

## CHAPTER IV

### COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE TRANSVAAL MUSEUM

1953 - 1964

#### 1. MUSEUM FRAMEWORK

##### Management

##### Organizational change

The organizational changes that took place in the Transvaal Museum after 1953 had a momentous effect on the way in which the historical collection and, to a lesser degree, the anthropological and archaeological collections were maintained. Various aspects of collections management, particularly the collecting, documentation and conservation of the history division underwent radical change. These changes were the result of a series of events in the 1930s and 1940s that influenced the development not only of the Museum, but also of the whole country. In the course of time alterations in the organization of the collections eventually led to the establishment of an independent cultural history museum.

- Change in emphases

During the 1930s the conditions in South Africa were hardly propitious for the establishment of history or cultural history collections in a museum. The Great Depression of 1929 - 1932 hit South Africans, both white and black hard, and the drought of 1932 - 1933 was one of the severest experienced in the country.<sup>1</sup> Many people became impoverished, some whites living as share-croppers (Afrikaans: *bywoners*) on farms, others finding jobs on the railways and the mines.

Nevertheless, the Great Trek and the exploits of the Voortrekkers had not been forgotten by Afrikaners and as the centenary year (1938) approached, unsuccessful local attempts were made to commemorate either a Trek personality or an event. At a conference held in 1931 a Central National Monuments Committee was established. The Committee was

---

<sup>1</sup> See D. Oakes, *Illustrated history of South Africa. The real story*, pp. 332 - 340.

responsible for the choice of the site and design of the monument now known as the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. It was clear that the building would not be completed in time for the commemoration. The 1938 centenary celebration was therefore confined to the laying of the foundation stone of the Monument, preceded by a countrywide symbolic ox wagon trek (Afrikaans: *Simboliese Ossewatrek*).

The ox wagon trek comprised eleven wagons and covered fifteen trek routes in South Africa and parts of Southwest Africa (Namibia). Wherever they went, the wagons were met with unprecedented enthusiasm by Afrikaners and inundated with heritage antiques associated with the Great Trek.<sup>2</sup> The aim was to preserve these objects in one central place for the descendants of the Afrikaners. Although some objects were temporarily housed at Hartenbos, it was the wish of many donors that the objects should be placed in the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria.<sup>3</sup>

Although the 1938 trek could in reality be described as the journey of a few wagons, it did mobilize the Afrikaners,<sup>4</sup> who were imbued with enthusiasm for and a true appreciation of their own cultural heritage and its preservation. According to Coetzee there is a direct link between the struggle of the Afrikaners for their language and culture and the motivation for a national cultural history museum.<sup>5</sup>

Although in the Transvaal Museum the immediate effect of these festivities was minimal (the only spin off was the phenomenal increase in the number of visitors)<sup>6</sup> the longer term effects were magnified by the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument in 1949. This led, in turn, to a gradual but profound change in emphasis on the management of the historical collection at the Transvaal Museum. Now, for the first time, the Museum became

---

<sup>2</sup> O.J.O. Ferreira, "Die geskiedenis van die Sentrale Volksmonumentekomitee" (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1970), pp. 82 - 91 and 118.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 118 and 240.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, file, Persoonlik 2, K. Roodt-Coetzee, Aantekeninge vir 'n rede deur die Staatspresident, Dr N. Diederichs, ter geleentheid van die opening van die Pioniershuis van die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese en Opelugmuseum, 5 November 1975, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Reports, 1938 - 1939 and 1939 - 1940, p. 2.

a national museum that promoted its natural **and historical** content.<sup>7</sup> This change did not come easily to a natural history museum and can be attributed to the expertise, zeal and perseverance of one person, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, the first professional officer appointed in the history division in 1953. This was during the directorship of FitzSimons, who would accede to the critical issue of creating a cultural museum, one that would embrace the human sciences – anthropology, archaeology and history.

- Museum environment change

The most significant shift towards the human sciences was noticeable at the Old Museum, where the bulk of the anthropological, archaeological and historical show and study collections were housed. The change in emphasis of the museum environment was evident in the new use that was made of the old space. The so-called show collection was renovated, indeed replaced by new displays in a new style, and the study collection was not only rearranged and re-packed, but enlarged and enriched to such an extent that additional accommodation outside the Museum soon became an urgent necessity.

#### Divisional/departmental organization

The organization (table 3) of the Transvaal Museum changed when a professional officer was appointed for the history division. The monthly and annual reports were for the first time compiled by a staff member for that specific division. They were no longer part of the general account or compiled by the director, but showed that history could stake its claim on equal terms with natural history. For many years the history or cultural history division, including ethnology, archaeology, numismatics and philately, was regarded as part of the natural history in terms of reporting. No difference was made between the natural and the human sciences. It was only in 1960, 1962, 1963 and 1964 that two major divisions, i.e. the natural sciences or natural history section and the cultural history section, were recognized.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> My bold.

<sup>8</sup> See Transvaal Museum Annual Reports for those years.

TABLE 3

**Organization in divisions/departments 1953 - 1964**

(according to annual reports)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NATURAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT/ DIVISION</u>	<u>HUMAN SCIENCE DIVISION/DEPARTMENT</u>
1953/1954	Division of Higher Vertebrates (mammals) Division of Higher Vertebrates (birds) Division of Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates Division of Entomology (general collection) Division of Entomology (Heterocera) Division of Entomology (Coleoptera) Department of Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Division of History Divisions of Archaeology and Ethnology Division of Numismatics and Philately
1954/1955	Higher Vertebrates (mammals) Higher Vertebrates (birds) Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates Entomology (general) Entomology (Heterocera) Entomology (Coleoptera) Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Archaeology and Ethnology History Numismatics and Philately
1955/1956	Higher Vertebrates (mammals) Higher Vertebrates (birds) Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates Entomology (general collection) Entomology (Heterocera) Entomology (Coleoptera) Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Archaeology and Ethnology History Numismatics and Philately

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NATURAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT/ DIVISION</u>	<u>HUMAN SCIENCE DIVISION/DEPARTMENT</u>
1956/1957	Higher Vertebrates (mammals) Higher Vertebrates (birds) Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates Entomology (general collection) Entomology (Lepidoptera) Entomology (Coleoptera) Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Cultural History (including archaeology and anthropology) Numismatics and philately
1957/1958	Higher Vertebrates (mammals) Higher Vertebrates (birds) Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates Entomology (general collection) Entomology (Lepidoptera) Entomology (Coleoptera) Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology	Cultural History Division (including archaeology and ethnology) Numismatics and Philately
1958/1959	Ornithology Mammalogy Bat-Banding Project Lower Vertebrates & Invertebrates Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology Entomology (general collection) Entomology (Lepidoptera) Entomology (Coleoptera)	Cultural History Division (including archaeology and ethnology) Numismatics and Philately
1959/1960	<b>For the first time two separate sections with departmental reports</b>  <u>Natural Sciences Section</u>  Ornithology Mammalogy Bat-Banding Project Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology Entomology (general collection) Entomology (Lepidoptera) Entomology (Coleoptera)	<u>Cultural History Section</u>  Cultural History Ethnology and Archaeology Numismatics and Philately

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NATURAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT/ DIVISION</u>	<u>HUMAN SCIENCE DIVISION/DEPARTMENT</u>
1960/1961	<p><b>No division between the natural and the human sciences</b>  Ornithology  Mammalogy  Bat-Banding Project  Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates  Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology  Entomology (general collection)  Entomology (Lepidoptera)  Entomology (Coleoptera)</p>	Cultural History Division of Ethnology and Archaeology Numismatics and Philately
1961/1962	<p><b>Again two separate sections with departmental reports</b>  <u>Natural Sciences Section</u>  Ornithology  Mammalogy  Bat-Banding Project  Lower Vertebrates &amp; Invertebrates  Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology  Entomology (general collection)  Entomology (Lepidoptera)  Entomology (Coleoptera)</p>	<u>Cultural History Division</u> Old Museum Division Ethnology and Archaeology Numismatics and Philately
1962/1963	<p><u>Natural Sciences Section</u>  Ornithology  Mammalogy  Bat-Banding Project  Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates  Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology  Entomology (general)  Entomology (Heterocera)  Entomology (Coleoptera)</p>	<u>Cultural History Section</u> Old Museum Ethnology and Archaeology Numismatics and Philately
1963/1964	<p><u>Natural History Section</u>  Ornithology  Mammalogy  Lower Vertebrates and Invertebrates  Vertebrate Palaeontology and Physical Anthropology  Entomology (general)  Entomology (Lepidoptera)  Entomology (Coleoptera)</p>	<p><b>For the first time an annual report from the acting director, Old Museum, in addition to the departmental reports</b>  <u>Cultural History Section</u>  Old Museum  Kruger House  Ethnology and Archaeology  Philately and Numismatics</p>

The name of the new division still had to change, because the emphasis on the content of the collection and its information had moved from history to cultural history. Various terms such as “Africana collection” or “antiques” were used; even names such as “cultural science” and “culturological science” division (Afrikaans: *kultuurkundige* or *kulturologiese afdeling*) came up for consideration.<sup>9</sup> In the end preference was given to the term **cultural history**. It was used as a blanket term, as this division comprised cultural history, anthropology and archaeology (later also including philately and numismatics and many years later again a history department), and the collections at the Old Museum, the Kruger House and the Voortrekker Monument.<sup>10</sup>

The evolution of the cultural history division into a separate museum took place over a period of ten years. The anthropology and archaeology divisions were incorporated into this division from the very beginning: they did not remain at the natural history museum, but later became independent departments in their own right in the new cultural history museum.

#### Administrative organization

The first recognition that the human sciences division in a natural history museum could hold its own, was the formation of a special Historical Sub-committee in June 1955 “... to cope more adequately with the rapid expanding activities of the Culturological Division”.<sup>11</sup> The Sub-committee comprised

- Prof. A.N. Pelzer (chairman)
- H.P.H. Behrens
- Prof. P.J. Coertze
- V. FitzSimons (director)
- K. Roodt-Coetzee (historical officer)
- Prof. H.M. van der Westhuysen.<sup>12</sup>

The task of the Sub-committee was to deal with all matters concerning the historical division and to make the necessary recommendations to the Museum Board.<sup>13</sup> The Sub-committee

---

<sup>9</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meetings 8 and 31 August 1956, 6 August and 20 September 1962.

<sup>10</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1957 - 1958, departmental report cultural history division, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1955 - 1956, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 3 - 4.

was very active and met each month, proving to be of great value to the Board as far as the cultural history division was concerned.<sup>14</sup> The director and the professional officer for history represented the Museum on the Board – Coetzee as head of the cultural history division and acting as secretary for the Sub-committee.

## **Resources**

### Staff

From 1953 to 1964 the staff for the anthropological, archaeological and historical (later called cultural history) collections had to be increased drastically to cope with the enlarged work load. Even when the separation of the two divisions was imminent, there were only eight staff members in the cultural history division (administration, cultural history, ethnology and archaeology, the Kruger collection, numismatics and philately, and exhibitions and restoration), in comparison to 29 in the natural history division (administration, mammalogy, ornithology, vertebrate palaeontology and physical anthropology, lower vertebrates and invertebrates, entomology, exhibition and taxidermy and preparators). These numbers exclude staff in the library, the caretakers, the messengers, night-watchmen and cleaners.<sup>15</sup>

- **Directors**

FitzSimons was actively engaged in promoting good management of the history collection, and was of the opinion that this material could provide for years of historical research. He agreed that the Museum should do its utmost to see that a qualified historical research officer was appointed as soon as possible.<sup>16</sup> He also took an active part in the discussions and decisions about the history exhibitions, such as the Van Riebeeck tercentenary (1952) and the Pretoria centenary (1955) displays. He represented the Transvaal Museum on the Historical Sub-committee. Coetzee testified that FitzSimons was very sympathetic and that he willingly gave his support wherever possible.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1963 - 1964, pp. 3 - 5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1948 - 1949, departmental report division of history, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letter Coetzee to W.J. de Kock, dd 25 February 1954.

- Curatorial and other staff in the cultural history, anthropological and archaeological divisions

After the appointment of Coetzee in the history division in 1953, the need for additional staff for conservation and administrative duties, and extra curatorial staff in the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections was identified. Coetzee also insisted on the creation and the filling of these posts. Additional posts on the pay roll first had to be approved by the Department of Education, Arts and Science and sometimes a post approved for one section would be utilized in another division. In this way personnel on curatorial, conservation and administrative levels were appointed. There was, however, a fair turnover of staff, compromising efficiency, because the work required constant training and supervision.

- Anthropological collection

From 1937 when the post of honorary curator for ethnology was declared defunct there had been no successor to Beukes. The work in the ethnology division came to a virtual standstill and no collecting was done. Coetzee reported that it was impossible to accomplish anything in the ethnology and archaeology divisions; with the available staff (a professional officer, a typist and a restorer) only the most pressing work was being done in the cultural history division and no task could be successfully completed.<sup>18</sup> The most urgent work in these two divisions (anthropology and archaeology), as seen in the monthly reports, was done by the cultural history staff.<sup>19</sup> When it was impossible to do any work, this was also reported.<sup>20</sup> The director, stressing the necessity for an ethnologist in the Museum, advised the Historical Sub-committee that the critical conditions in ethnology in South African museums should be brought to the attention of the government.

At the Transvaal Museum there were large gaps in the anthropological collections and the situation could only be remedied by the appointment of professional officers with specialized training. There was also an urgent need for research.<sup>21</sup> In view of this, the Board unanimously agreed that every effort should be made to have an ethnologist appointed as

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 29 August 1957.

<sup>19</sup> See monthly reports, NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 14 May 1957.

<sup>21</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1956 - 1957, departmental report for cultural history, p. 33 and 1957 - 1958, p. 34.

soon as possible.<sup>22</sup> It was recommended that the post filled by the restorer could be utilized for the appointment of an ethnologist. This could be done because a post had been created for a restorer by the Department of Education, Arts and Science, and this made it possible to advertise the post.<sup>23</sup> The professional officer appointed for ethnology, M.M. Venter (Jacobs-Venter) held a temporary post, owing to a decision by the government that no married women could be appointed to civil service positions in a permanent capacity.<sup>24</sup> She took up her appointment on 1 January 1959 but resigned on 31 October 1960, to be replaced by A.P. du Toit, whose designation was professional-officer-in-charge of ethnology with effect from 1 January 1961.

- Archaeological collection

No curator or assistant for archaeology was appointed during the period 1953 - 1964.

- Cultural history collection

Coetzee worked at the Old Museum alongside a caretaker and a cleaner. It immediately became clear that the work load made additional staff an absolute necessity, and for the first time a museum-assistant for history was appointed in August 1955.

The necessity of having a trained restorer of antique furniture, who could also make models and dioramas for cultural history and anthropology displays, was identified early.<sup>25</sup> His restoration task was so specialized that he could not repair objects in the same way as an ordinary joiner. He had to be a person with excellent training, in-depth knowledge of antique furniture styles and the techniques used in the manufacture of such furniture.<sup>26</sup> It was also necessary that he should have knowledge of antique lacquer, varnish, polish and tools, and South African and European timber.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Transvaal Museum Board minutes, meeting 17 May 1957.

<sup>23</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 20 May 1958.

<sup>24</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1958 - 1959, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 8 October 1956.

<sup>26</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 11 TM1/56, letter director to the Secretary for Education, Arts and Science, dd 22 October 1956.

<sup>27</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 20 June 1960.

The first staff member on the conservation staff was a restorer, T. Westphal, who was appointed on 1 January 1957.<sup>28</sup> He resigned on 31 May 1960 and was replaced from 1 October 1960 by T. Spoelstra, who had considerable experience.<sup>29</sup> A temporary assistant, J.M. Gagiano, was appointed on 29 December 1959.<sup>30</sup>

Time and again the lack of trained staff was detrimental to collections management practices. Even with two full-time assistants and a part-time typist, the work had increased considerably by 1958 and matters such as collecting, classification, registration, marking, indexing and storage could not be kept up to date.<sup>31</sup> The necessity of appointing qualified staff to deal with the photograph collection and Kruger Collection, became increasingly urgent,<sup>32</sup> but the post for a museum-assistant for the Kruger House was only created two years later. The first appointee was C. Brand.<sup>33</sup>

As the cultural history division became better established and more independent, the administrative duties made increasing demands on the professional officer's time and attention.<sup>34</sup> Although the staff (excluding the caretakers) had increased to eight by 1964, the provision was still inadequate. In that year the staff of the human science and the natural history divisions was listed separately in the annual report. The cultural history section was staffed as follows:

---

<sup>28</sup> Westphal worked as restorer in the museum in Hamburg, Germany and also had training in furniture techniques, architecture and art. Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1956 - 1957, p. 4; Sub-committee minutes, meeting 8 October 1956.

<sup>29</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1960 - 1961, p. 4, departmental report for cultural history, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1959 - 1960, pp. 5 - 6.

<sup>31</sup> NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly report, 24 August - 24 September 1958.

<sup>32</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1958 - 1959, departmental report for cultural history division, pp. 39 - 40.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1960 - 1961, departmental report cultural history, pp. 30 and 34.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1957 - 1958, departmental report cultural history division, p. 34.

<i>Administration:</i>	Mrs Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, acting director Mrs M. Esterhuysen, typist
<i>Cultural History:</i>	Mrs Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, professional officer-in-charge Mrs J. Gagiano, museum assistant
<i>Ethnology and archaeology:</i>	Mr A.P. du Toit, professional officer-in-charge Mrs A. Wiehahn, part-time typist ( to 26 June 1963) Mrs M.M. Esterhuysen, (as from 1 July 1963)
<i>Kruger collection:</i>	Mrs L.E. Behrens, museum assistant
<i>Numismatics and philately:</i>	Miss B.J. Versfeld, part-time assistant
<i>Exhibition and restoration:</i>	Mr T. Spoelstra, restorer. <sup>35</sup>

### The cultural history, anthropology and archaeology collections

- Collection growth

By 1953, according to Coetzee, the history collection at the Old Museum was already one of the most representative and diverse in South Africa. By 1955 Coetzee still held the view that the nucleus of objects held in the Museum could be developed into the most complete cultural history collection in the country. In her view there was no other museum that could equal the chronological display of the various periods in the colonial history of South Africa since the arrival of the Portuguese to 1910.<sup>36</sup> She also identified many lacunae in the collection, such as a lack of Cape Dutch furniture,<sup>37</sup> hardly any porcelain, glass and costumes and no objects from the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) period (Dutch: *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* [V.O.C.]). Coetzee was of the opinion that visitors to the Museum in Pretoria could not, for example, form an accurate picture of the white lifestyle at the Cape during the eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup>

In the past most pieces had been collected for their association with a historical figure or event, aesthetic worth or value as rarity or curiosity. Coetzee felt that an object should

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1963 - 1964, pp. 4 - 5.

<sup>36</sup> NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, envelope Geskiedenis van NASKO-Museum, Memorandum oor die aankoop van kultuurhistoriese voorwerpe, veral meubels, vir die Ou Museum, Pretoria, 25 February 1955, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. and System 1 No 11 TM1/56, letter Coetzee to K. Rood, dd 16 January 1956; TM1/55(h), K. Roodt-Coetzee, vergelyking tussen die Ou Museum en die Krugerhuis.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letter Coetzee to I.D. du Plessis, dd 2 November 1954. At this stage there was no accepted collections policy for history and cultural history objects for the Transvaal Museum or any other museum that collected cultural history objects in the country. For example, there was none that would limit the geographical range of collecting. According to her own vision for a national cultural history museum, Coetzee was making steady progress in collections policy precepts for the Transvaal Museum.

rather be a “document” of the past. Now, since clear aims for collecting had been determined, she started a “soek- en speurtog om die vereiste kultuurdokumente te vind” [an investigation to discover the required cultural documents].<sup>39</sup> To do this she either cajoled would-be donors, used contacts to link up with potential donors and lenders, or made purchases. In this way she managed to make good many of the deficiencies in the cultural history collections. She also assembled judicious collections of Cape silver, furniture, copper, ceramics and costumes. The result was that the content of the Old Museum was increased, according to Coetzee, to 30 times the original collection, and that of Kruger House was doubled<sup>40</sup> (table 4).

The best objects formed the nucleus of the exhibition of Cape silver and furniture that opened in the Old Museum in 1962 (figures 17 and 18). At the Kruger House there were furniture and other household items that had been used by the President and Mrs Kruger. These were located and collected with the assistance of and from Kruger descendants, so that the house reflected the original lifestyle of the presidential couple.<sup>41</sup> At the Voortrekker Monument the process of refining the objects was ongoing, because a new location for the museum was envisaged.

---

<sup>39</sup> NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, file Persoonlik 2, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee en die Kultuurhistoriese museumwese in Suid-Afrika, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, a visit to the Kruger family in the Rustenburg district in 1956. NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly report January - February 1956.

TABLE 4

**Additions made to the cultural history\*, anthropology and archaeology collections  
by donations, planned purchases and field trips 1953 - 1964**

(according to departmental reports where available, some approximate)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>OLD MUSEUM</u>	<u>KRUGER HOUSE</u>	<u>ANTHRO- POLOGY</u>	<u>ARCHAE -OLOGY</u>	<u>PHILATE- LY</u>	<u>NUMIS- MATICS</u>
1953/ 1954	1 337	22	42	82	1 354	106
1954/ 1955	1 123	136	55+88	26	2 542+20	88
1955/ 1956	667	143	16	45	1 431	120
1956/ 1957	870	45	33 (Anth & Arc)		1 315	55
1957/ 1958	500+	106	62 (Anth & Arc)			
1958/ 1959	1 231	111		73	5 940	
1959/ 1960	682		213	146		
1960/ 1961					3 000	
1961/ 1962	900	23	179		3250+	
1962/ 1963	1 377	98+			5 300	
1963/ 1964	4 018	53	267		4 000+	

\*Old Museum and Kruger House

At the beginning of 1961 Coetzee could report that

The most rewarding part of the activities of the past year was the acquisition of many antique pieces to fill lacunae in our collections and the search for, and discovery of, a number of valuable articles which, it is hoped, can be acquired in the near future. The improvement in the quality of the acquisitions is due mainly to two factors: Firstly, as the Museum has reached a saturation point in respect of certain aspects of social historical material, only choice pieces need now be accepted; and, secondly, that it has been made possible to undertake an extensive collecting tour during each of the last two consecutive years.<sup>42</sup>

Although the anthropological collection was rated highly by Van Warmelo, few objects of scientific value, accompanied by the necessary documentation and research, were added to the collection after the departure of Beukes, but donations were accepted indiscriminately; as Van der Waal puts it: “Na Beukes sak die stilte weer neer in dié afdeling” [After Beukes left, nothing happened in this section].<sup>43</sup>

A draft report, probably written in 1960 by Venter, sets out in detail the conditions of the anthropology division and its collection. Venter maintains that the collection was an incomplete representation of the ethnic groups in South Africa: San material was meagrely represented; there was only a small collection from the South-Western Bantu-speaking groups and a few objects from the Barotse and the Masai, but none from West and Central Africa. Furthermore there was nothing in the collection representing the Coloureds, the Griqua or the Khoi Khoi.<sup>44</sup> Lacunae in the collection were also identified as far as clothing, decorations, music instruments, witch doctor outfits and hand carvings were concerned, nor were there any modern substitutes.<sup>45</sup> At the time Venter regarded these substitutes as very important, because it was necessary in displays in a museum to show how the culture of the white people had been absorbed by blacks and how traditional African cultures had been partly transformed, but not completely assimilated.<sup>46</sup> The arrival of the next anthropologist,

---

<sup>42</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1960 - 1961, departmental report for cultural history, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> C.S. van der Waal, “Gesiedenis van die Volkekunde-Afdeling van die Nasko-Museum, Pretoria 1893 - 1977” (unpublished article), p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 4 - 5.

<sup>45</sup> NCHMA, File ET1/60 Etnologiese Afdeling, Konsepverslag: Toestand in Museum, p. 4, n.d.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

Du Toit, in 1961 heralded a new period: he collected material in a scientific manner and added to the collection through documented field work.<sup>47</sup>

In the archaeology division, the stone implement collection was reasonably big, although there were few examples of the Wilton culture. There were, however, excellent opportunities to collect additional material in the field. Although there was a fine collection of rock art, the display method (the rocks lying on the stoep of the Old Museum) was detrimental to its full appreciation.<sup>48</sup>

- Collections policy

The ideal was that the professional officers, anthropologists, archaeologists and cultural historians, should formulate a clear policy on collecting so as to avoid the use of the Museum as a mere warehouse for curiosities.<sup>49</sup> There was, however, no official written policy for the cultural history division of the Transvaal Museum.

---

<sup>47</sup> C.S. van der Waal, "Gesiedenis van die Volkekunde-Afdeling van die Nasko-Museum, Pretoria 1893 - 1977" (unpublished article), pp. 4 and 7 - 8.

<sup>48</sup> NCHMA, File ET1/60 Etnologiese Afdeling, Konsepverslag: Toestand in Museum, p. 5, n.d.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Kotie-Roodt Coetzee Archives, envelope Gesiedenis van NASKO-Museum, Aanbevelings met betrekking tot die toekoms van die Kultuurkundige Museum, 1960, p. 9.



**Figure 17**

Furniture and utensils dating from the period of the Dutch East India Company



**Figure 18**

Furniture from the years 1780 - 1795, when Cape Town was known as “Small Paris”

These photographs were taken in 1972 and the display probably differed slightly from the original exhibition of Cape Silver and Furniture

(Collection: National Cultural History Museum  
Christmas card (brochure), Volkscas, 1972)

Coetzee had an insatiable love for cultural history objects that lead to well-nigh compulsive collecting:

... as 'n mens eenkeer met die ou dinge te doen gehad het, kan jy dit nooit weer los nie; dit is soos 'n kiem wat in jou bloed kruip. Ek het so 'n liefde vir die dinge dat as ek daarmee kan werk, ek nie iets anders sal doen nie.<sup>50</sup>

Coetzee did not only possess a genuine love for material culture, but also the discerning power to make reasoned choices. She was able to set out lucidly, in writing, her assessment of requirements for worthwhile museum objects. Her paper, *Die probleme van museale waarde* was delivered in 1962 at the Werkring Kuns en Geesteswetenskappe of the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns [Study group arts and human sciences of the South African Academy for Arts and Science].<sup>51</sup> This paper can be regarded as a guideline in providing details of a collecting policy suitable for a cultural history museum. Indeed, it was to serve as a blueprint for use in the Transvaal Museum. In addition, statements made from time to time by Coetzee in letters, memoranda and articles, contributed a great deal to the formulation of a standard for collecting, in particular for the collection of cultural history objects.

- Documents of the past

Coetzee formulated the first policy that went beyond the ordinary relatedness between object and person or event (which is a very restrictive link) to cultural historical value. In other words each object to be collected had to have value as a document on, or evidence of, the spirit of the times; this cultural interpretation had to be independent of any association with a historical figure or event. It is of primary importance to ask what can be deduced (learnt) from an object about the lifestyle of the people or person who made and used it – their attitude towards life, their descent and their creative abilities.<sup>52</sup> As an example the reed hut (Afrikaans: *matjieshuis*) in Namaqualand is quoted: it cannot be linked to any historical event or notable figure, but it reflects an important and unique part of a cultural

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 6 TM1/52 - TM1/53, letter Voorsitster Historiese Uitstillingskomitee to J.H. Muller, n.d. [... if one has even just once worked with old things, one cannot let go. It is like a seed that sprouts in your blood. I love those things so much that; once having worked with them, I cannot imagine myself doing anything else. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

<sup>51</sup> K. Roodt-Coetzee, *Die probleme van museale waarde*, *Hertzog-Annale*, Yearbook IX, December 1962, pp. 43 - 53. See annexure 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

lifestyle.<sup>53</sup> For Coetzee each object was

... ‘n dokument van die verlede, dis ‘n getuienis oor hoe hulle in die verlede geleef, gewerk en gedink het, en waarna hulle gestreef het. Hulle meubels en naaldwerk, hulle klere en glas en aardewerk, hulle silwer en velwerk, al hierdie dinge wat deur ons mense op ons eie bodem gemaak is, dit is die dokumente wat ons beskou, bekyk, bestudeer en ons lei daaruit af wat die aard en karakter en strewing van ons mense was. Ons leer hulle daaruit ken en deur hulle ook onself.<sup>54</sup>

In her introduction to the catalogue on the Cape silver and furniture exhibition, opened in 1962, she states quite clearly that the aim was not to show furniture because they have curiosity or aesthetic value, but because they give expression to a cultural and mental state of mind, to a way of life.<sup>55</sup>

- Research and demonstrative value

Coetzee regarded the demonstrative value of an object as the second most important requirement, meaning that such an object should be a representative example of a skill or art that originated in a cultural setting. Not all objects that are important for research purposes have show quality. It does not matter whether an object is pretty or not, or whether it has monetary value or not. Objects should have display value to give the visitor, whether child or adult, the opportunity to relive the reality of his own or another culture in the museum.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, envelope Geskiedenis van NASKO- Museum, Memorandum oor die “aankoop van kultuurhistoriese voorwerpe, veral meubels, vir die Ou Museum, Pretoria”, 25 February 1955, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 18 TM1/62, radio talk, K. Roodt-Coetzee, Uitstalling van Kaapse silwer en meubels, November 1962. [A document of the past, testimony to their aims and the way in which people lived, worked, and thought in the past. Their furniture and needlework, their clothes and glassware and earthenware, their silver and leatherwork, all these things which have been made by our people on our own soil, these are the documents that we need to scrutinize and study, so that we can infer from them the temperament, character and the purpose of our people. We know them and ourselves through those things. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

<sup>55</sup> K. Roodt-Coetzee, *Kaapse silwer en meubels uitstalling*, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> K. Roodt-Coetzee, Die probleme van museale waarde, *Hertzog- Annale*, Yearbook IX, December 1962, p. 50.

Coetzee was also of the opinion that there should be sufficient objects in the study collection so that the museum could be used as a research centre.<sup>57</sup> Such objects could then be used to further scientific research by academics who wish to study the culture of different groups in South Africa in various periods. She felt that cultural history ranked as a scientific discipline (Afrikaans: *wetenskap*), but that it was not “ordinary” history.<sup>58</sup> One of the most important aspects of Coetzee’s work at the Transvaal Museum and later in her career was in fact to prove that cultural history could and should be practised in a scientific manner, because the human sciences had not been given the status “scientific” in the past.<sup>59</sup> Objects collected should have value as documents and as evidence for scientific research.<sup>60</sup> Coetzee was adamant that the information that was communicated to the public had to be scientifically correct,<sup>61</sup> and even more so, that all museological actions, such as cataloguing and conservation, should be scientifically well-founded.<sup>62</sup>

- Authenticity

Every museum prefers authentic and original objects, says Coetzee. In some cases it is difficult to distinguish between the original and a fake or copy. Therefore each object has to be zealously inspected by the cultural historian to make sure whether it is authentic. Did it really come into existence at the time stated by the donor, or as suggested by the object itself, or is it a cunning copy?<sup>63</sup> The necessity for proof or provenance of antiques and old pieces was emphasized by Coetzee.<sup>64</sup> She was uncompromising in her belief that all information about an object had to be solicited and scrutinized (for both research and

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.; NCHMA, TM1/9, Draft memorandum, Board of Trustees to the Secretary for Education, Arts and Science, n.d.

<sup>58</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 11, TM1/56, letter Coetzee to J. van Zyl, dd 14 August 1956.

<sup>59</sup> See p. 116 of this research.

<sup>60</sup> NCHMA, *Komitee van Ondersoek na openbare museums in Pretoria, 1960 - 1961*. Aanbevelings met betrekking tot die toekoms van die kultuurkundige museum, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 15 TM1/60, letter Coetzee to Theron, dd 28 October 1960.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., letter Coetzee to the town clerk, Hendrina, dd 29 March 1960.

<sup>63</sup> See K. Roodt-Coetzee, Die egtheid van ‘n V.O.C.-bokaal, *Bulletin van die Transvaal-Museum*, no. 7, July 1961, pp. 3 - 5.

<sup>64</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 11 TM1/56, letter Coetzee to D.P. du Buson, dd 13 January 1956. Irrefutable proof had to be delivered that a porcelain plate came to South Africa with the Huguenots.

authentication purposes).

- Leaders

According to Coetzee, objects with historical and sentimental value associated with an important historical event or eminent person, are on a slightly higher level of significance than objects that are curious, weird or strange. Objects in the first category are probably the most popular with museum visitors and often form the nucleus of a museum's collection.<sup>65</sup> Their collection can be justified because they promote piety and patriotism and create a sense of reality of the past.<sup>66</sup> These objects should not be disregarded totally and, says Coetzee, the Museum ought to be representative of the leaders (Afrikaans: *Groot Manne*) of South Africa. As there were already extensive collections on Kruger, Botha and Commandant-General P.J. Joubert, she felt that objects associated with General J.B.M. Hertzog should also be collected.<sup>67</sup>

- Roots

A representative collection of show and study material on the development of the Afrikaner colonial cultural heritage should include the roots of that culture in Western Europe. Coetzee regarded the countries of origin of the Afrikaner as the source of their cultural lifestyle. Two West European countries were of particular interest, namely the Netherlands and Germany.<sup>68</sup> As there were no objects depicting the home life of their forebears in the Museum, objects were needed to assemble a small representative collection to portray the cultural lifestyle of their German and Dutch ancestry.<sup>69</sup>

- Availability of money

The Transvaal Museum had always been dependent on donations, as there was no purchase fund and very little, often no money, to buy objects. The result was that the growth of the

---

<sup>65</sup> K.Roodt-Coetzee, Die probleme van museale waarde, *Hertzog -Annale*, Yearbook IX, December 1962, pp. 44 - 46.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>67</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letters Coetzee to C. Hertzog, dd 2 November 1954 and to H. Joubert, dd 2 November 1954; System 1 No 9 TM1/55, letter to L.I. Coertze, dd 3 June 1955.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letters Coetzee to R. Breed, dd 22 June 1954 and to H. Schroeder, dd 5 August 1954.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letter Coetzee to H. Schroeder, dd 5 August 1954; System 1 No 12 TM1/57, letter Coetzee to the director, Ottema-Kingma Stichting, dd 12 March 1957.

collection was at its best haphazard. Objects that were urgently needed to fill gaps in the collection could not be purchased and were simply lost to the Museum.<sup>70</sup>

One of the first tasks Coetzee turned to was to obtain money for purchases and improvements. She was adamant that an impressive museum could be developed with the necessary funding:

As ek ons mense net kan oortuig van die baie goeie werk wat 'n historiese museum kan doen as ons so bietjie geldjies het. In die museum-wereld is dit nog net die gogga-, en mot- en paddamense wat geld kry vir navorsing, as geskenke van die publiek.<sup>71</sup>

As the need to buy objects grew, money had to be found somewhere. In November 1953 an entrance fee was introduced at the Kruger House, partly to provide additional funds for the maintenance of the house and the purchase of Kruger objects, and also to cover two salaries.<sup>72</sup> A charge of 1/- was made for adults to visit the Kruger House, the Old Museum and the Transvaal Museum, from 1 July 1958.<sup>73</sup>

In 1956 the City Council of Pretoria decided that a third of the annual amount donated to the Transvaal Museum, a sum of £500, could be used for the purchase of antiques.<sup>74</sup> The Board also gave Coetzee permission to collect money<sup>75</sup> and by 31 March 1959 the balance sheet of the Transvaal Museum reflected a historical purchase fund, a Voortrekker Monument Museum fund, an open-air museum fund and a Kruger House fund.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Memorandum, Aankoopfonds van die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese en Opelugmuseum, Februarie 1971, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 11 TM1/56, letter Coetzee to P.J. van der Westhuizen, dd 4 June 1956. [If only I could persuade our people that a history museum could do excellent work with a little bit of money. In the present museum world, it is the bug, moth and frog people who get money from the public for research. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

<sup>72</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1953 - 1954, p. 7; *Komitee van Ondersoek na openbare museums in Pretoria, 1960 - 1961. Aanbevelings met betrekking tot die toekoms van die kultuurkundige museum*, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1958 - 1959, p. 8.

<sup>74</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 9 May 1956.

<sup>75</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 11 May 1956.

<sup>76</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1958 - 1959, p. 48.

When objects were purchased, the recommended policy was that preference should be given to objects in the following order:

- objects made and used in South Africa,
  - objects made elsewhere, but with a South African association, and
  - objects of foreign origin and no connection at all with South Africa.<sup>77</sup>
- 
- Selection of objects

The Sub-committee decided that the professional officer for cultural history could select or discard objects for the collections on grounds of condition or general suitability.<sup>78</sup> Sometimes Coetzee would add objects that she did not regard as suitable for the Museum. An iron, for example, was not acceptable as museum object, because its condition was “primitive”, but it was probably accepted because it was identified as being of Boer manufacture (Afrikaans: *Boeremaak*).<sup>79</sup> But a chair that was described as being in a bad and battered condition, was identified as unacceptable for a museum. Objects in a poor condition were accepted for study purposes, such as a foot-warmer<sup>80</sup> and a red flannel baby shirt. This last item is accompanied by the following note:

Slegs vir studiedoeleindes goed. Hierdie tipe rooi flennie kledingstukkie was baie gedra van ca. 1860 - 1920; die geloof onder die Boerevroue was dat geen ander materiaal so geskik was om borskwale te genees as juis rooi flennie nie. **Om hierdie rede word die verflenterde babahempie in die versameling opgeneem, ook omdat daar geen ander rooi flennie stuk in die versameling is nie.**<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> NCHMA, National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum, Committee for general matters and committee for financial matters minutes, joint meeting 9 October 1964.

<sup>78</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 20 October 1960.

<sup>79</sup> Historiography Catalogue, vol. 5, H.C. accession no. 7265.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., H.C. accession no. 7318.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., H.C. accession no. 7337. My bold. [Only suitable to be used for study purposes. During the period ca. 1860 - 1920 clothing made of this type of red flannel was worn frequently. Boer women believed that no other type of material was as therapeutic in the curing of chest complaints than red flannel. For this reason the tattered baby shirt is accepted into the collection. In addition, there is no other piece of red flannel in the collection. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

- Show and study collections

The conventional division into show and study collections used at the Transvaal Museum, was also practised at the Old Museum, but the aims for these two collections later changed radically and new meaning was given to them.

- New exhibitions and display methods

In a museum, very often an object had to be unique, rare or curious. Traditional historical displays emphasized this type of object as museum piece and it was even called a relic. It was displayed with a general caption. No effort was made to establish its relationship with other objects, the associative connection and aesthetic value were important. These requirements were also part of the Museum's collection policy. Most of the objects selected for display in the Old Museum met these conditions.

The first major change took place in 1952 with the Van Riebeeck exhibition. Coetzee was the chairperson of the special display sub-committee of the Museum and the Transvaal Provincial Van Riebeeck Festival Committee.<sup>82</sup> Conditions at the Old Museum improved because Coetzee worked at the Museum for almost two years prior to the exhibition without any remuneration, often from 08:00 in the morning till 22:00.<sup>83</sup>

This display consisted of historical objects, including some of the rarest and most valuable objects dating from the time of the Voortrekkers, that have been in the Museum since 1892. These had not been exhibited previously as a result of a lack of display space and cabinets.<sup>84</sup> During the time she worked unofficially at the Museum, additional objects were collected by Coetzee by means of letters, mainly to people who had already loaned objects for previous exhibitions organized by her, such as the 1949 display at the Voortrekker

---

<sup>82</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1951 - 1952, departmental report for division of history, p. 33.

<sup>83</sup> W. Louw, Lewenskets van Mev Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, *Museum Memo*, 6(2), November 1978, p. 17; NCHMA, System 1 No 6 TM1/52 - TM1/53, letter Coetzee to F.O. Dentz, dd 4 December 1953.

<sup>84</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. 2; Die provinsiale Van Riebeeck-fees in Pretoria vanuit 'n kunsoogpunt gesien, *Inspan*, April 1952, p. 23; Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1951 - 1952, departmental report division of history, p. 33.

Monument. Money was raised for the purchase of a number of glass cases to display these items. Coetzee exhorted potential donors by arguing that

A gift which goes towards the acquisition of a cabinet is a gift which will continue to be useful for centuries, a gift which will enable the public to participate effectively in a cultural heritage to which it is entitled.<sup>85</sup>

The Festival Committee also decided that any profit would go to the development of the history museum, in other words, the Old Museum.<sup>86</sup>

The exhibition, opened on 13 March 1952,<sup>87</sup> depicted cultural development in South Africa over a period of 300 years. The Festival Committee took decided and energetic measures<sup>88</sup> to ensure an outstanding exhibition. It was to cover

The Bantu, the period of settlement under Van Riebeeck and his successors, the period 1700 to 1800, the British Settlers and their contribution, the Great Trek, the succeeding period in the four provinces to 1910, the rise of industries in South Africa, the contribution of the Jewish group, the Anglo-Boer War, Unification.<sup>89</sup>

The exhibition itself made a perceptible change,<sup>90</sup> as the new cases allowed for a wide selection of objects. The space was, however, according to the director, still very overcrowded, and little could be done until more space became available.<sup>91</sup>

After the advent of Coetzee in September 1953, the director was able to report that progress was made with the arrangement of display material under her capable and energetic

---

<sup>85</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. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 5 TM/43 - TM1/51, Van Riebeeck Festival Committee minutes, meetings 5 November and 4 December 1951; Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1951- 1952, departmental report division of history, p. 33.

<sup>87</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1951- 1952, p. 13 and departmental report division of history, p. 33.

<sup>88</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>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 6 TM1/52 - TM1/53, letter Secretary for Education, Arts and Science to Coetzee, dd 30 January 1952.

<sup>91</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1952 - 1953, p. 8.

supervision and that many of the new acquisitions were incorporated “**in their particular section of the exhibition collection**”.<sup>92</sup> In other words, the old collection policy was still followed that objects were regarded as part of the show collection.

The very first thing that Coetzee did was to re-organize the displays. The wooden tops of the cases were replaced by glass to allow more light into the cases. An additional five desk-type cases were also donated by the Department of Commerce and Industry and this did a great deal to alleviate the space problem.<sup>93</sup> For the first time, visitors to the Museum could enjoy a variety of new displays because Coetzee was of the opinion that objects should be changed or rotated in order to display as large a selection as possible.<sup>94</sup> Temporary exhibitions reflected the new spirit that prevailed in the history division. One such exhibition was on the life of President T.F. Burgers to mark the occasion of the unveiling of his statue in Pretoria in October 1953. Then too, an exhibition entitled South Africa and the British Crown was staged to coincide with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.<sup>95</sup> Another was on the history of the House of Orange to celebrate the visit of Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands to South Africa, October 1954.<sup>96</sup> These displays were set up in the entrance hall of the New Museum where the Mapungubwe exhibition could still be seen.

Some archaeology and ethnology material on display in the entrance hall remained in the New Museum, but there were also new displays in the Old Museum. A special display of Kruger objects commemorated the transfer of the Kruger statue to Church Square, Pretoria, on 12 October 1954. A small display on the Dorsland trek was also arranged.<sup>97</sup> A new

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 1954 - 1955, p. 9; my bold.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 1953 - 1954, departmental report for division of history, p. 35.

<sup>94</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 18 TM1/62, letter Coetzee to A.E. Ferreira, dd 17 January 1962.

<sup>95</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1953 - 1954, p. 12 and departmental report for division of history, pp. 35 - 36.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 1954 - 1955, p. 13 and departmental report for history, p. 32.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., departmental report for history, p. 32.

display on the Mapungubwe collection<sup>98</sup> and some stone implements, was set up in the Old Museum.<sup>99</sup> The contents of no less than 27 cases were also replaced and rearranged and dresses were placed on dummies. The director was able to point out that the standard of arrangement and display of material compared favourably with the best in the country.<sup>100</sup>

In February 1954, a few months after Coetzee's appointment, FitzSimons wrote that the Museum reached the limit of its display space.<sup>101</sup> No material relating to the post-1914 period could be exhibited because there was simply no space,<sup>102</sup> nor could clothes worn during the 1938 Great Trek festivities, because they were not yet antiques – in the meantime they would be carefully preserved.<sup>103</sup>

The same was also true of the ethnology and archaeology exhibitions: the space available was so crowded that objects could not be displayed to their full advantage and those relating to indigenous communities were not even exhibited, to the disappointment of many visitors.<sup>104</sup> Only one room was permanently devoted to ethnology. The display cabinets were so high that it made the room dark. A row of cabinets in the middle of the room worsened the situation. Children shrank from walking through these exhibits. Exhibition space was so limited that the cabinets were crammed with objects described as uninteresting, mixed-up, unnatural and drab.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1962 - 1963, departmental report for ethnology and archaeology, p. 28. The final removal of the Mapungubwe material to the University of Pretoria was only completed in 1962.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 1954 - 1955, departmental report for archaeology and ethnology, p 31.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 9 and departmental report for history, p. 32.

<sup>101</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letter FitzSimons to W.J. de Kock, dd 18 February 1954.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., letter Coetzee to C. Brink, dd 15 July 1954.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., letter Coetzee to A. Meyer, dd 18 October 1954.

<sup>104</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1957 - 1958, departmental report for the cultural history division, p. 35.

<sup>105</sup> NCHMA, File ET1/60 Etnologiese Afdeling, Konsepverslag: Toestand in Museum, p. 2, n. d.

The lack of space for the show and study collections held the danger that donors would refuse to make donations to the Museum; this in turn, could lead to public dissatisfaction about conditions at the Old Museum.<sup>106</sup> By 1959 the problem of storage became so acute that “daar nie meer vir ‘n potlood plek is nie ... hier is nie meer die kleinste plekkie in die pakkamers nie ...” [There was not space even for a pencil ... there is not the smallest space in the storerooms].<sup>107</sup>

Changes were inevitable, because Coetzee felt that in a modern cultural museum the display principle is that cultural objects must be exhibited in the context of man’s existence and usability (Afrikaans: *lewens- en gebruikverband*). In other words, heritage objects must be used to rebuild the natural setting in which people lived in the past.<sup>108</sup> This sentiment was behind one of the display methods used by Coetzee in the Pretoria Centenary exhibition in 1955.

The history of Pretoria was depicted by means of a series of themes, such as religion, sport, and education, and a series of five dioramas representing Pretoria in 1855 as compared to a century later. Period rooms were created depicting the way of life in 1855 and 1895 (figures 10 and 11); there was also an outspan scene: Voortrekkers camping at the Fountains. The “natural” displays, which also had educational value, attracted the most attention. This was particularly so with school groups.

The moving force behind these exhibitions was Coetzee, who had been appointed as member of the sub-committee to handle the historical displays.<sup>109</sup> She spent almost seven months in setting up this exhibition, managing everything from the planning stage to its reconstruction in the New Museum. The exhibition was opened on 25 November 1955 by the

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 13 TM1/58, letter Coetzee to M.C.E. Horn, dd 20 October 1958.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., System1 No 14 TM1/59, letter Coetzee to C.W. Venter, dd 6 November 1959.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, file, Persoonlik 2, K. Roodt-Coetzee, Aantekeninge vir ‘n rede deur die Staatspresident, Dr N. Diederichs, ter geleentheid van die opening van die Pioniershuis van die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese en Opelugmuseum, 5 November 1975, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letter town clerk, Pretoria, to Coetzee, dd 26 April 1954.

Mayor of Pretoria, Councillor Hilgard Muller.<sup>110</sup>

The same period-room technique was used in the Voortrekker Monument Museum, showing how a kitchen, bedroom and sitting room (Afrikaans: *voorkamer*) of the time really looked. The so-called outspan was particularly successful. These true representations of the lifestyle of the past presented cultural history to the visitor in a lively, vivid and comprehensible manner.<sup>111</sup> Coetzee herself describes the use of rooms instead of display cupboards as unique.<sup>112</sup> The display method using period rooms also stimulated the need for the reconstruction of complete houses, as this kind of natural representation brought past lifestyles back to life. This may also have influenced the idea of an open-air museum in South Africa, where rooms in houses were to be recreated, positively.<sup>113</sup>

Although the Pretoria Centenary exhibition was planned and arranged by Coetzee in collaboration with the director of the Transvaal Museum, space was so limited at the Old Museum that the exhibition had to be held in the Hollandia Hall, Proes Street, Pretoria. It was only after the Centenary that the exhibition was re-erected in the Mammal Hall at the New Museum, but the camp scene, kitchen and living room could not be displayed. At the close of the exhibition, the cases and many of the contents were given to the Museum.<sup>114</sup> The display remained on show until 1964.

In fact, space originally intended for natural history at the New Museum had to be utilized for history displays, as the need for additional exhibition space by the cultural history division became pressing, despite the rearrangement and improvement of displays and new

---

<sup>110</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1955 - 1956, p. 13 and departmental report for history, p. 30.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., envelope Geskiedenis van NASKO- Museum, Die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese en Opelugmuseum: 'n historiese oorsig, p. 4.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letter Coetzee to Mrs Manie Maritz, dd 7 December 1954.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, envelope Geskiedenis van NASKO-Museum, Die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese en Opelugmuseum: 'n historiese oorsig, pp. 4 - 5.

<sup>114</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1955 - 1956, p. 8 and departmental report history, p. 31.

exhibitions at the Old Museum.<sup>115</sup> Another way of dealing with the lack of display space, was to change temporary exhibitions on a regular basis. They thus covered a variety of subjects and often related to day to day events. In this way the public's interest was retained. The director felt, however, that the amount of time and labour spent on displays hardly warranted the effort, because the congestion and lack of space in the Old Museum were so severe.<sup>116</sup>

The fact that diverse and dissimilar themes were addressed in the displays shows a striking contrast to the drab and stagnant displays during the previous period. At the New Museum, for example, four cases displaying the Smuts Collection,<sup>117</sup> paper money and "good-fors" from Republican days,<sup>118</sup> stone implements from a deposit at Wonderboom, early Chinese porcelain, medals and coins, a police ceramic badge and police uniform insignia and badges were all on display.<sup>119</sup> In 1960 a display on medals from the United Kingdom was mounted in the New Museum.

At the Old Museum an exhibition, called "From Cave to Compound", was opened on 24 May 1958 and ran for three months. Added interest was provided by African dances performed by a number of groups and a series of lectures. This was followed by a display on the British Settlers, to synchronise with Settlers' Day, celebrated on 1 September 1958.<sup>120</sup> A temporary display on the African as an artist (Afrikaans: *Die Bantoe as kunstenaar*) was also set up in 1959.<sup>121</sup> Later two exhibitions, one on African cultures in the past and present, and another on the ancient culture of Peru were put up.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 1960 - 1961, pp. 7 - 8.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 1959 - 1960, p. 8.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 1957 - 1958, p. 12.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 1958 - 1959, pp. 13 - 14.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., departmental report cultural history division, pp. 37 and 39.

<sup>121</sup> C.S. van der Waal, " Geskiedenis van die Volkekunde-Afdeling van die Nasko-Museum, Pretoria 1893 - 1977" (unpublished article), p. 19.

<sup>122</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1959 - 1960, p. 10.

True to her conviction that the Museum ought to be representative of South African leaders Coetzee set out to display their life and times. The Smuts Collection had been enlarged by the donation of Smuts objects by the family and it was envisaged to reconstruct the bedrooms of the General and Mrs Smuts from the house in Doornkloof (where the Smuts family lived) in the Museum.<sup>123</sup> Smuts's bedroom was rebuilt in the Old Museum.<sup>124</sup> This was the first reconstruction of a room at the Old Museum and was followed by Hertzog's study. An exhibition honouring the six prime ministers of the Union of South Africa was held at the Old Museum to coincide with the Union Festival in 1960.<sup>125</sup> Objects associated with Prime Minister J.G. Strijdom were also displayed.<sup>126</sup> An exhibition on addresses of honour to Hertzog was opened in November 1963.<sup>127</sup>

When the Union of South Africa became a Republic in 1961, a special display, called "The World Opinion and the South African Republic" (ZAR) was arranged. For the first time objects, presented by many countries to the Boers in homage during the Anglo-Boer War, were exhibited.<sup>128</sup> A small display was also arranged as token of sympathy with the death of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands.<sup>129</sup> With Coetzee's aim to raise the standard of cultural history material on display, special objects were collected, such as Cape silver and copper objects.<sup>130</sup> In a new exhibition of Cape silver and furniture, opened 6 November 1962, the pieces were arranged chronologically, representing Western cultural styles for the first time in South Africa.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> N a, Items of interest, *SAMAB*, 6(15), September 1958, p. 403.

<sup>124</sup> See also Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 6 December 1959.

<sup>125</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1960 -1961, p. 11.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., departmental report for cultural history, p. 33.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 1963 - 1964, departmental report cultural history section, p. 29.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 1961 - 1962, p. 32.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 1962 - 1963, departmental report for cultural history section, p. 24.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 1961 - 1962, departmental report cultural history, p. 31.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 1962 - 1963, departmental report for cultural history section, p. 23.

Exhibitions were also held at venues outside Pretoria, for example, the temporary exhibition, “From Cave to Compound”, was first shown in Johannesburg.<sup>132</sup> In co-operation with the Africana Museum in Johannesburg Kruger medals and medallions were put on an exhibition called “Commemorative Medals of the ZAR”.<sup>133</sup>

- New study collections, new storage methods

General storage conditions were so poor that Coetzee did not mince matters when she described the situation as follows:

By my aanstelling in 1953 was ek ontsteld oor die toestand van die pakkamers en die verwaarlosing waaraan die stukke blootgestel was. Waardevolle stukke is onherstelbaar beskadig deur rotte en deur motte, kewers en ander insekte; emmersvol oorblyfsels van vernietigde Bantoevoorwerpe het ek self met grawe opgeskep van die vloer van ‘n pakkamer en laat weggooi ... By kontrole met die katalogusse het dit geblyk dat belangrike stukke (o.a. ‘n Zeederberg-koets) eenvoudig uit die Museum verdwyn het. Blykbaar het sekere versamelaars vrye toegang tot die versameling gehad en daar is ook stukke uitgeleen wat nooit weer terug ontvang is nie. Enkele leenbewyse is nog in die Museum maar meestal is die leners oorlede en is dit onmoontlik om vandag te bepaal wat van die geleende voorwerpe geword het. So byvoorbeeld is die enigste outentieke Voortrekkerklere in 1933 aan Anton van Wouw uitgeleen en ek het vasgestel dat alles verbrand is.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 1958 - 1959, departmental report for cultural history division, p. 37.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., departmental report for numismatics and philately, p. 44.

<sup>134</sup> NCHMA, *Komitee van Onderzoek na openbare museums in Pretoria, 1960 - 1961*. Memoranda, K. Roodt-Coetzee, Memorandum oor die kultuurkundige afdeling van die Transvaal-Museum, pp. 2 - 3. [When I was appointed in 1953 I was dismayed at the condition of the storerooms and the neglect to which the objects were subjected. Valuable objects were irreparably damaged by rats, moths, beetles and other insects; I shovelled the remains of broken African objects from the floor of a storeroom into buckets and they were thrown away. While correlating the catalogues, it was apparent that important objects (amongst others a Zeederberg coach) had simply disappeared from the Museum. Apparently some collectors had free entry to the collections and certain objects that had been loaned out, had never been returned. There are still a few loan certificates in the Museum, but the lenders have since died and it is now impossible to ascertain the whereabouts of the objects. For example, the only original set of Voortrekker clothing was lent to Anton van Wouw, and I have learnt that everything has been burned. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)] According to a note made by Coetzee on accessioning a donation of medals, handed in at the Old Museum on 5 February 1945, Transvaal Museum, Acquisitions entry register, vol. 3, acquisition no. 3834, the original donation consisted of 23 objects (as stated on a label), but only 18 were later found in a package in an old cupboard: *Historiography Catalogue*, vol. 2, H.C. accession no. 5970. A similar note was made with regard to two signets. The donor called at the Museum and told Coetzee that she donated two signets, but only one was traced in the Old Museum, unmarked and uncatalogued: *ibid.*, vol. 3, H.C. accession no. 6692.

Immediately after her appointment, Coetzee worked through the storerooms at the Old Museum and the Kruger House. During her first month at the Old Museum, she sorted out ethnological objects in the display cabinets, a storeroom and a shed, and then disinfected and re-packed them. In a small storeroom, she went through all the disposable material and found some old swords between cupboard shelves and old frames. They were sorted, dusted and packed away.<sup>135</sup> Some objects were even found in the strong room at the New Museum.<sup>136</sup> Others were mixed up in storage and Chinese, Egyptian, Greek and Afrikaner objects were found among the ethnology objects under the display cabinets. These were all sorted and catalogued.<sup>137</sup>

Although credit goes to the director, FitzSimons, who initiated the efforts made by Schiel, his packaging system was unacceptable. In one instance a variety of objects (including a christening robe, a ploughshare, a photograph and a document) were all put away together in one parcel, with no wrapping material. The result was that documents were creased and photographs scratched.<sup>138</sup> Heavy metal and stone objects were also found placed on top of fragile bead, bone and ivory objects, which meant that most of the smaller items had been broken.<sup>139</sup> Many pots had also been shattered.<sup>140</sup>

A lot of time was spent in the storerooms; this was a continuous process that involved the sorting out of the bulk of the collection, putting into practice a more scientific method of packing than the one used previously.<sup>141</sup> Objects had to be repacked into new cartons and

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Monthly reports, Division of History (K. Roodt-Coetzee) April 1953 - March 1954, monthly report, 28 September 1953.

<sup>136</sup> For example, Historiography Catalogue, vol. 2, H.C. accession nos. 5858, 5866, 5870 - 5877, 5884 - 5885, 5895.

<sup>137</sup> NCHMA, Monthly reports, Division of History (K. Roodt-Coetzee) April 1953 - March 1954, monthly report, 26 October 1953.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly report April 1955.

<sup>139</sup> NCHMA, File ET1/60 Etnlogiese Afdeling, Konsepverslag: Toestand in Museum, p. 2, n.d.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>141</sup> The collection was sorted out into parcels by Schiel. Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1954 - 1955, departmental report for history, p. 32.

numbered according to a system designed for easy access.<sup>142</sup> Objects were also moved from storage in unsuitable rooms to more adequate storage areas with proper shelving.<sup>143</sup> In 1955 for example, the archaeology and ethnology material, which had at first been stored in two rooms upstairs, was transferred to the cellar, where suitable shelving had been erected so that the objects could be arranged in a systematic manner.<sup>144</sup> By 1963 the archaeological material was still jumbled and it was difficult to locate objects in the Leith Collection. Between 1962 and 1966 the objects were classified according to ethnic affiliation (Afrikaans: *stamverband*).<sup>145</sup> All staff members, whether typist or museum assistant, had to help with the work in the storerooms and in almost every monthly report some facet of this work was recorded. For example, in March 1962 rifles were removed from the cellar, the shelves taken out and rebuilt in the strongroom; the rifles were then numbered and replaced on the shelves.<sup>146</sup>

Although some cardboard boxes were received from the director, finding suitable and sufficient boxes was a problem. Boxes were solicited from businesses, such as the outfitters Grant Mackenzie in Pretoria. Items that were packed in boxes included documents, Bibles, religious literature, utensils, and prisoner-of-war objects.<sup>147</sup> Paper and cotton waste was used as packaging material,<sup>148</sup> and tissue paper was placed between the pages of photo albums.<sup>149</sup> The packaging was improved as an ongoing process and the repackaging of various collections was recorded in the monthly reports. The toys, for example, were packed

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 1955 - 1956, departmental report cultural history, p. 32; NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports March 1955 and October 1958.

<sup>143</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report 1955 - 1956, departmental report for archaeology and ethnology, p. 30; NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly report, June 1955.

<sup>144</sup> C.S. van der Waal, "Gesiedenis van die Volkekunde-Afdeling van die Nasko- Museum, Pretoria 1893 - 1977" (unpublished article), p. 10.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly report March 1962.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., April 1955 and January 1961.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., January 1956.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., February 1956.

in new boxes and the new storage place added to the card index.<sup>150</sup> The philately albums were shown to the Board of Trustees, who congratulated the curator on the neat appearance and good condition of the collection.<sup>151</sup> Valuable objects such as paintings and jewellery, remained in storage in the safe at the Transvaal Museum until 1963.<sup>152</sup>

Inadequate storage space continued to be a problem although two small exhibition halls were added to the Old Museum (at the NE and NW corners, where there were small yards.)<sup>153</sup> The lack of storage space was such an obstacle that the Museum could soon find itself unable to receive large items, such as old vehicles and antique furniture.<sup>154</sup> One solution was to find suitable storage outside the Museum. Various options were considered, such as the use of the amphitheatre at the Voortrekker Monument, or even placing an advertisement in a local newspaper for the hire of a suitable building.<sup>155</sup> For the first time in the history of the Museum two storerooms were hired in 1961 outside the precincts of the Museum.<sup>156</sup> Although this provided some storage relief, it could only be regarded as a temporary solution. It was also very inconvenient, because supervision and accessibility were difficult.<sup>157</sup> This resulted in the rearrangement of the storerooms at the Old Museum, such as the re-packing of the textiles, and created more storage space, but it entailed a great deal of moving of objects from one place to another. Recording the movement of objects is one of the basic principles of modern collections management, but it is unclear whether all moves were adequately documented in the 1960s.

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., March 1962.

<sup>151</sup> Transvaal Museum Board of Trustees minutes, meeting 14 August 1959.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 25 November 1963.

<sup>153</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1957 - 1958, p. 8.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., departmental report cultural history division, p. 35.

<sup>155</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meetings 2 April, 20 May, 14 October and 24 November 1958.

<sup>156</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1961 - 1962, departmental report for Old Museum, p. 32.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 1961 - 1962, p. 7.

Other makeshift measures were attempted, and often these caused even more problems. Shelves erected in the ladies cloakroom caused some dissatisfaction and a rack that had been installed in the cellar, subsequently collapsed.<sup>158</sup> Although new offices, store and workrooms built on the eastern side of the Old Museum provided much needed additional accommodation in 1960, the need for functional and sufficient housing persisted.<sup>159</sup> The storage problem remained acute until 2002. It is appropriate to record that the National Cultural History Museum eventually moved to its new premises (the old Mint building in Visagie Street, Pretoria) in 2000 and the unpacking and re-arrangement of the collection in the new functional storerooms – to date probably the best in Africa – started in June 2002.<sup>160</sup>

## 2. DOCUMENTATION FRAMEWORK

During the 1950s there were few fully-fledged cultural history museums in South Africa with qualified staff who could discuss museological matters such as documentation and conservation. The cultural history division of the Transvaal Museum can be regarded as one of the pioneers in the South African cultural history museum scene and many innovative steps in collections management had to be taken by Coetzee. One of the aims of Coetzee's overseas visit in 1958 was to glean information on the documentation systems used, but she reported that very little had been published in this regard, that it was a relatively new science and that it appeared to her that every museum insisted on its own little scheme.<sup>161</sup>

### **Management and resources**

#### Responsibility and coordination of documentation

Before starting with the documentation Coetzee made it a priority to work through the

---

<sup>158</sup> NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports July and November 1958.

<sup>159</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1960 - 1961, departmental report cultural history, p. 31.

<sup>160</sup> G. Balkwill, "40 Years in the wilderness - the promised land at last (almost)", pp. 7 and 15, paper delivered at the SAMA conference, Pretoria, 5 June 2003.

<sup>161</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 13 TM1/58, letter Coetzee to E. Holm, dd 2 October 1958.

existing catalogues, correspondence files and acquisitions registers.<sup>162</sup> In the first years Coetzee was solely responsible for documentation. There was no other member of staff who could help her because the first museum-assistant for history was only appointed in 1955.

The staff also had to be trained in all aspects of the management of cultural history collections, as there was no formal training taught at any South African institution. At this stage training envisaged by SAMA was the diploma and technical certificate of the British Museums Association.<sup>163</sup> The curriculum of the British diploma comprised three sections. The administrative section included registration and cataloguing and the second section conservation methods. The third section dealt with advanced work on the first two sections, but with special reference to one or more of the following branches of museum work: archaeology, history, general natural history, botany, geology, zoology, industrial technology or another approved academic subject.<sup>164</sup> Although this diploma was highly regarded, it did not cover special local requirements; in particular it did not cater specifically for the cultural history collections that Coetzee had in mind. The continuous training of her own staff in documentation matters, which she later gave to staff members of other museums, had to be presented, for the most part, by Coetzee herself.

#### Documentation policy and priorities

There was no written documentation policy, but clear principles were adhered to. Information about the objects was considered of prime importance as it gave meaning to these objects.<sup>165</sup> Whenever a new donation was given to the Museum, the donor was asked to supply detailed information. The associated information was one of the most important aspects of the collecting undertaken by Coetzee, specifically with regard to objects for the cultural history division. Although she was not officially attached to the Museum in the

---

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., Monthly reports, division of history (K Roodt-Coetzee) April 1953 - March 1954, 28 September 1953, 26 October 1953 and 25 March 1954.

<sup>163</sup> C.K. Brain and M.C. Erasmus, *The making of the museum professions in Southern Africa*, p. 27.

<sup>164</sup> N a, The diploma of the South African Museums Association, *SAMAB*, 7(6), September 1960, p. 139.

<sup>165</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letter Coetzee to K.J.H. Behrens, dd 9 February 1954.

early fifties, the basic principles of collections management were already clear in her letters. For example, she requested detailed information about the objects, such as the particulars of the owner and the place and date of manufacture.<sup>166</sup> Within three weeks of her appointment, she told a donor that it was of the utmost importance to the Museum that the history of the object be accurate. She asked how old the object was, who the first owner was, where this person lived, and other details.<sup>167</sup> The following information was solicited about a wedding dress worn at a marriage that took place in the concentration camp in Volksrust after the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging:

Graag sal ons soveel moontlik inligting saam met die rok wil ontvang soos name van u ouers, datum van die troue, was u vader ook in die kamp of het hy van buite af ingekom, was daar 'n sluier by die rok, hoe het die hele seremonie plaasgevind en alles wat sy u daarvan vertel het. Weet u waar sy die materiaal vandaan gekry het en weet u wie die rok vir haar gemaak het? Moontlik het u nog 'n foto van u moeder of van die kamp.<sup>168</sup>

The necessity for clear and unambiguous documentation was brought home when Coetzee encountered many objects at Hartenbos with no particulars at all. There were also many pieces of paper with information, but those had become detached from the objects.<sup>169</sup> And of course, at the Old Museum she also discovered many objects about which the information had been lost. Although she went through old correspondence files to look for this information,<sup>170</sup> she often wrote that she could find no particulars.<sup>171</sup> For this reason information applicable to an object was meticulously written down and incorporated in the catalogue. For example:

---

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 6 TM1/52 - TM1/53, letter chairperson of the historical display committee to J.H. Muller, n.d.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., letter Coetzee to L. Bosch, dd 18 September 1953.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., letter Coetzee to A. van Stryp, dd 6 October 1953. [We would like to receive as much information about the dress as possible, such as the names of your parents, the wedding date, whether your father was in the camp, or whether he was allowed to come into the camp, whether the dress had a veil, where the ceremony took place, and everything she told you about it. Do you know where she obtained the material and who made the dress for her? Perhaps you still have a photograph of your mother or of the camp. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 12 TM1/57, letter Coetzee to L. Duvenhage, dd 1 October 1957.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports for January - February - March 1956.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 13 TM1/58, note with regard to Historiography Catalogue, vol. 2, H.C. accession no. 5401.

Gestruk [ekstrak?] van die kliphoutboombas is met die hand aan die nerfkant gesmeer en daarom is die wol nie verkleur nie. Taaibosbas gee 'n ligter kleur.<sup>172</sup>

Coetzee followed a policy of collecting information even if she did not secure any objects. She set out deliberately to visit old people to obtain information about the past and the traditional Boer way of life. For example, house building methods, the dressing of leather, pastimes and clothing.<sup>173</sup> She was interested in furniture making, wine pressing, teaching methods and old folktales that were told and retold from one generation to another.<sup>174</sup> The memories of elderly people were written down so as to preserve this evidence for posterity. All the things elderly people had heard from their parents or others had thus far not been written down in history books, but very often this evidence gave one a better perspective on the past (figure 19).<sup>175</sup>

In many cases this kind of information was difficult to obtain and should have been written down years ago.<sup>176</sup> On the other hand, Coetzee was aware that verbal information was not necessarily so accurate and reliable.<sup>177</sup> True particulars of the object had to be noted; not stories or fantasies; in other words, the history as told by the donor had to be verified carefully.<sup>178</sup> This was particularly so in the case of family traditions. A shawl, for example, allegedly 300 years old, was brought from Germany by an old lady, but a photograph showed the lady wearing clothes that dated to about 1845. Coetzee came to the conclusion that the shawl could not possibly have been brought from Germany 300 years ago.<sup>179</sup> In the

---

<sup>172</sup> Historiography Catalogue, vol. 5, H.C. accession no. 7256. [Extract of the bark of the rockwood tree was spread on the hair side, and for this reason the wool did not become discoloured. The bark of the "taaibos" gave a lighter colour. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

<sup>173</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1954 - 1955, departmental report cultural history, p. 33.

<sup>174</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 12 TM1/57, letter Coetzee to A. van der Spuy, dd 1 October 1957.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 8 TM1/54, letter Coetzee to M. Postma, dd 19 Oktober 1954.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 11 TM1/56, letter Coetzee to W.C. Lambrechts-de Villiers, dd 16 February 1956.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 2 TM1/57, letter Coetzee to H.A. van Velden, dd 1 Oktober 1957.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 14 TM1/59, letter Coetzee to C.J. Joubert, dd 25 November 1959.

<sup>179</sup> Historiography Catalogue, vol. 5, H.C. accession no. 7230.

vertelling deur Mr. J.J. Scheepers, Paul Krugerstr. 905,  
Mayville : —

Mr. Scheepers het in Mr. J. A. Strauss van  
Lute, S.-Rhodesie ontmoet wat vertel<sup>ek</sup> dat  
hy in die o. westelike deel van Portuges-Oos-  
Afrika op 'n opfartog was en dat hy daar  
met 'n Kafferstam in aanraking gekom  
het wat hom vertel het dat hulle  
daarlangs op waens afgekom het wat  
vlate onder bome gestaan het en op die  
tang van die wa het 'n hulle in boek  
geseu. Die ou voorvaders het hulle  
vertel van die mense wat daar kom  
staan het met hulle waens en toe  
van daar daar omgehou het. Hulle  
het die water wat in die uitge-  
holde boomstamme gestaan het ge-  
bruik omdat dit in daardie steek  
van min reën. Die waens het op 'n sandhol onder  
Mr. Strauss staan in 'n in die waaier  
van bogenoemde me.

Mr. Strauss was vroeër offisiële  
jagter van die Portugese regering.  
saam met 'n meneer Ingers.

Mr. Strauss was vandag self hier, 29/10/53.  
Hulle was in 'n boom naby Maienga toe die kaffer  
dit aan hom vertel het, en in 'n suid-oostelike  
rigting gewys het. Hy skat dit moes in die  
omgewing van Makurija gewees het.

Figure 19

Narrative recorded by Kotie Roodt-Coetzee

(NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives)

case of a tobacco carver, she noted in the catalogue that, according to the donor, the carver had been made in c. 1760, but that it was not as old as this.<sup>180</sup>

The value of family histories, genealogical information, private documents, letters and books should, according to Coetzee, never be underestimated as they often contained particulars that could not be obtained elsewhere.<sup>181</sup>

Coetzee followed every possible lead to collect objects and information. Where there was no information about objects, she wrote to the family of the donor (even if the donation had been made many years previously), asking pertinent questions about the objects.<sup>182</sup> She would also write to a person after reading an article that appeared in a newspaper,<sup>183</sup> or contact the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) about talks relevant to the Museum, and ask experts for their advice.<sup>184</sup> Departments at the University of Pretoria were also approached for information. For example, the Engineering Faculty was asked to identify metals that looked similar, and the Biology Department was given samples of bamboo, cane and various kinds of reed.<sup>185</sup> The co-operation of the forestry research section of the Forestry Department was asked for the microscopic analysis of samples of wood.<sup>186</sup> The South African Police (SAP) was on occasion requested to trace a person who Coetzee had heard owned an antique, in the hope that he might be prepared to donate it to the Museum.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., No. 7356.

<sup>181</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 9 TM1/55 Jan - Sept, letter Coetzee to A.S. Kleijnhans, dd 3 August 1955.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 8 TM 1/54, letter Coetzee to the family A. van der Westhuizen, dd 6 January 1954.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 11 TM1/56, letter Coetzee to P. Prinsloo, dd 17 May 1956.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 9 TM1/55 Jan - Sept, letter Coetzee to L. Evans, dd 9 March 1955.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports, August 1958 and December 1960.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., March 1963.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 18 TM1/62, letter Coetzee to the Sergeant-in-charge, Nylstroom, dd 21 June 1962.

## Documentation system

### Design of documentation system

The new documentation system Coetzee implemented in the cultural history division at the Old Museum comprised classification and cataloguing. At the time the Shaw system was already in use in the anthropology collection.

The purpose of classification was to establish and document information on the object with regard to its country of origin, date of manufacture or make, and material used. The construction and manufacturing techniques used to produce the object and its condition, peculiarities, characteristics or deviations were also recorded. Also significant was the age of the object, its history and details of the donor and family. Where, when and how the object had been collected were also recorded.<sup>188</sup> In the process the objects had to be clearly identified and unambiguously named. This eventually led to the use of a system of catchwords in the catalogue and the card catalogue (see below).

Cataloguing implies two basic processes:

- each object is accessioned in a catalogue according to the classification with its own number, and
- an object record (Afrikaans: *stamkaart*) on a card is made for an object to record its basic details. Additional entries are also made on separate cards (Afrikaans: *newe inskrywings/ verwysingskaarte / indekskaarte*).<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 16 TM1/61 Jan - Jun., "Elementêre reëls in verband met museumorganisasie" (unpublished procedure), p. 1, n. d.; System 1 No 15 TM1/60, letter Coetzee to the Town Council of Ermelo, dd 12 December 1960.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

The design and development of the card catalogue as a cultural history museum information retrieval system, as implemented by Coetzee, can be largely ascribed to the assistance from her husband, Prof. P.C. Coetzee,<sup>190</sup> who as trained librarian was familiar with the theory and practical application of various classification and information retrieval systems used in libraries.

Two articles<sup>191</sup> bear witness to Prof. Coetzee's<sup>192</sup> involvement with museum practice. The article *Registreermetodes in die museum* gives a clear analysis of the objections to the acquisitions register as a retrieval tool. He advocates the use of an object record as the first step in the accessioning of museum objects. He was of the opinion that the catalogue was no longer the most important record in the museum – the card catalogue in a cabinet with object entries was of more significance.<sup>193</sup> He suggested that a record be made in the form of a loose card and that this should be compiled as soon as possible after arrival of the object in the museum. All the routine activities relating to the objects in the museum such as cleaning, restoration, loans and other movements should be added to the card; it forms the basis for all additional entries and the information on the card could even be used for display labels (figure 20).

This method was used in the Old Museum in a slightly revised form. The acquisitions register was used progressively less and was gradually phased out. The object records did not replace the catalogue, which was probably used merely as a numerical index. They

---

<sup>190</sup> Petrus Carolus Coetzee (1905 - 1987) worked at the University of Pretoria from 1922, except for a short period at the State Archives. He became librarian at the University in 1937 and in 1959 was the first head of the Department of Library Science. From 1963 to 1971, when he went on pension, he was full-time professor. He did pioneering work on South African libraries. An honorary doctorate was awarded to him by the University of South Africa in 1982. Coetzee married Kotie Roodt in 1934. F.J. Du Toit Spies and D.H. Heydenrych (comps.), *Ad Destinatum II 1960 - 1982 'n Geskiedenis van die Universiteit van Pretoria*, pp. 41 - 42; J.S. Bergh, O.J.O. Feirreira, F. Pretorius, J.E.H. Grobler & W.A. Stals (eds), *Ad Destinatum III 1983 - 1992 'n Geskiedenis van die Universiteit van Pretoria*, p. 423.

<sup>191</sup> NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, file Kursus in museumwese, opsomming van lesings, P.C. Coetzee, "Die museumkatalogus faseanalities beskou" and "Registreermetodes in die museum" (unpublished articles).

<sup>192</sup> As Kotie Roodt-Coetzee is referred to as Coetzee in this study, Prof. P.C. Coetzee is referred to as Prof. Coetzee.

<sup>193</sup> NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, file Kursus in museumwese, opsomming van lesings, P.C. Coetzee, "Registreermetodes in die museum" (unpublished article), p. 5.

formed the basis of an alphabetical object card catalogue, using catchwords, headings or approved standard terms (Afrikaans: *trefwoorde/ rangwoorde*). The object records were also supplemented by added entries.

RANGNOMMER OF -WOORD			
HERKOMS	DATUM VAN ONTVANGS	INVENTARIS- NOMMER	PLEK VAN BERGING
BESKRYWING			
LITERATUUR			
GESKIEDENIS			
BEHANDELING			
LEIDRAAD			

**Figure 20**

Object record as proposed by Prof. P.C. Coetzee

(P.C. Coetzee, "Registreermetodes in die museum" (unpublished article))

At the time there was no list of recognized standard terms or catchwords to expedite the recording of information in a controlled manner. The use of an established hierarchy of catchwords had already been addressed by Prof. Coetzee,<sup>194</sup> and this matter also occupied Coetzee's attention. The struggle to devise a workable solution is clearly indicated by the handwritten alterations and deletions on many of the catalogue cards and in the catalogues.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> In 1973 the first list of standard terms or catch words for a cultural history museum was published in Afrikaans by the National Cultural History and Open Air Museum: L. Slabbert, *Trefwoorde vir kultuurhistoriese voorwerpe*.

As far as can be ascertained, Coetzee did not use a standard cataloguing or classification form, nor did she use a loose card, but notes were found which she must have used to record the initial information. Thereafter the formal classification apparently took place and particulars were written down in the catalogue. In many instances these were long and detailed and even today constitute the basic information about the object in the Museum's documentation system, because the card catalogue was not maintained as computerization took place. Labels for display purposes were produced according to the information in the catalogue.<sup>196</sup>

- Classification

Coetzee regarded the classification of the collection as the starting point of the documentation process. As early as 1940 she wrote that the most important task would be the scientific classification of all the material.<sup>197</sup> At first her primary concern was to classify the objects in storage, because, as she pointed out, there was no system in the packaging. Before her actual appointment at the Transvaal Museum, she had already begun with the classification of the historical objects in the cellar of the Old Museum while searching for objects to use in the Van Riebeeck display. This was, however, "liefdeswerk wat ons in ons spaartydjies doen en daarmee kom 'n mens nie ver nie".<sup>198</sup> [A labour of love, done in little scraps of spare time; in this way very little progress can be made.] In this sense the term "classification" can be associated with its usual meaning, namely the arrangement together of similar types of objects, separating them from dissimilar ones.

In 1953 she set out to arrange similar objects together, such as photographs, costumes, military uniforms according to rank and also helmets, shoes, badges, caps and sabretaches. Other categories were documents, Bibles, religious literature, basket work and skins,

---

<sup>196</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 14 TM1/59, letter Coetzee to C.J. Joubert, dd 25 November 1959.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, file Briewe A.T.K.V. - Museum, letter Coetzee to D. Mostert, dd 24 February 1940.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 6 TM1/52 - 1/53, letter Coetzee to D. Heller, dd 15 April 1952.

stamps, medals and matrices.<sup>199</sup> Ethnological objects were separated from archaeological objects<sup>200</sup> and all the objects in the Kruger section were sorted and packed separately, for example books, tokens of honour and personal effects.<sup>201</sup> The coin collection was kept at the New Museum in a safe.<sup>202</sup> The coins were also re-arranged in systematic order<sup>203</sup> and mounted in special albums. Because the objects in the storeroom were organized, they were now far more readily accessible to users (the museum staff, the public and other interested parties such as auditors) than had previously been the case.

Coetzee also used the term classification in a different sense, namely that each object had to be specified according to set requirements. The entries in the catalogue had to conform with her basic rules for classification.<sup>204</sup> A typical example is as follows (classification requirements given in italics after the relevant particulars):

Historiography Catalogue, vol. 5, H.C. accession no.7167

BANKIE (*catchword*) 1750 (*the date of manufacture or make*)

Kaaps; (*country of origin*) stinkhout; (*material*) tweesitplek; armleunings; rugleuning het paneel vertikaal met gekartelde rand en blommotief op elk uitgesny; bokant die paneel op die horisontale, gekartelde hout is ook 'n blommetjiepatroon uitgesny; beide het 'n agtergrond wat gestippel is soos in die midde van die 18de eeu gebruiklik was; 3 pote, gewelfen bal en klou voor; agter is die pote regaf; fyn rottangmat; mat is voor en aan die kante gewelf; tipe meubel en styl is tipies van ca. 1750, maar die reguit lyne in die leuning is nie heeltemal getrou aan daardie styl nie. As verskoning kan aangevoer word dat dit nie 'n hofmeubelstuk is nie maar provinsiaal en boonop koloniaal (*peculiarities characteristics or deviations*).

---

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports January to April 1955 and December 1958.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., June 1955.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., April to May 1955.

<sup>202</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 29 July 1955.

<sup>203</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1955 - 1956, departmental report for numismatics and philately, p. 34.

<sup>204</sup> For classification requirements see p. 198 of this research.

Tegniek: Handgemaak; nie besonder fyn afgewerk nie  
(*construction or manufacturing techniques*).

Mate: hoogte van grond tot bo by leuning: 37"

Lengte van mat: 46"

Hoogte van mat: 17  $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Wydte van mat: 19  $\frac{1}{2}$ "

Gesk.: Uit die versameling van Mev. Ds. Elsie van Broekhuysen, (kleindogter van Pres. Kruger,) geb. Eloff, dogter F.C. Eloff. Sy het dit êrens in die Boland gekoop (*history of the object and/or the donor and family*).

Gekoop vir £33 van Ds. van Broekhuysen se dogter, Mev. Elsie van Huyssteen, Smithstraat 176, Muckleneuk, Pta.

Julie 1960 (*donor or manner of collecting and date of collecting*).<sup>205</sup>

One of the most important aspects of documentation is the allocation of a catchword and the formation of a hierarchy of retrieval terms. This has a bearing on both the storage of objects and the compilation of the card catalogue. In the catalogues problems experienced can be seen clearly. For example, should both general and specific terms be used, and in which way should they be used? In many cases an additional term, either general or specific, was added at a later stage, for example:

---

<sup>205</sup> The surname of the family is spelled incorrectly in the catalogue; the correct spelling is Van Broekhuizen. [SETTEE 1750  
Cape; stinkwood, two seater, arm rests, back with vertical panels with curved edges and a flower motif carved on each; above the panel on the horizontal curved wood there is also a carved flower pattern; both with a pitted background, as was usual in die middle of the 18th century; 3 legs, in front cabriole legs with ball and claw feet, at the back straight legs; fine cane seating, front and sides shaped; this type of furniture and style is typical of ca. 1750, but the straight lines at the back are not precisely true to that style. The fact that this is not a court piece, but a provincial, and more to the point, a colonial piece of furniture, may serve as an excuse.  
Technique: Handmade; not finished very expertly  
Dimensions: height from ground to arms: 37"  
Length of seating: 46"  
Height of seating: 17  $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
Width of seating: 19  $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
History: From the collection of Mrs the Rev. Elsie van Broekhuysen (granddaughter of President Kruger), born Eloff, daughter of F.C. Eloff. She purchased it somewhere in the Boland.  
Bought for £33 from the daughter of the Rev. van Broekhuysen, Mrs Elsie van Huyssteen, 176 Smith Street, Muckleneuk, Pta.  
July 1960. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

- LYFIE (H.C. accession no. 6648/1)  
Rokslyfie  
Vrouelyfie  
Deel van 'n rok  
[Dress, dress bodice, woman's bodice, part of a dress]
- UNIFORM (H.C. accession no. 6874/3)  
Oorlogsdrag of  
Velddrag  
[Uniform, war dress or field dress]
- ROKKIE (H.C. accession no. 6940)  
Doprokkie  
Onderrokkie  
Babarokkie  
[Small dress, christening robe, underdress, baby dress]
- RING (H.C. accession no. 6908/3)  
Vingerring  
[Ring, finger ring]

One of the key premises of collecting as envisaged by Coetzee, was that objects in a cultural history museum should be regarded as culture documents that conveyed a state of mind (Afrikaans: *draers van 'n geestesgesteldheid*). To portray this, she also made use of catchwords, indicating clearly the origin of the object. For example, the catchword Boer made (Afrikaans: *Boeremaak*) was provided and specific events were added, such as objects made by Boer prisoners of war. In other cases the country of origin was indicated (table 5).

TABLE 5

**Examples of catchwords used in the Historiography Catalogue**

<u>H.C. ACCESSION NO.</u>	<u>CATCHWORDS</u>
6429/1	BATAAFSE SILWER [Batavian silver]
6509	PEN Engels - Suid-Afrika [Pen English - South Africa]
6802/4	VURK SILWER, KAAPS [Fork Silver, Cape] Vurk, eetvurk Suid-Afrikaans Kaaps, silwer [Fork, dinner fork, South African, Cape, silver]
6978/20	BORSSPELD Boerekrygsgevangenewerk [Brooch, Boer prisoner-of-war work]
6914/52	SAKOORLOSIE Switsers [Pocket watch, Swiss]
7737	ROK trourok [Dress, wedding dress] Suid-Afrikaans, Boeremaak [South African, Boer made]
7782	SLOPIE Suid-Afrikaans, Boeremaak (Kaaps) [Pillow case, small, South African, Boer made, Cape]

When she lacked the necessary expertise, Coetzee did not hesitate to ask a knowledgeable person for help. She did so with the classification of a donation of Egyptian objects by requesting the help of Prof. A. van Selms.<sup>206</sup> She also asked J.F. Eloff to help with the classification of ethnology objects.<sup>207</sup> Prof. K.D. Whyte of the Classics Department of Natal University spent two days examining and re-cataloguing the Roman coins.<sup>208</sup>

During Coetzee's visit to Europe in 1959 she made an intensive study of the arts and crafts of ordinary people and those produced by the higher cultural levels. Her investigations were in those countries from which South Africans were derived, in the hope of tracing some relationships between the articles in use in Europe from about 1550 and those made in South Africa in various periods. She also made a study of the methods and tools used in wood, pewter and metal work, glass, pottery, leather and building structures. She did this in order to improve her classification of South African articles.<sup>209</sup>

- Cataloguing

The backlog in documentation was detrimental to the efficient retrieval of information about an object and the object itself. The fact that the staff had to take many hours or even days to trace an object, and the necessity of compiling a detailed index to facilitate this process,<sup>210</sup> was seen as reason enough to increase the number of staff members. This was repeatedly mentioned in the minutes and reports,<sup>211</sup> such as the following:

During the past year it became very apparent that activities at the Old Museum, Kruger House and the Voortrekker Museum could not be satisfactorily carried out by one person, especially in view of the fact that the cataloguing of material, received during the past fifty years, had to be put on a sound basis. As a result an assistant was appointed towards

---

<sup>206</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1957 - 1958, departmental report for cultural history division, p. 34.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 1959 - 1960, departmental report for numismatics and philately, p. 42.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 1959 - 1960, departmental report cultural history, p. 34.

<sup>210</sup> The card index contained the numbers of the "packs," so that an object could be located easily.

<sup>211</sup> NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly report, September 1958; Sub-committee minutes, meeting 6 February 1959.

the end of the year to type cards for a detailed index catalogue, which is now being prepared. Some 3 500 preliminary entries have already been prepared for typing and inclusion in the permanent card-index. The daily routine of work seeking out antiques, cataloguing, numbering and setting out these items on display has occupied so much time that there has been no opportunity for research, publication or for work on the backlog of cataloguing. With the appointment of an assistant, however, cataloguing can now be taken in hand more actively.<sup>212</sup>

Although an assistant was appointed in 1955,<sup>213</sup> cataloguing accumulated, because it became virtually impossible to complete the documentation that was in arrears while at the same time keeping up with the documentation of new acquisitions. There was not only a backlog in the history collection, but also in the archaeology and ethnology collections, the Kruger House and the Voortrekker Monument Museum. More staff became necessary, and the Department of Education, Arts and Science was repeatedly requested to appoint additional staff members.<sup>214</sup> The lack of staff and the difficulties this created was regarded as a strong motivation for the separation of the cultural history division. The Sub-committee agreed that Van der Westhuysen's proposal, seconded by Behrens, that the cultural history division be split off from the Transvaal Museum to form a separate institution, should be seriously considered.<sup>215</sup>

Although the philately collection was not catalogued (each individual stamp had not been given an accession number and entered into a catalogue), the collection was brought up-to-date by adding historical notes and annotations that involved research.<sup>216</sup> In addition to accessioning cultural history objects, work on the card index was ongoing and significant progress was reported on the compilation of the index.

---

<sup>212</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1954 - 1955, departmental report history, p. 32.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>214</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 6 June 1956.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 10 August 1956.

<sup>216</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1954 - 1955, departmental report for numismatics and philately, p. 36.

Subject, donor, period, personal and regional cards were now typed. Depending on the work load, some progress was made on the backlog of objects that had been received previously.<sup>217</sup> In the period from 1957 to 1958, for example, an additional 1 545 cards were typed, catching up some of the backlog.<sup>218</sup> At other times very little progress was made.<sup>219</sup> The work was all the more time-consuming because the objects were illustrated on the cards with hand-drawn pencil sketches (figures 63 and 64).<sup>220</sup> The typing had to be done by a trained person, but the staff was simply insufficient, trained or otherwise. When the arrangement, cataloguing and indexing of the Kruger Collection was envisaged the aid of a student who knew something about cataloguing was sought.<sup>221</sup> Despite the fact that the cards were typed by the student,<sup>222</sup> the system could not be fully implemented due to the lack of staff.<sup>223</sup>

Nevertheless every effort was made to keep up with new accessions and in the annual report for 1959 -1960 it was reported that no fewer than 2 131 cards were typed to achieve this goal.<sup>224</sup> With all the new donations the same procedure was followed, namely the objects were catalogued, marked with the accession number and either placed safely in the store or on exhibition.<sup>225</sup> The cataloguing was completed by making index cards for the card catalogue (see table 6).

---

<sup>217</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1956 - 1957, p. 36.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 1957 - 1958, departmental report history, p. 38.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 1958 - 1959, p. 38.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 1955 - 1956, p. 31; 1958 - 1959, p. 39.

<sup>221</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 12 TM1/57, letter Coetzee to Prof. A.N. Pelzer, dd 3 October 1957.

<sup>222</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1957 - 1958, departmental report for the cultural history division, p. 39.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 1961- 1962, departmental report cultural history, p. 33.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 1959 - 1960, p. 36.

<sup>225</sup> See for example, Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1954 - 1955, departmental report history, p. 34; NCHMA, System1 No 11 TM1/56, letter Coetzee to R. Breed, dd 7 September 1956.

It was only in the early 1960s that photographs of new acquisitions were taken to replace the hand-drawn sketches on the index cards; this saved a great deal of time and gave a neater appearance. The first step was taken by the ethnology department.<sup>226</sup> This department sorted the index cards alphabetically according ethnic groups rather than objects.<sup>227</sup> Photographs for the index cards were even taken while on field trips. This proved to be particularly important for certain structures and big objects that could not be removed.<sup>228</sup> A new card system was designed for photographs and the new registration began in July 1958.<sup>229</sup>

TABLE 6  
**Rate of indexing 1953 - 1964**  
(According to annual reports)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NEW ACCESSIONS</u>	<u>CARD INDEX</u> <u>New Acquisitions</u>	<u>CARD INDEX</u> <u>Arrears</u>
1953 - 1954	1 430		
1954 - 1955	1 259	3 500	
1955 - 1956	871	2 240	
1956 - 1957	915	730	4 378
1957 - 1958	668	2 255	1 545
1958 - 1959	1 415	1 800	
1959 - 1960	1 041	2 131	
1960 - 1961	No information		
1961 - 1962	900	1 867	

<sup>226</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1960 - 1961, departmental report for ethnology and archaeology, p. 35.

<sup>227</sup> NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly report, March 1958.

<sup>228</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1962 - 1963, departmental report for ethnology and archaeology, p. 28.

<sup>229</sup> NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports, January 1957 and July 1958.

1962 - 1963	1 475	1 489	
1963 - 1964		700	

By 1961 it was reported that there were still hundreds of objects that had been donated before 1953 that had no index cards. Furthermore, nothing had been done in the archaeology collection, where there were more than 9 000 objects without index cards.<sup>230</sup> There was also a backlog of work and confusion in the documentation in the ethnology and archaeology departments.

While the ongoing reorganization of the storerooms continued, many objects were discovered in the historical, anthropological and archaeological collections that had been donated more than 30 years previously and had never been catalogued.<sup>231</sup> In practice this meant that these “old” objects had to undergo the same documentation process as the newly acquired ones. In cases such as these, information had to be sought in old files before the object could be catalogued and then numbered.<sup>232</sup> This process also involved the correction of wrong entries in the catalogue. For example, Coetzee sorted some archaeological tools that had been catalogued in the Historiography Catalogue years ago by Schiel. She also deleted the old numbers and re-catalogued them<sup>233</sup> making the correlation between information in the registers and the index cards.<sup>234</sup> The next year (1962) it was reported that reasonable progress was being made with the re-cataloguing of objects acquired by the Museum in the past, and that 1 498 catalogue cards had been typed and a few hundred provided with a drawing.<sup>235</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meetings 3 February 1961 and 3 July 1961.

<sup>231</sup> NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports, February - March 1956 and May 1962.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., monthly reports February and March 1956.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., monthly report July 1955.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., monthly reports, December 1959, January and February 1960.

<sup>235</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1962 - 1963, departmental report cultural history, p. 25.

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

The documentation sources used in the cultural history division remained the same as those in the previous period. They comprised the acquisition entry registers, the catalogues, the loans registers and file and the correspondence files. But there was one significant difference. A voluminous index with a variety of retrieval possibilities was compiled. These sources were used by the staff at the Old Museum, but as researchers made increasing use of the facilities, the index proved a boon for quick retrieval of information and objects.

### **Collections audit**

Stock-taking was reported for the first time in 1961, when the textiles were re-packed and stock accounted for at the same time.<sup>236</sup> In 1964 an official audit of the collection was undertaken. For the first time in the existence of the Museum, an auditor verified the safe-keeping of objects. In the ethnology division some objects in the catalogue and on the card index could not be traced, as the storage location had not been noted. In the cultural history division however, all objects that the auditor asked to see, could be shown to him. He also made recommendations about the security of keys and on the filing of acquisition entry forms.<sup>237</sup>

At the back of volume 5 of the Historiography Catalogue a note, initialled and dated 24 July 1964, was added during the audit inspection to the effect that several pages of the catalogue were missing. In volumes 3, 4 and 5 of the Historiography Catalogue are the initials and a stamp of the Administrative Inspector of the Department of National Education, dated 10 April 1972. These probably refer to an audit inspection.

## **3. CONSERVATION**

From the time of her appointment Coetzee regarded the preservation of objects in the collections as a priority. She reassured donors that the collections were well looked after.

---

<sup>236</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1961 - 1962, departmental report Old Museum, p. 32.

<sup>237</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 20 TM1/64, Verslag van werksaamhede van die Ou Museum en Krugerhuis vir die tydperk vanaf 1 April 1964 tot 21 Augustus 1964 (amended), p. 1.

She organized several exhibitions; at none of them were any objects had been lost or broken.<sup>238</sup>

One of the most common problems experienced in a museum is insect infestation. Once this happened, it was virtually impossible to get rid of the pests. For that reasons no new donations were allowed into the Museum before they were treated in the disinfecting room.<sup>239</sup> Infected objects were treated in various ways. San objects were, for example, put in the sun, brushed and re-packed with disinfectant.<sup>240</sup> Others were taken to the fumigation chamber in the entomology department; various disinfectants and preservatives were used, such as para-dichlorbenzene, wood preservative and naphthalene.<sup>241</sup> A flag was even ironed to rid it of moths' eggs.

The first textile preservation was done by Coetzee herself; she personally repaired uniforms and the clothes for the exhibition at the Voortrekker Monument in 1956 and 1957.<sup>242</sup> Furniture and other wooden objects were treated with a special preserving mixture, and leather dressing was imported from England.<sup>243</sup> After his appointment in 1957, the restorer immediately commenced with the restoration of furniture, old weapons, kitchen utensils and farming implements,<sup>244</sup> but was also responsible for general carpentry and had to make replicas of objects as required.<sup>245</sup> The technical assistant who worked under the supervision of Coetzee as textile restorer, also did other restoration work and made replicas.

---

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 6 TM1/52 - TM1/53, letter chairperson of the historical display committee to F. Von Reiche, dd 19 January 1952; System 1 No 11 TM1/56, letter Coetzee to D.E. Moodie, dd 1 May 1956.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 9 TM1/55 Jan - Sept., letter Coetzee to Pretorius, dd 4 February 1955.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly report March 1955.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 9 TM1/55 Jan - Sept., letters Coetzee to Pretorius, dd 4 February 1955 and to A. Rothman, dd 8 November 1955; System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports, April 1955, May 1957 and January 1959.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports, April 1956 and January 1957.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 13 TM1/58, letter Coetzee to W.W. Viljoen, dd 10 January 1958.

<sup>244</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1956 - 1957, departmental report cultural history, p. 36.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 1957 - 1958, pp. 40 - 41.

Restoration was sometimes outsourced when museum staff did not have the necessary expertise. For example, certain documents and Bibles were sent to the bindery at the State Archives for repairs; paintings were sent to J. van Tilburg, who worked under the supervision of Anton Hendriks, the curator of the Johannesburg Art Gallery.<sup>246</sup> The restoration of furniture and paintings was preceded by thorough discussion between the professional officer (Coetzee), the restorers and where necessary other experts. The advice of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) and the Departments of Agriculture and Forestry were sought in connection with the provision of wood for restoration, the preservation of sandstone, cotton and woollen fabrics, as well as paints and adhesives.<sup>247</sup>

Where no expert could be found, experiments were done in the Museum by Coetzee until the required technique was perfected. For example, books were consulted on beadwork and the techniques subjected to close inspection, firstly by un-threading the beadwork and then by re-stringing the beads with a piece of thread and queen beads. These techniques were demonstrated to the temporary assistant, who soon learnt the craft and restored many pieces most expertly.<sup>248</sup> Unfortunately very little detail is available in the form of reports that explain exactly what restoration techniques were applied. One exception to this is a description in the catalogue on the restoration of a baby cot.<sup>249</sup> Although restoration played a role in the conservation of the collections, general maintenance was also regarded as important and the storerooms and displays were cleaned on a regular basis. Dust proofing was installed in the display cabinets,<sup>250</sup> and the ultra-violet rays were blocked either by painting windows, by fitting ultra-violet resistant glazing or fittings to the display cabinets

---

<sup>246</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 6 February 1959.

<sup>247</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Reports, 1960 - 1961, departmental report cultural history, pp. 33 - 34; 1963 - 1964, p. 11; NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly report January 1958.

<sup>248</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1959 - 1960, departmental report for ethnology and archaeology, p. 41.

<sup>249</sup> Historiography Catalogue, vol. 5, H.C. accession no. 7309.

<sup>250</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1959 - 1960, departmental report cultural and social history, p. 40.

or by hanging curtains.<sup>251</sup>

Coetzee was aware of the fact that conservation of museum objects was a specialized task and she collected literature on the conservation and preservation of antiques. She visited British and European museums twice in order to improve her knowledge of every aspect of the management of a cultural history museum. During her first tour (March - September 1959) she visited museums in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Britain. She also visited the restoration departments in the Koninklijke Instituut voor Kunstpatrimonium at Brussels and the National Museum in Copenhagen to glean information on aspects of conservation, such as tools and substances used.<sup>252</sup>

Coetzee's knowledge of and expertise in conservation was also considerably augmented by attending a training course on the conservation of antiquities held at the research laboratories of the British Museum in London from 23 June to 6 July 1963.<sup>253</sup> This was the first time that a member of staff from a South African museum had attended an overseas course in connection with the work done in a cultural history museum. Coetzee received instruction on the most recent scientific findings of relevance to the identification of objects, methods of restoration and care of articles in storage and on display. Special attention was paid to architecture, display techniques, restoration methods and registration systems. During her stay in Europe she also visited museums in Vienna, Nuremberg, Amsterdam, Arnhem, Oxford, Rome and Athens. Back in the Old Museum, research was directed towards discovering substitutes for British preparations in cooperation with the CSIR<sup>254</sup> and the conservation knowledge that she gained was immediately applied in local museums.

---

<sup>251</sup> Cultural History Committee minutes, meeting 7 February 1964.

<sup>252</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1959 - 1960, departmental report for cultural history, p. 34.

<sup>253</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 24 May 1963.

<sup>254</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1963 - 1964 departmental report cultural history, p. 28.

#### 4. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

A month after her appointment as professional officer at the Transvaal Museum, Coetzee, who was of the opinion that the collection should be made available for research and study purposes, wrote to the University of Pretoria urging students that were doing cultural history assignments and post-graduate studies to use the material available in the Museum. She pointed out that collections such as the Cape silverware, music composed in honour of Kruger and the Russian tokens of honour to the Boers would all be fruitful for research purposes.<sup>255</sup>

Coetzee was constantly updating and improving her own knowledge and expertise in all aspects of museum work, so she could perfect her day-to-day museological tasks. She also aspired to train staff at the Old Museum, and personnel from other museums received instruction at the Transvaal Museum. She regarded guidance of this nature as an important branch of the activities of the Museum, particularly once the classification and cataloguing of cultural material had been placed on a sound and up-to-date basis.<sup>256</sup>

The Transvaal Museum was regarded as a leading museum in the North, and was therefore in a position to give expert advice to other institutions.<sup>257</sup> Local museums and municipalities such as Rustenburg, Hendrina, Potchefstroom and Ermelo were given guidance on the proper organization of a museum, conservation and exhibitions. Even the curator of the museum on the Fiji Islands was given advice.<sup>258</sup> This soon became an onerous and time-

---

<sup>255</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 6 TM1/52 - 1/53, letter Coetzee to Prof. H.M. van der Westhuysen, dd 6 October 1953.

<sup>256</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1957 - 1958, departmental report cultural history division, pp. 36 - 37.

<sup>257</sup> Sub-committee minutes, meeting 3 February 1961.

<sup>258</sup> NCHMA, System 2 No 57 NKV, Maandverslae personeel 1955 - 1963, monthly reports September 1956, November and December 1960 and October 1962.

consuming task, as

more and more towns are coming to regard the Old Museum as the mother institution of the North, as far as cultural history museums are concerned and the museum committees of municipalities are approaching the Old Museum for information on the organization of their collections of cultural history, the type of display cases, the cataloguing and scientific methods of preserving antiques. Every institution ... must be given individual attention as the available buildings and the type of material differ.<sup>259</sup>

The first training course in museum techniques, was held at the Old Museum from 29 June to 3 July 1964, with the approval of the Cultural History Committee.<sup>260</sup> One of the reasons behind the course was that Coetzee had been inundated with so many enquiries that it had become impossible to visit or answer each one individually.<sup>261</sup> It was attended by 24 people and comprised 19 lectures, of which Coetzee presented nine. Instruction was given on museological aspects such as the history of museums, management and organization of a cultural history museum, the identification and collection of objects for cultural history and exhibition methods. Other topics such as registration and cataloguing methods, security for museum objects, field work and museum architecture were discussed by 10 knowledgeable people who were regarded as authorities in their field of expertise. These experts were gleaned from universities, institutions and private practices. W.M.H. Rennhackkamp of the CSIR, for example, spoke on the influence of light, humidity and heat on the colour and texture of museum objects.<sup>262</sup> The training was regarded as the most successful undertaking organized by the Museum in the past 10 years and it proved that museology is indeed a

---

<sup>259</sup> Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1959 - 1960, departmental report cultural history, pp. 36 -37.

<sup>260</sup> Cultural History Committee minutes, meeting 4 December 1963.

<sup>261</sup> NCHMA, System 1 No 20 TM1/64, letter Coetzee to J.W. van Wyk, dd 23 March 1964.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., Jaarverslag van die voorsitter van die raad van kuratore van die Kultuurhistoriese en Opelugmuseum vir die jaar geëindig 31 Maart 1965, p. 2.

fully-fledged discipline.<sup>263</sup> The course was appreciated by all those who attended.<sup>264</sup>

-----

Although the above discussions of the collections management practices used in the Transvaal Museum indicate the general trends and the typical changes that took place, the current problems of the National Cultural History Museum can only be fully identified and understood in a detailed account of the previous documentation of the collections. In the two chapters that follow, efforts have been made to trace the development of documentation for each stage of the “lifespan” of objects in the Museum.

---

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 19, TM1/63, report on work at the Old Museum and Kruger House, dd 1 April to 21 August 1964; Kotie-Roodt Coetzee Archives, file Kursus in museumwese, programme, Vakansiekursus in museumwese vir die kultuurhistoriese museum, Ou Museum, Pretoria 29 Junie - 3 Julie 1964.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., System 1 No 20 TM1/64, see for example letter L.S. Kruger to Coetzee, dd 20 July 1964.