/31 - TM1/33, letter Swierstra to J. Putter, dd 26 February 1940.

### Documentation sources (annexure 3) and their uses

The documentation sources at the Transvaal Museum for the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections were the acquisitions entry registers, the catalogues, the loans registers, the labels and the correspondence files. When entry forms were used, copies were not kept in the Museum.

These documentation sources contained very basic information and were therefore seldom used for anthropological, archaeological and historical research or enquiries by outsiders, as the Transvaal Museum was primarily known for its outstanding natural history prowess. If such queries on the human sciences were received, they were probably answered by staff who drew on their personal experience or knowledge, or from secondary publications rather than by using the documentation sources. It is clear from the many and varied annotations and notes, in particular in the catalogues, that the staff who had direct access to them used them.

### **Collections audit**

One of the most important functions of a museum is to take responsibility for its collections and the objects in the collections and to be able to account for these to the museum itself and to an outside authority, such as the government or other funding agency. In the past little or no control measures were taken by museums to ensure that the objects on the books were still in the museum, and no pressure, official or otherwise, was exercised from outside.

At the Transvaal Museum the annual statements of revenue and expenditure, audited by the Controller and Auditor-General, were subject to remarks contained in the auditing report that only referred to financial matters such as purchases and staff salaries.<sup>199</sup> Scant attention was paid to the documentation and management of the collections, except where acquisitions by purchase formed part of the expenditure.<sup>200</sup> The director declared that stock

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<sup>199</sup> See for example, Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meetings 13 March 1906, 7 March 1916 and 2 April 1918.

<sup>200</sup> See for example, Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1939 - 1940, audit inspection of the books and accounts, dd 10 April 1940.

was taken every year of the furniture, tools and instruments, but a regular annual stock-taking programme of the collections was not undertaken during this period.<sup>201</sup>

One recommendation was made by the auditor, to which the Museum Committee acceded, namely that registers of specimens and a catalogue of books should be kept, but these presumably referred to natural history specimens and the library.<sup>202</sup> The Committee discussed the insurance of the contents of the Museum at the instigation of the auditor's report.<sup>203</sup>

### 3. CONSERVATION

There was no conservation department and no conservators dealing with preservation problems that concerned the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections. No internal conservation records appear to have been kept. Nonetheless there was comprehension for basic conservation requirements, such as the detrimental effects of light on paper. For example, the request by a donor that important historic documents be framed and displayed, was rejected because the paper might fade. Instead the Museum Committee decided that the documents should be kept in the safe and exhibited only once a year.<sup>204</sup>

Preventive conservation was preferred to active conservation and restoration. Good housekeeping was always regarded as part of the preservation process; for example, the carpets in the Kruger House were disintegrating from constant wear and tear, and they were covered with strips of carpet to protect them.<sup>205</sup>

Pest control was also preventive, and items made of skin, flags and similar objects were treated either with a special solution called Areginal, that was made in Austria, or with Xylamon. The ethnologist at that time felt that it was too soon to prove the quality of the disinfectants, but they had already been used extensively in Europe and the tropical

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<sup>201</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 3 December 1918.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 4 August 1914.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 24 April 1917.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 5 October 1915; NCHMA, Box 515 TM5/8, letter Breijer to D.E. van Velden, dd 6 October 1915.

<sup>205</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 20 February 1936.

countries, and it was hoped that they would prove as effective in South Africa.<sup>206</sup> An arsenic solution was used as alternative to prevent pests from attacking the objects.<sup>207</sup> In an endeavour to get rid of borers and other pests attacking the ethnology collection in storage, the objects were dipped with a special solution supplied by the Museum's department of entomology and D.D.T. was also used.<sup>208</sup> By 1946 there were almost no traces of moths or borers in the ethnology collection.<sup>209</sup>

The importance of proper display or showcases was also realized, and the Department of Public Works was asked on occasion to make special cases for important objects,<sup>210</sup> such as the Bratina and the Sèvres vases.<sup>211</sup> The showcases with coins of South African interest were strengthened with extra locks, and the coins themselves cleaned and coated with colourless nail varnish to prevent tarnishing.<sup>212</sup> The furniture collection was also repaired and restored.<sup>213</sup>

The storage conditions at the Old Museum were detrimental to the objects because of the damp. The contents of the back storeroom, in particular the garments, skins and leather work, had to be cleaned and thoroughly dried, and moved to the front office, while the stone implements were moved to the back.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1934 - 1935, departmental report for ethnology, p. 1.

<sup>207</sup> For recipes, see NCHMA, System 1 No 2 TM1/27 - TM1/30, letters, Swierstra to R. Pearson, dd 8 March 1929 and Swierstra to E.A. Hooper, dd 20 May 1930; System 1 No 4 TM1/34 - TM1/42, letter Swierstra to V.W. Hiller, dd 17 October 1940.

<sup>208</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1945 - 1946, departmental report for ethnology, numismatics and archaeology, p. 1.

<sup>209</sup> NCHMA, Diary, FitzSimons, 1947, letter N.J. van Warmelo to FitzSimons, dd 1 January 1946.

<sup>210</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 7 November 1922.

<sup>211</sup> The so-called Sèvres vases (Historiography Catalogue, vol. 26, H.C. accession nos. 38687 - 8) came from the mansion of W.E. Hollard, Friedesheim, in Pretoria. They stand 1 200 mm high and therefore needed a special case. See A. Malan, End of a myth, *Ceramics and craft South Africa*, July-August-September 1991, p. 24.

<sup>212</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1941 - 1942, departmental report for archaeology, ethnology, numismatics and philately, p. 3.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 1946 - 1947, p. 3.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 1940 - 1941, p. 5.



The conditions at the Old Museum continued to deteriorate, and a warning was sounded that irreparable losses would be suffered, if the objects were not removed to a suitable location.<sup>215</sup> The situation went from bad to worse and was reported regularly. For example, in 1949 it was put on record that

the safety of the valuable historical and ethnographical material, of necessity housed in the Old Museum, proves a constant source of anxiety, owing to the total unsuitability of this building for the purpose, exposed as it is to the ever present hazards of damp, fire, burglary etc.<sup>216</sup>

The stamps were placed in standard loose leaf albums according to separate countries and in strict chronological order.<sup>217</sup> During the Second World War work was suspended on the stamp collection for two years, but the number of stamps that the Museum received increased tremendously and it was decided to sort and file the stamps in small pay envelopes according to issues and countries, and store them in a small filing cabinet.<sup>218</sup> In 1951 - 1952 no less than 200 000 stamps were mounted and annotated in albums.<sup>219</sup>

An innovative method of storing coins was adopted that may well be regarded as a method of preservation (figure 16). Each coin was mounted on a small square of cardboard, on which the accession number was written. A hole was punched through the cardboard to fit the size of the coin and it had a backing.<sup>220</sup> Duplicate coins, medals, tokens, counters, jettons and banknotes were packed in numbered envelopes.<sup>221</sup>

Although the Museum Committee was concerned about the condition of the art collection, which needed cleaning and renovating, the lack of money prohibited any action.<sup>222</sup> Gerard,

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 1945 - 1946, p. 2, special report written by the assistant professional officer for ethnology and archaeology.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 1948 - 1949, p. 7.

<sup>217</sup> B.J. Versfeld, The Transvaal Museum postage stamp collection, *Bulletin of the Transvaal Museum*, no. 6, January 1961, p. 3.

<sup>218</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1943 - 1944, report of the library, p. 2.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 1951 - 1952, departmental report division of numismatics and philately, p. 35.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 1938 - 1939, p. 7.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 1939 - 1940, p. 2, and departmental report for ethnology, numismatics and archaeology, 1945 - 1946, p. 2.

<sup>222</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 29 January 1934.

which needed cleaning and renovating, the lack of money prohibited any action.<sup>222</sup> Gerard, who was the honorary historian for military history and heraldry, and an expert on the history and restoration of flags, supervised the restoration and remounting of old historic flags at the Kruger House.<sup>223</sup>



**Figure 16**

Coins mounted on a square of cardboard

During the Second World War precautions to be taken, in case of an emergency, such as the danger of air raids, were discussed. It was proposed that provision be made outside the Museum building to store valuable historical objects. It was even suggested that the lion enclosures, which were not in use at the National Zoological Gardens of South Africa, Pretoria, be used. The matter was left in abeyance until the danger became more acute<sup>224</sup> and the proposal was never implemented.

Although the security of the numismatics collection on display was discussed as early as 1936, a night watchman was only appointed ten years later, after the burglary of gold and silver Botha objects.<sup>225</sup> Valuable silver objects on loan were, however, insured against

<sup>222</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 29 January 1934.

<sup>223</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1953 - 1954, p. 9.

<sup>224</sup> Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meetings 19 February, 23 April and 21 May 1942.

<sup>225</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 3 October 1946; NCHMA, System No 5 TM43/51, letter FitzSimons to H. de Waal, dd 17 September 1946.

The chairman of the Board of Trustees could in truth point out that

In spite of all efforts to effect safe-keeping, a considerable portion of our priceless material, more especially our almost unique collection of cultural and historical objects, is in grave danger of serious deterioration owing to lack of adequate storage space.<sup>227</sup>

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New displays began to appear in the Old Museum after the appointment of Coetzee in 1953 and collections were being assembled in a planned manner. The Old Museum gradually took on an entirely new look and began to emanate a new spirit; but the building itself was undeniably old fashioned and unfunctional. It was only in the new century that the Museum would move into a new and functional museum building.

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<sup>227</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1952 - 1953, p. 3.