

CHAPTER VII

ASSESSMENT OF COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AT THE TRANSVAAL MUSEUM

1913 - 1964

According to Roberts the assessment of the collections management practices may include aspects such as the standard of maintenance and the comprehensiveness of existing procedures, the effectiveness of the documentation for curatorial and control purposes, the scale of backlogs, the pressure of incoming and outgoing material, audit procedures and the effectiveness of staff time.¹ Although an assessment of these features is necessary to determine the effectiveness of collections management practices at the Transvaal Museum, an analysis is perhaps even more imperative to establish the attitudes and convictions that led to these practices during the period 1913 to 1964.

During the last decade of the twentieth century museums in Africa and other countries with a so-called colonial past have been scrutinized zealously because they have been blamed for shaping – by collecting certain objects and displaying them in a certain manner – only one cultural heritage to the detriment of a diversity of other social groups in their particular country. According to Küsel, former director of the National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria:

Museums in Africa were remnants of a colonial past that had not really adapted to African values and needs. Museums were a Western cultural procession of Western value systems with strong emphasis on the individual, specialisation, technology, science and the written word.²

Museums are the products of their age, reflecting the values and norms valid in that period, and thus operating on a different basis than is the case today. Various factors such as interests and inclinations of staff members, and perhaps even more significant, their convictions, cultural and historical milestones, political events and radical changes in government – all may affect the course of a museum, and the practices of managing the

¹ D.A. Roberts, *Planning the documentation of museum collections*, pp. 132 - 134.

² U.S. Küsel, Negotiating new histories in a new South Africa, in D. McIntyre and K. Wehner (eds), *National Museums Negotiating Histories Conference proceedings*, p. 34.

collection. This certainly happened in the past, and it happened as much as it is happening today. Even now (2005) museums feel the need to debate the question of whether they are in danger of sacrificing artistic and curatorial judgement when they make decisions on collecting in the face of political considerations.³ Perhaps within 50 or a 100 years, our descendants may blame us for changes made at the turn of the twenty first century. The history of the Transvaal Museum during the period 1913 to 1964 reflects the values and norms that were valid in the museum world, but also in the country at that particular time and should thus be considered in that light. The present day's concerns should not be superimposed on the past; nor should it detract from very real achievements during those years.

1. THE TRANSVAAL MUSEUM 1913 - 1953

The parent museum of the Transvaal Museum, the Staatsmuseum, was the national museum of the ZAR and took great pride in its collections. It's aim was to foster national solidarity among the citizenry of the Republic.⁴ In the annual report for 1897 it was stated categorically that the Staatsmuseum had an ideal bigger than the mere preservation of objects. The Museum was "... het Grootboek, waarop geregistreerd wordt de vooruitgang van het volk ... Het is, meer dan eenige andere instelling in den Staat, de bewaarder der Historie van het Volk".⁵

In 1908 (after the Anglo-Boer War and the reorganization of the Staatsmuseum as the Transvaal Museum) Gunning wrote in retrospect that great attention had been paid to the collection of historical relics, and that the Staatsmuseum, by fostering love and respect for the country and for its glorious past, would have been instrumental in building a noble South African nation. He explains his view by stressing that the **second** aim of the Staatsmuseum was:

³ H-Museum ([Marra](mailto:marra@MUSEUMSLIST.NET))<marra@MUSEUMSLIST.NET> , dd 19 April 2005, H-Net Network for Museum Professionals, <H-MUSEUM@H-NET.MSU.EDU>

⁴ See E.Grobler, "Die Staatsmuseum van die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek en sy historiese en etnografiese versamelings" (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1994), pp. 47 - 59.

⁵ NCHMA, Jaarverslag van het Curatorium van het Staatsmuseum over het dienstjaar 1897, p. 4. [The Museum is 'the chronicle in which the progress of the people is recorded ... It is, more than any other state institution, the keeper of the history of the nation.' (Translated from the Dutch.)]

the stimulating of the national pride, the encouraging of the consciousness in the people that this State was but a part of a homogeneous complex of States and Colonies in South Africa, that the past of all these countries was the same, that the great men and great heroes of each component part belong *ipso facto* to the remainder, that origin, present and future, were and should ever be one and the same.⁶

Not only does this attitude deviate from the national ideals of the state museum of an independent government (the ZAR), but Gunning gives another aim of the Staatsmuseum, namely that it should provide practical aid to education, also a second place. But at the same time he stated with great conviction that the **first** (primary) aim of the Staatsmuseum was the promotion of scientific exploration within the state and the acquiring and preserving of scientific collections as the natural outcome of such explorations.⁷

Gunning's new interpretation of the goals of the Staatsmuseum can be explained by the fact that a new period had commenced with the new British dispensation after the Anglo-Boer War, and this had generated new ideals for the Museum. The role of the Museum changed from one contributing to the national consciousness of a single state, the ZAR, to that of a specialized museum, embracing natural sciences. Although the first three directors of the Transvaal Museum were all originally associated with the Staatsmuseum, they were also trained natural scientists and naturally espoused their predilection for the natural sciences. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century this penchant became the directive that prioritized activities at the Transvaal Museum. According to a director of the Museum, C.K. Brain, it had one aim, and that was to document the biodiversity of southern Africa. To that end, mainly through intensive field work, fundamental scientific information was collected,⁸ and large natural history collections were established. The research results based on this material was published in local and overseas scientific journals and in-house publications, such as the annals, monographs, memoirs and special publications. Examples are *The birds of South Africa*, *The butterflies of Southern Africa* and *The lizards of South Africa*,⁹ all of which contributed to the world wide recognition of the Transvaal Museum

⁶ J.W.B. Gunning, A short history of the Transvaal Museum, *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*, 1(1), April 1908, pp. 1 - 4.

⁷ Ibid., my bold.

⁸ C.K. Brain, Natural History at the Transvaal Museum 1901 - 1992, in N.J. Dippenaar (ed.), *Staatsmuseum 100*, pp. 16 - 18.

⁹ For a complete list, see Transvaal Museum publications, price list.

as a research institution.

In attaining this laudable distinction, the Transvaal Museum was on an equal footing with the leading natural history museums in the world, institutions that had established themselves as research centres doing basic research. The main reason behind this accomplishment, according to L.V. Coleman, was that “the natural history museum in collecting, identifying, and classifying botanical and zoological species from throughout the world was for a time the leading scientific institution in the biological field”.¹⁰

Nevertheless there was an awareness at the Transvaal Museum and also among the members of the Museum Committee that the ethnology, archaeology and historical collections still remained an integral part of the Museum. As early as 1908 a sub-committee was appointed to compile a report on the scope and functions of the Museum.¹¹ This document was reviewed in 1913 when a report on the catalogues and collections was discussed by the Museum Committee. The first decision by the Committee deals with natural history, followed by the ethnology, archaeology and historical collections. The Committee resolved

That book catalogues should exist apart from card ones in all divisions.

That the cataloguing of the Ethnographical Division be completed as soon as possible.

That the Historical Division should be taken in hand at once and brought up to date.

That the collection of curios be put in order.

That the collection of Photos be taken in hand, catalogued and arranged in albums.

Newspapers

That the Government be approached with regard to having the collection of newspapers handed over to the Archives from time to time, as this Museum cannot afford the space nor the funds to have the collection bound.

Stamps

That no stamps are to be given out of the Building in exchange or otherwise prior to the collection being catalogued.

Coins

That better provision be made for the safety of the coin collection.

The cataloguing of this collection to be taken in hand.¹²

¹⁰ L.V. Coleman as quoted by E.P. Alexander, *Museums in motion*, p. 161.

¹¹ Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 9 October 1908. A copy of this report could not be traced.

¹² Ibid., 15 July 1913.

At this Committee meeting the urgency of beginning the cataloguing of the collections was pointed out by the acting director, Swierstra. As a result a clerk, J.T. Jenkins, who later became secretary to the Museum and the Committee, was seconded to catalogue such collections as were considered necessary and urgent **in his spare time**.¹³ From the catalogues it is clear that some recording was done and the first numismatics catalogue was probably opened then.

In a memorandum of 1919 it was stated that

... there are 1360 Ethnographical species packed away, a collection of Bushmen engravings is waiting for exhibition, the Whitwell collection needs attention, the collection of Ovambo & Bushmen implements & or-naments ... must be exhibited, [as must] all the historical specimens acquired during these years.¹⁴

At this stage 60 historical and 1 700 anthropological and ethnological specimens were listed in comparison to 1 409 mammals, 1 693 birds, 1 473 reptiles, 1 991 spiders, 18 000 geological specimens, 22 000 insects and about 50 000 molluscs. This certainly showed how the Transvaal Museum succeeded in their exploration of the Union of South Africa. This is indeed a testimony to the attention the Museum was concentrating on the completion of the South African natural history collections. The exploration of the Union would continue in those branches where new material could be expected.

Items regarded as immediate necessities were pieces of apparatus such as glass jars, cabinets and glass cases. These should be obtained as soon as possible. An increase in the salaries of some staff members was also urgent. In view of the anticipated expenditure an increase in the grant to the Museum was proposed, including £550 for the purchase of specimens and a salary of £500 for an ethnologist.¹⁵ Although an ethnologist on the staff was envisaged, the dire needs of the historical and archaeology collections were not addressed at all and no indication was made of the extent of cataloguing or indexing achieved at that stage. It was only with the arrival of Radcliffe-Brown in 1921 and Rossouw in 1924 that some progress was made.

¹³ Ibid. and 3 December 1914. My bold.

¹⁴ Memorandum on the future policy of the Museum and the necessary expenditure connected with this, in minute book, Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 20 October 1919.

¹⁵ Ibid.

When staff were appointed in one division, it was expected that attention should also be given to the other collections. For example, Rossouw put in a great deal of work in both the ethnology and history catalogues. This meant that attention was divided between two or more different and often incompatible sections of work. This had a negative impact on effective staff time. In addition, all the work on the collections was done by the professional staff because they did not, as happened with the natural history staff, have the advantage of an assistant. In this connection, Beukes says of the anthropology department:

In the past this particular division has suffered immensely through the absence of such an assistant. Technical work has often been done sporadically by the assistants of other departments with the result that very necessary scientific data was often not obtained from donors nor entered into the Ethnological Catalogue. In addition the packing and storing of undisplayed objects was often done in an unsystematic way with the result that no proper record of these articles could be kept.¹⁶

It was in response to the appeal by Beukes that an assistant for anthropology was appointed, but he only worked at the Museum for little more than a year. More than a decade later an assistant was also appointed for the history division without the direct supervision of a curator.

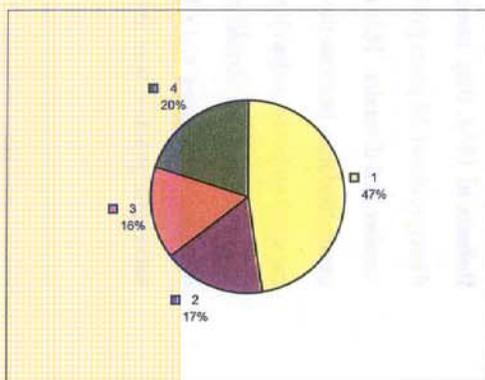
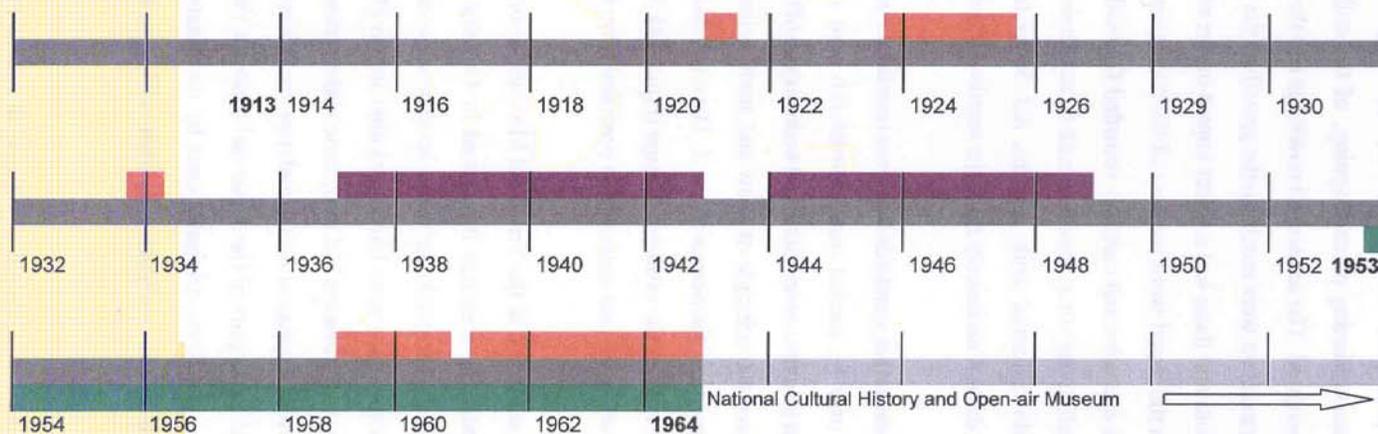
Often there were no professional staff at all for these divisions for a long period (figure 66), and the work had to be done by the director, or in exceptional cases by a natural history staff member. Swierstra, who was the entomologist, first assistant and later director is a case in point. The director was also responsible for the day to day running of the Museum and had to attend to natural history curatorial duties simultaneously. He even went on natural history field work trips. Although a decision was taken as early as 1914 that the director and the first assistant should not be absent from the Museum at the same time for longer than a few days,¹⁷ work was very often behind. In 1929 the editor of *Die Volkstem* and beneficiary of the Museum, Engelenburg, wrote:

De reputatie van 't Staatsmuseum als aanvaarder van geschenken is niet al te goed! ... De toestand ... is dat uw Museum feitelik maandelang bestuursloos kan wezen ... Maar zelfs voor 'n openbare instelling is 'n minimum-standaard van adminstratiewe doeltreffendheid geen luxe!¹⁸

¹⁶ NCHMA, Box 137, TM14/34, letter Beukes to the director, dd 22 February 1934.

¹⁷ Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 7 April 1914.

¹⁸ NCHMA, System 1 No 2 TM1/27 - TM1/30, letter F.V. Engelenburg to Swierstra, dd 13 August 1928.[The reputation of the Staatsmuseum in accepting donations is not very sound ... The fact is that your Museum is without a manager for months ... A minimum standard of administrative efficiency even for a public institution is no luxury! (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]



- Anthropology
- Archaeology
- History
- No Staff

Figure 66

Periods of tenure of academically qualified professional staff in the anthropology, archaeology and history divisions at the Transvaal Museum, 1913 - 1964

There were no comprehensive written policies or formal procedures with regard to the collections management of the historical, anthropological and archaeological collections. Instead general museological principles were followed, allowing for the basic documentation tasks, such as acquisitioning or cataloguing, of the collections to be completed when time and staff permitted. The academic knowledge and the museological skills of the professional officer or assistant were crucial to the growth of the collection and the documentation of the collections and these had a direct impact on the effectiveness of the process. It was dependent on the sound work (or not) of the professional officer. An example of such endeavour is the extensive and carefully recorded field-collections made by Beukes.¹⁹ From time to time staff (a clerk or a caretaker) with no academic qualifications was seconded or appointed to do curatorial work: Jenkins, A.J. Swierstra, Schiel and Malan. The quality of their work did not necessarily meet the required standards.

In practice this meant that there were no set standards that were maintained on a continuous basis. At best the work could only be carried out intermittently, not only as far as documentation was concerned, but also the conservation and maintenance of the collections. As the Transvaal Museum followed the principle of show and study collections, objects were put on exhibition as far as space and showcases allowed. The rest was stored without regard for material, shape, size or type, in the available storage (figure 14). There were no environmental control measures, although pest control was practised from time to time.

There were a great many catalogues in use at the Transvaal Museum according to Austin Roberts in 1944; they were maintaining a system introduced by Gunning while he was director, about 30 years previously.²⁰ The catalogues show an almost alarming increase in number and diversity. That new catalogues were introduced after the Anglo-Boer War is understandable, because the Transvaal Museum had to operate under a new dispensation, but catalogues were abandoned without apparent reason and new ones were opened almost indiscriminately. It should be said in support of the Transvaal Museum that most of the obsolete catalogues were kept, even those originally used by the Staatsmuseum. The acceptable practice was that each division maintained its own catalogue, based on serial

¹⁹ Ibid., Diary, FitzSimons, 1947, letter N.J. van Warmelo to FitzSimons, dd 1 January 1946.

²⁰ A. Roberts, Proceedings of eighth annual general meeting of the South African Museums Association, 10 May 1944, *SAMAB*, 13(6), June 1944, p. 176.

numbers.²¹ The result was that there was no standard procedure for cataloguing, and the way in which accessioning was done in the natural history divisions was not necessarily suitable for the anthropology, archaeology or history divisions. The use of different record systems caused inefficiency in the documentation for control and curatorial purposes, in particular with regard to location or storage details, and often routine work had to be repeated.²² Basic collections documentation activities such as accessioning were replicated, but it was done fairly well. Little wonder that the catalogues had to be revisited again and again and were regarded as workbooks by the staff who dealt with these collections. This is clearly indicated by the numerous annotations in the catalogues.

Although the scale of the backlog of unprocessed material in the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections is difficult to determine, there is evidence in all the catalogues that there were objects that had been acquisitioned and accessioned a long time after the objects were originally donated or purchased. This can in some small measures be ascribed to the pressure of incoming and outgoing material, since new acquisitions were received on a continuous, if irregular basis, but purchases were almost never made and loans were few and far between. The backlog was to a great extent also the result of the fact that there was seldom staff to deal with the collections. From time to time there were efforts to deal with the backlog, for example, when A.J. Swierstra, assistant for anthropology, took on the acquisitions in the history division.

The general result was, as Roberts asserts, that few collections in museums have more than rudimentary records.²³ This was also the case at the Transvaal Museum. On the one hand the catalogues recorded only the most basic information – sometimes not even that. For example, in the coins and medals catalogue, some accessioning was done as follows: with Nu Accession Nos. 641 to 656 the words *Japan Different Copper Coins Different coins* are written vertically in the Country column. There is no other information (figure 31) and no attempt was made to enhance or enrich the basic information. On the other hand copious information was entered by some curators, such as Beukes, who was particularly

²¹ NCHMA, Box 515, File Memoranda dealing with Tvl Museum matters - space, finance, collections etc. etc., Functions of a museum questionnaire - Transvaal Museum, p. 4.

²² Ibid., Box 137, TM14/34, letter Beukes to the director, dd 22 February 1934.

²³ D.A. Roberts, Proposals for a survey of cataloguing practice in British museums, *Museums Journal*, 75(2), September 1975, p. 78.

conscientious in this regard.

Almost no index cards still exist today that were used during that period. There is no indication whether index cards were produced before accessioning and for how long the card catalogue was maintained. Professional curators like Radcliffe-Brown and Rossouw did extend the card indexes. The information book and indexes compiled by Schiel were probably only used by him and thereafter by Coetzee. But they were of little value for the general retrieval of information and the general effectiveness of this documentation for curatorial purposes was therefore very limited.

During this period there was no available training in museology and no in-house training was provided on essential collections management tasks for the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections. More often than not, the professional staff working in these collections, who had a background of academic training, left the Museum after a short stay. Radcliffe-Brown, for example, studied at Trinity College Cambridge,²⁴ Rossouw obtained his doctorate at the University of Chicago and Beukes studied in Heidelberg, Germany.²⁵ None of them were trained in the wider spectrum of human sciences. The assistants had no training at all.

The status of the human sciences division and its position in a natural history museum is also indicated by the posts that were approved and created and those that were filled. For many years there was a divide between the natural history and the history sections. Since the 1930s natural history was sub-divided into botany, mammalogy, ornithology, palaeontology and physical anthropology, lower vertebrates and invertebrates, general entomology, lepidoptera, coleoptera and heterocera. And usually there was a professional officer, with an assistant, for each division.²⁶

By way of contrast, from 1913 to 1953, the professional post for ethnologist was filled only

²⁴ See letter by Radcliffe-Brown in J.A. van Schalkwyk, Radcliffe-Brown at the Transvaal Museum, *Research by the National Cultural History Museum*, vol. 5: 1996, pp. 39 - 40.

²⁵ C.S. van der Waal, "Gesiedenis van die Volkekunde-Afdeling van die Nasko-Museum, Pretoria 1893 - 1977" (unpublished article), p. 3.

²⁶ NCHMA, *Komitee van Ondersoek na openbare museums in Pretoria, 1960 - 1961*. Memorandum van die Raad van Kuratore van die Transvaalse Museum aan die Komitee van ondersoek na openbare museums in Pretoria, p. 10.

very sporadically and only once was there an assistant. Two temporary part-time assistants for history was appointed from 1947 to 1951. The first professional officer in archaeology was appointed in 1937, but again also for a limited period, and for history the first, Coetzee, was only appointed in 1953. Little wonder that Robinson, the assistant director of the Museum and professional officer in charge of the department of physical anthropology and vertebrate palaeontology, wrote that the activities on the cultural history side of the Museum were very limited for many years because of the acute shortage of both staff and funds.²⁷

The status of the human sciences division as part of what was primarily a natural history museum is indicated by the annual reports of the Transvaal Museum. Initially the work done in archaeology, ethnology and history was recorded in the first assistant's report. In the director's general report matters such as acquisitions and show and study collections were recorded, whereas copious reports were written by the curators for higher vertebrates, lower vertebrates and invertebrates, entomology, botany and palaeontology. The first exception to this rule occurred when the Kruger Museum was opened: a page-long report was drawn up by the director on the activities at the Paul Kruger Museum for the year 1 April 1934 to 31 March 1935. The next exception was the work done by Beukes. While he was still working for the Transvaal Museum as honorary curator he wrote annual reports for ethnology for the years 1934 - 1935, 1935 - 1936 and 1936 - 1937.

In the annual report for 1939 - 1940 there was a significant deviation: for the first time a **separate** report was written for the archaeology, ethnology, numismatics and philately departments, albeit by the director.²⁸ This procedure was repeated in the report for 1940 - 1941. The 1941 - 1942 report was written by Haughton, with an added note on "Historical" matters. In 1942 - 1943 no report was written, and for the next two years the report was only for archaeology, ethnology and numismatics, and philately formed part of the library report. In the 1946 - 1947 report there is still another change: history was added. The report was thus written for ethnology, archaeology, history and numismatics. The following year (1947 - 1948) no report at all was written for these divisions. A separate report for the division of history was written by the director for the period 1 April 1948 - 31 March 1949

²⁷ Ibid., J.T. Robinson, Memorandum on the accommodation problems of the Transvaal Museum, p. 1.

²⁸ My bold.

in which no mention is made of ethnology, archaeology, numismatics and philately. It was only in the annual report for 1950 - 1951 that a pattern was established for separate reports for all three divisions, that is history, archaeology and ethnology, and numismatics and philately. My investigations have yielded nothing on the control of the collections, the audit of objects on record, or the movement of objects in terms of the show and study collections.

Anthropological collection

From the inception of the Transvaal Museum after the Anglo-Boer War, the Museum Committee members and director were sympathetic towards the needs of the ethnology collection in particular. Gunning was interested in the ethnology collection, and especially in the possibility of an ethnographic survey of the entire country.²⁹ The responsibility for the ethnology collection was given to Swierstra, who had been first assistant at the Transvaal Museum since 1905.

The ethnology collection was regarded as the most important of the three collections (anthropology, archaeology and history) as far as staff was concerned, because the Transvaal Museum Committee discussed the possibility of appointing an assistant for ethnography and anthropology as early as 1910, and for the following reasons:

the necessity for the creation of this post is so universally admitted, that it is unnecessary to enlarge on this subject ... The ethnographical collection in the Transvaal Museum is the largest and most important one in South Africa, and it is necessary that this collection should be worked catalogued and prepared for exhibition before it is moved into the New Museum building.³⁰

The appointment of an honorary curator for that collection was discussed as early as 1913.³¹

In 1915 the director was of the opinion that a separate ethnological department should be established.³² The matter was taken up again in 1917 when the Museum Committee instructed the director to draw up a memorandum highlighting the necessity of having a

²⁹ See E. Grobler, The origin of the Anthropology collection of the National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria (1892 - 1921), *Research by the National Cultural History Museum*, vol. 5: 1996, pp. 16 - 18.

³⁰ Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, special meeting 28 November 1910.

³¹ Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 21 October 1913.

³² *Ibid.*, 5 October 1915.

scientific assistant for ethnography.³³ The government was accordingly requested to appoint an assistant for ethnology.³⁴

The first curator who was appointed in the ethnology division was Radcliffe-Brown, followed intermittently by Rossouw and Beukes. They were attached to the ethnology division in particular, although all three seem to have worked with the archaeology and history collections as well. After the resignation of Rossouw and the disbandment of the honorary curatorship of Beukes, the vacancy for an ethnologist was left vacant due to financial constraints. As early as 1925 the Museum Committee had already decided not to fill the post, owing to the fact that the money required for proper research work in the ethnology division would place a great strain on the funds of the Museum.³⁵

In 1938 there was a vacancy on the staff for one professional officer for the historical **and** ethnological division, but once again this post could not be filled because of financial considerations. At this stage, according to the annual report, it was regrettably impossible to appoint a full-time ethnologist – no mention was made of an archaeologist or historian – on the staff until the Museum’s financial position improved, but it was also felt that:

The study of Ethnology is to a great extent neglected in this country and with the passage of time it is becoming more and more difficult to study the fast disappearing original culture of the indigenous native tribes. In addition, the original household utensils, musical instruments, agricultural and war implements ... will disappear and be unprocurable.³⁶

It was not only at the Transvaal Museum that there were staff shortages to cope with anthropology collections: very few museums in South Africa had staff whose special task this was. According to Jones anthropology was regarded as the “Cinderella” of the sciences and the most neglected subject, and that it had not attracted as many workers as the more fully established branches of natural history.³⁷ More than ten years later, the situation was

³³ Ibid., 4 September 1917.

³⁴ Ibid., 3 December 1918.

³⁵ Ibid., 22 September 1925.

³⁶ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1938 - 1939, pp. 2 and 7.

³⁷ N. Jones, The place of anthropology in the museums of South Africa, *SAMAB*, 2(15), September 1942, p. 369.

unchanged, because Shaw – appointed at the South African Museum in Cape Town in 1933 and for about 25 years the only museum ethnologist in South Africa³⁸ – stated that ethnology attracted far fewer serious students than **any other branches of natural science**.³⁹ The need for a trained anthropologist in every museum and the necessity of anthropological work was also discussed at SAMA.⁴⁰ It seems that the Transvaal Museum recognized the importance of anthropology but nonetheless the post was not filled permanently.

One of the most important contributing factors to this situation as far as natural history museums is concerned is ascribed to the grouping together of anthropology and natural history collections.⁴¹ Davison asserts that this was the result of the distinction between “them” and “us”, in other words a conceptual boundary from an Eurocentric perspective, that “we had history, including cultural history, whereas *they* had timeless tradition ...”⁴² Although the existing situation as regards anthropology in South African natural history museums was unsatisfactory, in the United States, says Porter, no other branch of enquiry has attracted more attention throughout the development of natural history museums than ethnography.⁴³ Anthropology was grouped together with natural history at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, the American Museum of Natural History and the Field Museum of Natural History.⁴⁴ In South Africa, this was also the situation in the South African Museum, Cape Town and the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria. This also ties in with the perception that anthropology was regarded as having “mainly a pure-science nature”.⁴⁵

Although it was a powerful incentive that the structure of the Transvaal Museum was in line

³⁸ R.F.H. Summers, *A history of the South African Museum 1825 - 1975*, pp. 142 - 143.

³⁹ My bold. E.M. Shaw, Museums and ethnology research, *SAMAB*, 6(12), December 1957, p. 301.

⁴⁰ E.C. Chubb, The first eight years of the South African Museums Association’s experience, *SAMAB*, 13(6), June 1944, pp. 161 - 162.

⁴¹ P. Davison, Rethinking the practice of ethnography and cultural history in South African Museums, *African Studies*, 49(1), p. 151.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁴³ C.M. Porter, The natural history museum, in M.S. Shapiro (ed.), *The museum a reference guide*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ E.P. Alexander, *Museums in motion*, pp. 50 - 57.

⁴⁵ A. Roberts, Museums, their function and scope, *SAMAB*, 4(2), June 1947, p. 23.

with such accepted practice, there were priorities other than anthropology for a Museum devoted to natural history. The research work at the Transvaal Museum involved the documentation of the biodiversity of southern Africa.⁴⁶ This meant that the permanent natural history collections were built up in a continuous and purposeful manner, in particular through intensive fieldwork.⁴⁷ The care and proper management of the permanent natural history collections was and still is the core function of a natural history museum such as the Transvaal Museum.⁴⁸

In comparison with the above the Transvaal Museum's documentation with regard to the ethnology collection showed a lack of collections management. No need was felt to inventorize or even to check the items in the ethnology collection after the Anglo-Boer War because the Transvaal Museum was, in practice, the old Staatsmuseum. New donations, purchases or field work objects were not always acquisitioned and accessioned immediately; often this was only done months, or even years, afterwards. Beukes was of the opinion that:

the general organisation of this department [ethnology] has suffered immensely through different systems having been employed by successive departmental heads. Apart from the sufficient organisation thus caused much routine work has been repeated in the past - but according to different systems.⁴⁹

The range of sources, such as acquisitions entry registers and catalogues, shows many consistencies and available information was transferred from one register/catalogue to the other fairly accurately. The entries were made in numerical order, but with apparently little regard for sequence of deposits. Furthermore there was almost no indication of the name of the staff members who made the entries, the post held, and the date of the entries. The cross references sometimes give links between the various sources, but not in all instances.

The fact that new acquisitions were accessioned in a catalogue was on par with the method used by other museums for their ethnology material. According to a survey on ethnography collections in museums in southern Africa in 1943, undertaken by Jones, 17 museums used

⁴⁶ C.K. Brain, *Natural History at the Transvaal Museum 1901 - 1992*, in N.J. Dippenaar, (ed.), *Staatsmuseum 100*, p. 18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 18 - 46.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁹ NCHMA, Box 137, TM14/34, letter Beukes to the director, dd 22 February 1934.

an accession book in which their newly-acquired African objects are entered. Seven museums also used a card catalogue, while three were about to begin doing so.⁵⁰ This was probably the result of the encouragement given by Shaw to museums to implement an ethnographical card index system, as had happened at the Transvaal Museum.

The following assessment of the ethnology collection at the Transvaal Museum in 1946 by Van Warmelo, an South African anthropologist, summarizes the position well:

I would like to put it on record that as far as I can see you have an extremely varied and valuable collection. As in most museums, much of the older material is very fine, but its value much impaired by the unmethodical recording of the old days. A closer study of the subject will enable us to place numerous items. The most valuable part is no doubt the extensive and carefully recorded field-collections made by Dr Beukes, and some things contributed by my Department. This shows that the best method is to let a specialist do the collecting. We found almost no traces of moths or borers, but one thing seems necessary: to go through all the objects carefully to see to their numbers, because a fading ink has been used on some, and this is becoming illegible. The storage room is of course somewhat limited, but nothing to complain of. The absence of someone to attend to the collection appears the most important to me at present.⁵¹

Archaeological collection

The archaeology collection only came into its own with the appointment of a trained archaeologist on the staff in the person of Haughton in 1937. She took the collection in hand and started with the archaeology catalogue, but during her stay at the Museum she also had to assume responsibility for the history, philately, numismatics and ethnology collections and divided her attention and time between these. After she left, almost 20 years elapsed before another archaeologist was appointed.

The first accessions in the archaeology catalogue were rewritten from volumes 1 and 2 of the Main Catalogue of the Department of Ethnology Africa. When Haughton started doing fieldwork, the descriptions in the catalogue changed considerably and even included hand-drawn maps. These may be compared with the site charts that were regarded as supplementary to the catalogue system of the Archaeological Survey of the Union of South

⁵⁰ N. Jones, Ethnography in museums in Southern Africa, *SAMAB*, 3(3), September 1943, p. 64.

⁵¹ NCHMA, Diary FitzSimons, 1947, letter N.J. van Warmelo to FitzSimons, dd 1 January 1946.

Africa described by the director, Van Riet Lowe (annexure 6).⁵² This system may have influenced the accessioning done by Haughton, as details were published during her stay at the Transvaal Museum.

Historical collection

During the period under review, history was regarded as a peripheral field of study in a museum. In his paper on the functions and scope of museums, the renowned Austin Roberts enumerates the subjects in general and in special museums on which experts were working at the time. He mentions geology, palaeontology, archaeology, ethnology and the biology sciences, such as botany, zoology and entomology. He does say, however, that general museums display historical or ethnological relics and that museums fulfil an important role in cultural and scientific labours.⁵³

The management of the history collection in the Transvaal Museum always took second place to ethnology during the period 1913 to 1953. Indeed it had little call on the duties or obligations of the staff members in charge. The work in that division was delegated to either the director, the ethnologist or an assistant, and could therefore only be done part-time. There was little interest in the historical collection and almost no expert knowledge about it. To say the least, the administration of the history collection was in a chaotic condition,⁵⁴ because there was no qualified historian or cultural historian on the staff.

For a very short period, while Rossouw was working at the Museum, there was a revival in the interest in history, because he felt that the history division of a museum should display the history of a people (Afrikaans: *volksgeskiedenis*) so that posterity need not only read about or hear of history, but could also see it.⁵⁵ He called the history division the

⁵² C. van Riet Lowe, Catalogue system of the Archaeological Survey, Union of South Africa, *SAMAB*, 2(15), September 1942, pp. 325 - 327.

⁵³ A. Roberts, Museums, their function and scope, *SAMAB*, 4(2), June 1947, pp. 21 - 25.

⁵⁴ According to a letter by Coetzee "... was die administrasie van die Historiese Afdeling destyds in 'n chaotiese toestand. Toe was ene mnr Zwierstra, 'n Hollander, direkteur." [... the administration of the Historical Section was in a chaotic condition. At that stage a Mr Zwierstra, a Hollander, was director]. NCHMA, System 1 No 14 TM1/59, letter Coetzee to F.O. Dentz, dd 23 February 1959.

⁵⁵ NCHMA., Box 515, "Die 'Generaal Louis Botha' versameling" (unpublished pamphlet), p. 1. The pamphlet was probably written by Rossouw.

“Department of Historiography” and styled himself as the historiographer.⁵⁶ Rossouw showed considerable interest in the Botha Collection and the objects received from the Zuid-Afrikaansch Museum in Dordrecht.

The history collection was unplanned and activities were sporadic as many years elapsed between the various entries into the catalogues. Although the transfer of information from one catalogue to another was sometimes done meticulously, in other cases this was not done and as a result observations such as the following were made:

H.C. 5401. ‘n Ou klok, moei, waarskynlik van die eerste helfte van die 19de eeu. Geen inligting of besonderhede is sover te kry nie. Dit staan waarskynlik nog van die ou Staatmuseum Z.A.R. af.⁵⁷

In the late 1940s a change took place in the attitude that had previously prevailed at the Transvaal Museum with the appointment of Schiel as part-time assistant for the historical division in 1947. He had to sort, check, catalogue and list all the items in the historical collection.⁵⁸ Schiel found a huge amount of most interesting historical material in storage at the Old Museum. Many of these objects could have been exhibited had there been enough space.⁵⁹ Schiel’s activities engendered a new appreciation for the historical collection. In a significant statement the director, FitzSimons, wrote:

Throughout the year under review, Mr A. Schiel, as a temporary part time assistant, has been engaged in sorting, arranging, listing and cataloguing the mass of historical material which has been accumulating in storage at the Old Museum. In the course of this work he has made numerous interesting discoveries, which have aroused the active interest of historians and archivists throughout the country ...

As I have seen most of the material that has passed through Mr Schiel’s hands in the course of the year, I have come to realise more than ever what a vast store of invaluable historical material we have in the Museum. It is also patent to me that this material can provide for years of historical research and that we should do our

⁵⁶ Ibid., Box 515, list, Botha Collection, dd 8 April 1924. See glossary.

⁵⁷ Ibid., System 1 No 13 TM1/1958, note.[H.C. 5401. An old clock, pretty, probably dating from the first half of the 19th century. No information or particulars have so far been found. It probably dated from the days of the Old Staatsmuseum Z.A.R. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

⁵⁸ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1947 - 1948, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1948 - 1949, p. 4.

utmost to see that a qualified historical research officer is appointed as soon as possible.⁶⁰

Although Schiel's appointment may be regarded as a watershed in the shifting fortunes of the history collection, the work done by Schiel and Malan, his successor, was not museologically speaking of a particularly high standard:

Deur die jare moes opsigters wat in die meeste gevalle 'n afgetrede polisieman of messelaar of garagewerker was, die voorwerpe wat geskenk is, ontvang, inskrywe en verpak. Verkeerde metodes deur hierdie opsigters gebruik, gebrek aan wetenskaplike kennis om die museumpeste waaraan die voorwerpe blootgestel was, te bestry, verkeerde en onvoldoende gegewens wat neergeskrywe is, het oneindig baie skade aan die versameling veroorsaak. In baie gevalle is geen gegewens, selfs nie eers die naam van die skenker neergeskrywe nie.⁶¹

A similar situation is discussed by E.C.N. van Hoepen with regard to the National Museum in Bloemfontein, although he refers to the period at the end of the nineteenth century, when a caretaker was responsible for accessioning. Van Hoepen comes to the conclusion that even though the first members of staff were very keen, their hard work yielded little, because they lacked the necessary knowledge of museum methods.⁶² Although the entries made by Schiel contain basic information, there was no question of any classification as was later advocated by Coetzee (see figure 57).

⁶⁰ Ibid., departmental report for the division of history, p. 1. My bold.

⁶¹ NCHMA, System 2 No 38 KNO(1) 1955 - 1970, Memorandum vir voorlegging deur die Historiese Genootskap van Suid-Afrika aan Sy Edele die Minister van Onderwys, Kuns en Wetenskap, p. 3. [In the past the donated objects were accepted, accessioned and packed by a caretaker, who in many cases was a policeman, a bricklayer or a garage attendant on pension. These caretakers used the wrong methods, lacked the scientific expertise to eradicate museum pests to which objects are subject, and wrote down incorrect and incomplete particulars that caused endless harm to the collections. In many instances no details, not even the name of the donor, was written down. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

⁶² E.C.N. van Hoepen, Die Nasionale Museum, *SAMAB*, 9(3), March 1945, p. 256.

Although FitzSimons was responsible for the first appointment in the history division, his primary consideration remained the growth and advancement of natural history. He received many kudos for his achievements in his own discipline, and he excelled throughout his career at the Museum, both as scientist and as director. On his retirement it was said : “There is probably no natural history organisation in South Africa which has not benefited from the richness of his experience”.⁶³ FitzSimons’ personal endeavours to develop the history division were laudable, despite the fact that his first interest was natural history.

Causes for neglect

To justify the low standard of collections management practices in the ethnology, archaeology and history collections at the Transvaal Museum two main reasons were usually provided, namely the lack of adequate space and financial constraints. Time and again these reasons are reiterated in annual reports, memoranda and other museum documents.

Available space

The space available in the new museum building in Paul Kruger Street, Pretoria, was “barely adequate for the natural history collections alone and, as a result the cultural history collections had perforce to be left in the Old Museum”.⁶⁴ In 1951 the director, FitzSimons, explained that the New Museum had been occupied by government offices until the early 1920s, after which the natural history collections were transferred to the building. The Geological Survey Division still occupied a part of the building, with the result that it was decided that the historical collections should remain at the Old Museum. FitzSimons was adamant that the situation could only be rectified by full occupation of the New Museum building and the erection of the two wings that had originally been planned.⁶⁵

In a memorandum written in 1955 on the conditions at the Transvaal Museum it was stated that the state of congestion that had been reached was unimaginable and was quite inexcusable in a national museum, that should be in a position to present the best in

⁶³ N a, Editorial, *SAMAB*, 8(11), December 1966, n.p.

⁶⁴ NCHMA, System 2 No 38 NKO(1) 1955 - 1970, Memorandum re proposed new museum of cultural history, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 1 - 2; V. FitzSimons, Historical collections of the Transvaal Museum, *Pretoriana* 1(1), September 1951, p. 9.

museology that the country could offer.⁶⁶ In the annual report the situation was described as follows:

A desperate stage has been reached in most sections of the Museum due to over-crowding, as a result of which an additional burden is being placed on the scientific officers concerned, through them having to work in what now become storerooms. This regrettable state of affairs not only affects their work but involves the loss of much valuable time in constantly re-arranging the existing collections to house incoming material, and at the same time preserve some semblance of working space for themselves.⁶⁷

This report refers to the New Museum, but the same could equally be said of the Old Museum, where the bad conditions and the unsuitability of the building to safely house the collections, were reiterated again and again in annual reports.⁶⁸ The Old Museum is described

as a building with much wood in its construction and thus a constant fire hazard; the corrugated iron roof springs new leaks after every storm, with consequent damage to material; termites are undermining the floors and plaster is constantly falling off the walls and pediments ... storage and exhibition space is at a premium. All these factors ... directly militate against the proper functioning of the institution by the restriction of research output and other normal museum activities ...⁶⁹

In a questionnaire on the functions of a museum,⁷⁰ this last point is elucidated as follows:

Study material, which forms the basis of all scientific work carried on in the Museum, is all carefully numbered, catalogued and stored according to its nature ... overcrowding has now reached such a state that accessibility and proper supervision is being rendered extremely difficult, not to mention the wastage of valuable time involved and the constant risk of deterioration of material.

This point refers to the cataloguing of scientific specimens,⁷¹ and not to the cataloguing of the history, archaeology and ethnology collections.

⁶⁶ NCHMA, Box 515, File Memoranda dealing with Tvl Museum matters - space, finance, collections etc. etc., Memo on conditions at present existing in Transvaal Museum, 1955.

⁶⁷ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1954 - 1955, p. 10.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1946 - 1947, p. 7; 1947 - 1948, p. 9, 1948 - 1949, p. 7 and 1958 -1959, p. 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ NCHMA, Box 515, File Memoranda dealing with Tvl Museum matters - space, finance, collections etc. etc. Functions of a museum questionnaire - Transvaal Museum, 1955, p. 3. There is no indication of the respondent.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 4.

The stark reality is that until 1953 the display and storage of the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections in the Old Museum was under the supervision of a caretaker, while the professional staff and natural history collections were located at the New Museum. The result was that collections management practices for these collections were at best carried out in a desultory fashion as there was no professional staff on location (except periodically) who were responsible for documentation and conservation. There is no indication of the locality where documentation was carried out, although it can be taken for granted that acquisitioning was done at the New Museum. New donations were probably handed in at both Museum buildings, but where accessioning and marking were done and under what circumstances the catalogues were kept, is unknown. Whether the movement of objects between the two buildings was monitored and how they were transported, is also not known. All in all, insufficient space at the Old and the New Museum, coupled with the fact that the two buildings were located a distance away from each other, certainly had a marked detrimental effect on the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections.

Inadequate finances

Another contributing factor to the neglect of the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections was the inadequate financial provision made by the government for the Transvaal Museum, with the result that the Museum had no money to rectify the situation.⁷² After Union in 1910, the Transvaal Museum received a grant-in-aid from the Department of the Interior, plus the salaries of the staff, and privileges such as the free printing of the annals, free postage and stationery and a reduction in rail fares. In 1914 the grant was £5 200, but during the First World War the grant was decreased considerably and in addition wartime bonuses had to be paid without remuneration from the government.⁷³

By 1949 all the privileges and some salaries were stopped, although the grant was increased in lieu of special circumstances, for example the management of Kruger House, the special appointment of Broom and the addition of the Janse Entomological Collection. By the financial year 1948/49 the expenses had more than doubled in comparison to 1930, but not the grant. In fact the total grant received in 1930 was £8 100 and in 1948/49 it had only

⁷² Ibid., System 1 No 6 TM1/52 - TM1/53, K. Roodt-Coetzee, Die Kultuurhistoriese Museum, Boomstraat, Pretoria, p. 3.

⁷³ Memorandum on the future policy of the Museum and the necessary expenditure connected with this, in minute book, Transvaal Museum Committee minutes, meeting 20 October 1919.

been increased by £150 to £8 250. The Museum could barely make ends meet by using its reserve fund. A solution that the Board would have to consider was the closing down of some sections.⁷⁴

The dire financial straits in which the Museum found itself, occur like a never-ending refrain in all the annual reports. For example in 1951 the director explained the position as follows:

In spite of repeated representations over the past years, the Government still does not appear to appreciate that an institution, such as the Transvaal Museum, which is constantly growing and expanding, needs far greater financial support than it has been receiving up to now ...

As a direct result of inadequate financial support, follows the shortage of staff, which is now becoming a matter for serious concern ...⁷⁵

FitzSimons also makes it quite clear that the government should be held responsible if they did not provide adequate support for the proper utilisation and display of the wealth of material in the Museum, and refers to “the mass of valuable and unique material” in the Old Museum.⁷⁶ Should this not happen, argued FitzSimons, the national heritage would, for the most part, moulder in cellars and storerooms.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, at this stage there were six professional officers, all with academic qualifications, one taxidermist and four museum assistants in the natural history departments. But as yet there was only **one part-time temporary assistant** in history, a person who had no qualifications, and there were no such appointments at all in archaeology and ethnology.⁷⁸

Representations were made to the government to increase the grant and to improve conditions, but these appeals met with no success. In 1960 the chairman of the Board asserted that the board members were overcome by dejection as the result of the fact that there was no response to their attempts to improve the existing circumstances.⁷⁹ This year

⁷⁴ NCHMA, Box 515, File Memoranda dealing with Tvl Museum matters - space, finance, collections etc. etc. Financial position of the Transvaal Museum, typed copy, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1950 - 1951, pp. 7 - 8.

⁷⁶ V. FitzSimons, Historical collections of the Transvaal Museum, *Pretoriana*, 1(1), September 1951, p. 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁸ My bold.

⁷⁹ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1959 - 1960, p. 1.

was also the first in which the Transvaal Museum had perforce to charge an entrance fee of 1s. for adults in an attempt to alleviate the financial position in some measure.⁸⁰ It was only in 1963 that there was some financial relief for the Transvaal Museum with an increase of R5 000 in the grant-in-aid from the government and R1 000 from the City Council of Pretoria. The Museum could also look forward to the implementation of many recommendations by the two Commissions of Enquiry of 1960 - 1961 that were destined to bring about considerable improvement.⁸¹

Although the lack of adequate space and financial constraints contributed to the low priority given to the management of the anthropological, archaeological and historical collections at the Transvaal Museum, the conviction that the Museum was first and foremost a natural history museum – and not a general museum – and the attitude that natural history research should be given priority, was crucial in the Museum's decision making and was detrimental to the management of these collections.

2. THE TRANSVAAL MUSEUM 1953 - 1964

Despite the fact that the Transvaal Museum had struggled with inadequate resources for many years, Coetzee nevertheless blamed the government for not appointing a staff member to manage the history division at the Old Museum.⁸² FitzSimons also could not understand the indifference of the Government to the needs of the Museum.⁸³ In 1948 the future of history museums and history sections in museums came under the scrutiny of a government Commission of Enquiry on state-aided institutions. This Commission recommended that the annual grant for the Transvaal Museum should be adapted to enable the Museum to implement its true functions, and also that a post for a professional officer in history be created and an appointment made as soon as possible.⁸⁴ This eventually resulted in the appointment of a qualified curator for the history collection in 1953. Even after her appointment Coetzee asserted that the staff were not to be blamed for the poor conditions;

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸¹ Ibid., 1962 - 1963, p. 5.

⁸² NCHMA, System 1 No 6 TM1/52 - TM1/53, letter Coetzee to F.O. Dentz, dd 4 December 1953.

⁸³ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1948 - 1949, p.

⁸⁴ Ibid., *Verslag van die Kommissie van Ondersoek na sekere staatsondersteunde inrigtings*, p. 175.

instead it was people or departments “wat die historiese sy van ons Volkslewe so afskeep” [who neglect the historical aspect of the life of our people].⁸⁵ The two words “ons Volkslewe” [the life of our people] refer to the cultural wealth of the Afrikaner people, and it was this aspect of history that, for the next decade, would imbue the activities, including collections management practices, in the history and later the cultural history division.

The recommendation of the Commission was not the only reason for the change in attitude by the director and the Board of the Transvaal Museum. It may also be attributed in some measure to the upsurge in national pride and awareness of their heritage shown by the Afrikaners. This was in particular linked to the centenary of the Great Trek in 1938 and the presentation of many precious heirlooms to the wagons that took part in the symbolic ox wagon trek. In Pretoria, the neglect of important objects in the Old Museum which had historical and cultural historical worth – the heritage of the Staatsmuseum in fact – had already been noted and brought to the attention of cultural bodies. They in their turn brought pressure to bear on the Transvaal Museum and also testified at the Commission.

Another contributing factor, which played no small role in alerting the Board to the possibilities of the Old Museum and its collections, was the appointment of an assistant to deal with the history division. His activities resulted in the discovery of a large amount of most interesting historical material in the storerooms,⁸⁶ probably previously unknown. This new awareness came at a propitious time because the Transvaal Museum, as the only Museum in Pretoria with a history division, also became involved in the establishment of a Voortrekker Museum in Pretoria.⁸⁷ By 1949 the creation of this museum was imminent as even more enthusiasm was engendered among Afrikaners by the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument, and in particular by the staging of an exhibition of some of the objects from the Old Museum at the Voortrekker Monument. A display, now enlarged, was also set up at the Old Museum. These two exhibitions awakened great interest and strong representations were made to the Board to give serious attention to the development of its

⁸⁵ Ibid., System 1 No 12 TM1/59, letters Coetzee to J.C. Bergh, dd 12 November 1959 and System 1 No 15 TM1/60, Coetzee to M. Roux, dd 16 March 1960.

⁸⁶ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1948 - 1949, p. 4.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 1953 - 1954, departmental report for division of history, p. 39.

history division.⁸⁸ In 1953 a sub-committee on which the Transvaal Museum had a seat was formed to explore the possibilities of establishing a museum at the Voortrekker Monument.⁸⁹ The next event which stimulated enthusiasm for the past was the Van Riebeeck Festival. The display in Pretoria, in which the Transvaal Museum – and the history collection – played a big role, was another incentive. There was also a change in the Board and the hard core of natural history scientists were supplemented to some extent by historians.

Additional staff appointed also reflect the changed circumstances of the history division. The first assistant for history was appointed at the end of 1954, to deal in particular with cataloguing, and a second assistant was added in August 1955. The greatest change in staff after the appointment of Coetzee was that the need for a restorer was recognized and he was appointed on 1 January 1957. Although the staff had thus increased considerably since 1953, Coetzee still regarded the shortage of skilled staff as the greatest obstacle to the progress of the cultural history division. This was very apparent as it became more and more independent, and the administrative duties of the professional officer increased.⁹⁰ The fact was that the activities in the cultural history division had increased to such an extent, that the staff, although it had increased from one person in 1953 to six in 1960, could not cope with the workload. Even when staff time was used more than effectively, Coetzee and her colleagues often had to work after hours. To the detriment of the quality of work, there was also a turnover in staff, the very reason being that there were not enough people to cope with the increasing workload under difficult conditions.⁹¹

The changed status of the human sciences division and its place in a natural history museum is reflected clearly in the annual reports. Three separate annual reports for the divisions of history, archaeology and ethnology and numismatics and philately for the year 1952 - 1953 were still being written by the director. In the next year Coetzee handled two divisions, those of history and archaeology and ethnology, and the director only dealt with

⁸⁸ NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, file Memo's 1965 - Speech by the Minister of Education, Arts and Science, 20 October 1967, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1953 - 1954, departmental report for division of history, p. 39.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 1957 - 1958, departmental report for cultural history division, p. 34.

⁹¹ Ibid., departmental report for cultural history division, p. 30.

numismatics and philately. For the first time this pattern was changed when Versfeld assumed responsibility for the numismatics and philately annual report for 1958 - 1959. For the year 1959 - 1960 another change is reflected namely the report for ethnology and archaeology was written by the professional officer-in-charge. From the year 1961 - 1962 the departmental reports were divided into two sections: the natural sciences section and the cultural history division. In the annual report of 1963 - 1964 the staff list also reflects this division.

Anthropological and archaeological collections

As professional officer for the division of history, Coetzee readily assumed responsibility for the anthropology and archaeology divisions in 1953. For the next five years she dealt with enquiries, new acquisitions, storage and whenever possible, also with the displays. This was a problem as the space available for the ethnology and archaeology displays was very limited, and only small changes could be effected and the objects re-arranged.⁹² Although the introduction of dioramas was envisaged, this was not accomplished.⁹³

She also realized that staff with specialized training were needed to develop the collections, as she herself and other staff could only give limited attention to this division.⁹⁴ Representations to the government to allocate a post of ethnologist met with no success.⁹⁵ Coetzee assessed the situation in the archaeology and ethnology department at the time as follows:

These two sections are still without the guidance of a trained official and the work has had to be performed by the staff of the section for Cultural History. In order to expand our collections the immediate appointment of a qualified Ethnologist is necessary, as the collection of material and work on research has, in the course of years, been neglected to such an extent that there is enough work and a definite need for a team of workers in both these sections.⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid., 1953 - 1954, departmental report for archaeology and ethnology, p. 39, 1954 - 1955, p. 31 and 1957 - 1958, p. 35.

⁹³ Ibid., 1955 - 1956, departmental report for archaeology and ethnology, p. 30.

⁹⁴ Ibid., departmental report for cultural history, p. 33 and 1957 - 1958, departmental report for cultural history division, p. 34.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1956 - 1957, departmental report for cultural history, p. 33.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1957 - 1958, departmental report for cultural history division, p. 34.

More than five years after Coetzee's appointment, the post of a professional officer was filled in the ethnology division on 1 January 1959, and she could devote her time to its needs. At this stage, then, the situation was assessed as follows:

It is impossible for an outsider to realize the extent of the backlog work, the hiatus in the collections and the confusion caused by caretakers who tried to register donations in the past, that exist. The seriousness of the situation is very great and the only way to assure progress is by the service of at least three additional assistants ... There should be at least one professional officer for the Bantu groups and one professional post for the Coloureds, as well as assistants to each.⁹⁷

The fact that additional staff was urgently needed by these divisions, were repeated again and again.⁹⁸ The appointment of an assistant improved the handling of administrative matters, but the backlog could still not be addressed and the accumulation of unprepared material became problematical.

As a result of the fact that the anthropology curator also had to work in the cultural history division at the Old Museum, a report on the condition of the archaeology and anthropology divisions was delayed. The report, eventually probably prepared in May 1960, makes it clear that the situation was far from satisfactory with regard to all the aspects of collections management in the anthropology and archaeology divisions. As far as storage was concerned, the assessment was short: "In die pakkaste heers chaos" [There is chaos in the storage cupboards]. A short history of the various catalogues that were in use and had contributed to the confusion in documentation, is given and the existing card catalogue is curtly described as "worthless". At this stage there still were many objects without numbers or labels and some were broken or in a bad condition. Exhibits both in the exhibition rooms and display cabinets were described as uninteresting, ill-assorted, unnatural and colourless.⁹⁹ There were, nevertheless, some redeeming features: in this report the lacunae in the ethnology collection were identified and as a result a campaign was launched to acquire ethnology material. The cataloguing of new acquisitions was kept up to date.¹⁰⁰

Since his appointment at the beginning of 1961, the ethnologist, Du Toit, devoted all his

⁹⁷ Ibid., 1959 - 1960, departmental report for ethnology and archaeology, pp. 38 - 39.

⁹⁸ Ibid., and 1960 - 1961, p. 36.

⁹⁹ NCHMA, File ET1/60 Etnologiese Afdeling, Konsepverslag: Toestand in Museum, p. 2, n. d.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 3 and 5.

time and energy to anthropology. New collections management practices in the ethnology division were initiated. With regard to documentation the existing catalogue was retyped on loose-leafed pages and a start was made with the systematic photographing of the objects for the card catalogue. Attention was paid to the restoration of broken objects and material was sorted and re-arranged (figure 67 and 68).¹⁰¹ New displays were also initiated and an exhibition on the living pattern of the Northern Sotho was staged.¹⁰² Field work and research was undertaken and the collection supplemented by judicious collecting.¹⁰³ Despite many years of inertia, interspersed by bouts of activity, the ethnology division had at long last come into its own and in the next period the high standards set by Beukes and Du Toit were maintained.¹⁰⁴ The archaeology division would remain on the periphery of collections management activities until a post was created by the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum for an archaeologist in 1966.¹⁰⁵



Figure 67

Broken clay pots, that had been reconstructed, on display at the Old Museum in 1961
(D. Faraday, *Mapungubwe bewaar sy geheim*, *South African Panorama*, October 1961, p. 41)

¹⁰¹ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1960 - 61, departmental report for division of ethnology and archaeology, pp. 35 - 36.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1963 - 1964, departmental report for ethnology and archaeology, p. 33.

¹⁰³ C.S. van der Waal, "Gesiedenis van die Volkekunde-Afdeling van die Nasko-Museum, Pretoria 1893 - 1977" (unpublished article), p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Letter director of the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum to A.M.E. Janse van Rensburg, dd 1 December 1966, received from A.M.E. Judson.

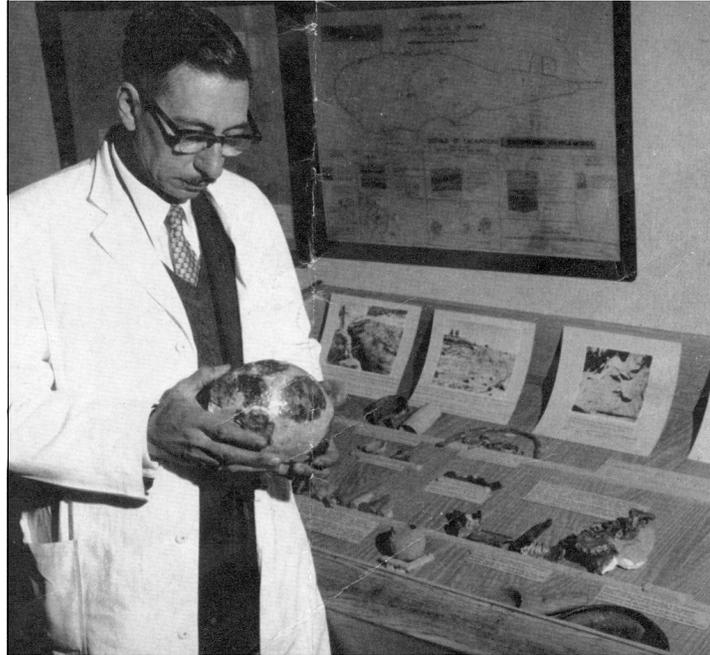


Figure 68

The professional officer for ethnology, A.P. du Toit, at an ethnology display in the Old Museum
(D. Faraday, *Mapungubwe bewaar sy geheim*, *South African Panorama*, October 1961, p. 41)

Cultural history collection

Dynamic and continuous change took place in the history division during the period 1953 to 1964. From its status as a negligible part of the Transvaal Museum the history division was regenerated into a vital, significant, unprecedented and new component of the Museum. The name of the division was not only changed from history to cultural history, but the vision of a cultural history museum, portraying the lifestyle of people by using objects that were regarded as cultural documents, was implemented by means of standardized collections management practices within the Museum and the new exhibitions that could be viewed by the public.

In these formative years, Coetzee, sometimes by trial and error, blazed the way for the establishment of the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum. For the first time, the management of the history collection, or the cultural history collection as it was later called, was

second to none. The work in the division was the responsibility of a trained cultural historian, in the person of Coetzee, who worked full time in this division and was responsible for its rejuvenation. The changes wrought can be described as follows:

Furthermore with the upsurge in interest in our cultural history among the public in general, assisted in no small measure by the activities of the present staff, material is pouring in at an ever increasing tempo and the position has now been reached when space for its safekeeping, let alone display, is no longer available; in fact the position is now so bad that a large section of the collections is being exhibited in the New Museum building, (where it is completely out of place among exhibits of natural history), and storage space had to be sought outside the confines of the Museum ...¹⁰⁶

This tribute deals with two aspects of the contribution engineered by Coetzee, namely the growth of the collection and the displays.

Displays

In the exhibition Coetzee created at the Voortrekker Monument in 1949 (figure 6a) mixed objects were placed together in an artistic manner. The period rooms which featured so richly in Coetzee's displays, showed a marked development from this kind of display. They were also a far cry from the stereotype wall cases and freestanding cases (figure 69) normally used in museum exhibitions. The Africana Museum in Johannesburg, for example, used such cases (figure 70) and Coetzee, too, did not hesitate to use these cases if she felt they were needed. In the Old Museum oblong free standing cases were used to display the Eastern ceramics collection, and upright wall units to exhibit period costumes and accessories. In the previous period, multi-leaf pedestal cases had traditionally been used for the display of the Elliott photographs and the Botha honorary addresses.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ NCHMA, System 2 No 38 NKO(1) 1955 - 1970, Memorandum re proposed new museum of cultural history, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1946 - 1947, pp. 3 - 4.

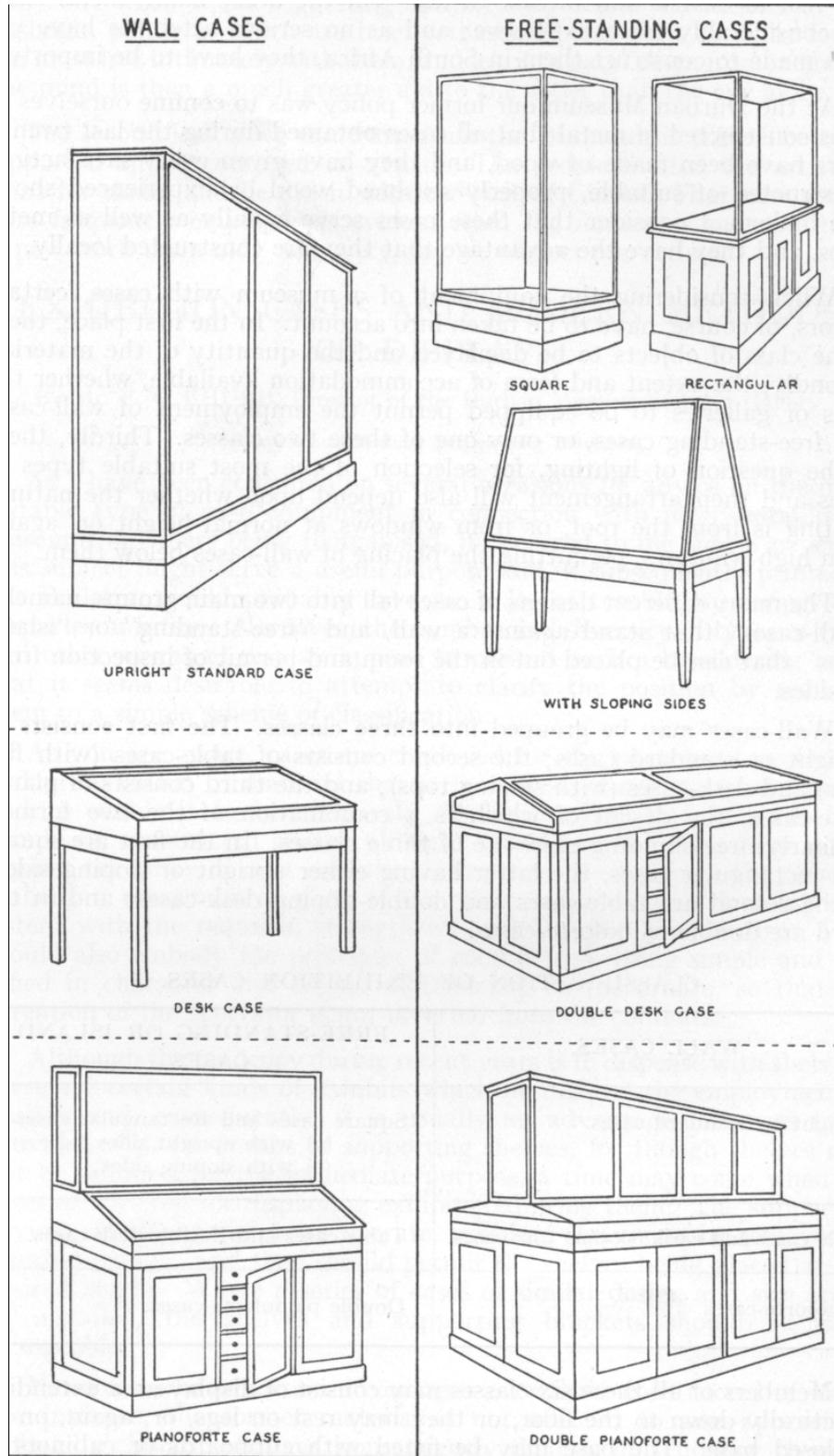


Figure 69a

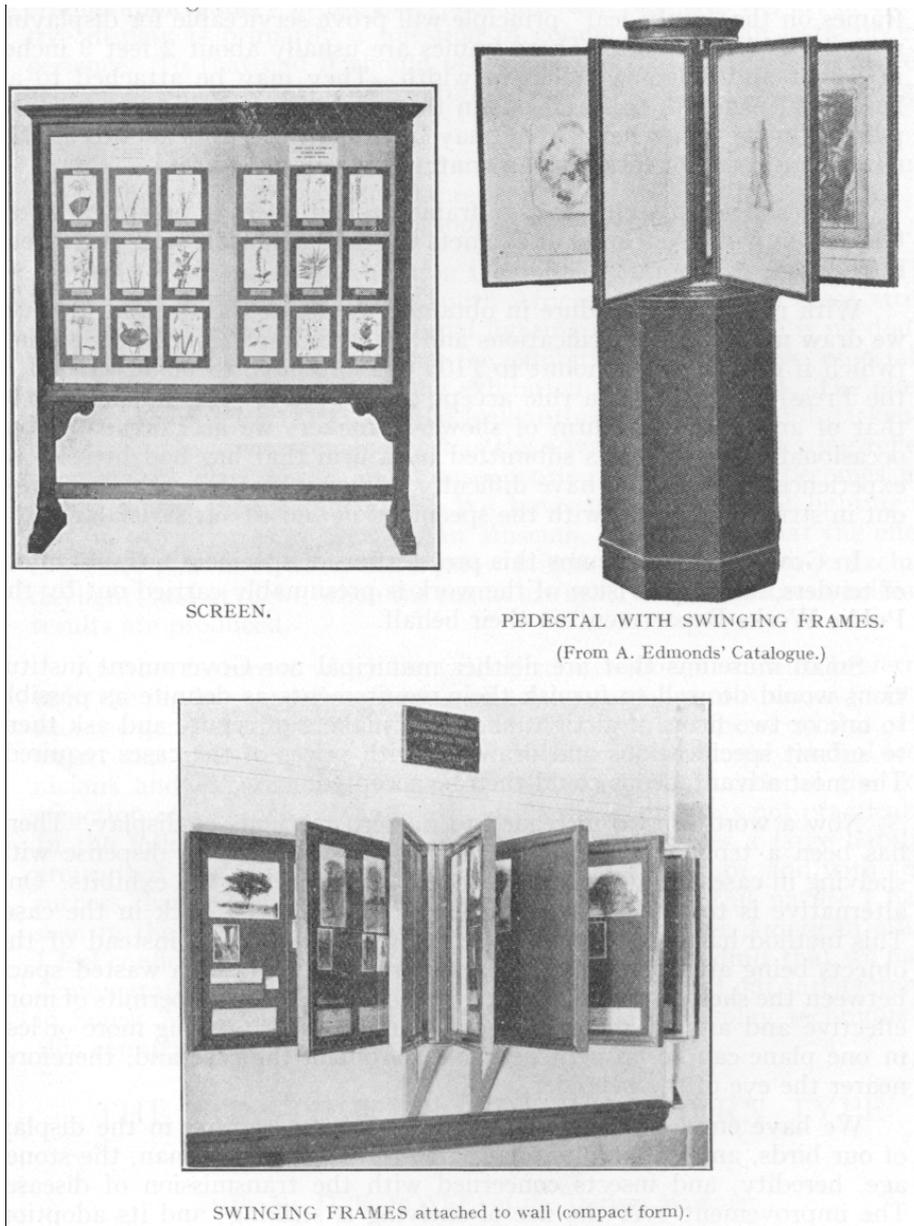


Figure 69b

Typical display cases available for museum use
(*SAMAB*, 2(12), March 1942, pp. 306 - 307)



Figure 70

Desk cases and swinging frames in use at the Africana Museum, Johannesburg

(A.H. Smith, *Treasures of the Africana Museum*, p. 11)

Visitors to natural history museums were accustomed to the so-called habitat-group type of exhibit in which animals are represented in their natural surroundings. This effect may have been the stimulus for Coetzee to do the same for people and for cultural history objects that belong together – and she did so with great success. Coetzee may also have been influenced by photographs of rooms furnished to represent a lifestyle in detail, particularly in European folk museums (figures 71 and 72).¹⁰⁸ She devised period rooms, either in “real” rooms where the objects were protected from visitors by a glass front, or as open displays, where there was only a rope barrier between the visitor and the display. A period room gives the visitor a glimpse of the lifestyle in days gone by (figure 73), whereas one may look at only one object at a time in a more conventional display where different objects are put haphazardly together, such as the display of several tables and chairs, armoires and cupboards and a bed in the Africana Museum (figure 74).

¹⁰⁸ See for example, the photographs of the Welsh Folk Museum in I.C. Peate, The Folk Museum, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, XCVII (4803), 9 September 1949, pp. 800 - 803.

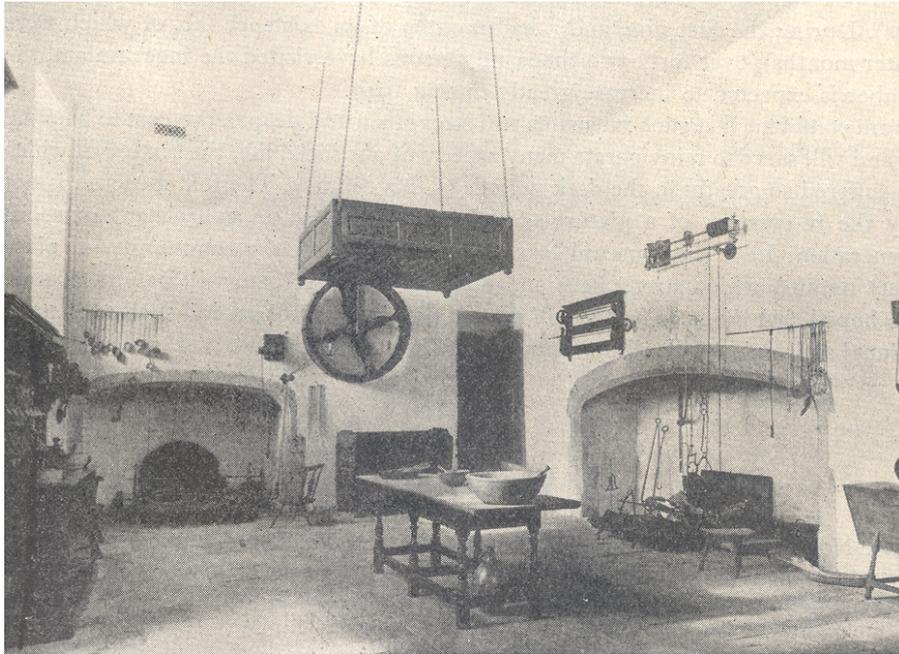


Figure 71

The kitchen at St Fagans Castle, Welsh Folk Museum, Cardiff, 1949
(I.C. Peate, *The Folk Museum*, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, XCVII (4803),
9 September 1949, p. 803)



Figure 72

A Voortrekker kitchen with open hearth, cow dung floor strengthened with peach stones and a reed ceiling, erected in the Voortrekker Monument Museum

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



Figure 73

Period room on display at the Old Museum, showing furniture, ceramics, copperware, silver key plates and handles in context
(Collection: National Cultural History Museum Christmas card (brochure), Volkscas, 1972)



Figure 74

Furniture, glassware and silver displayed separately
at the Africana Museum, Johannesburg
(A.H. Smith, *Treasures of the Africana Museum*, p. 10)



Figure 75

Camping scene with ox wagon, displayed
for the first time for the Pretoria centenary, 1955

(Collection: National Cultural History Museum HKF 4823)



Figure 76

Outspan scene at the Voortrekker Monument Museum,
showing ox wagons as an integral part of the display

(*Museum Memo*, 6(3), November 1978, p. 7)



Figure 77

Coach at the Africana Museum, Johannesburg,
standing in isolation, next to a desk display case and swinging frames

(*SESA*, vol. 1, p. 58)

An object in its natural setting has more appeal than an object in isolation. For example, in the first ox wagon scene, devised by Coetzee for the Pretoria centenary in 1955 and the ox wagon at the outspan scene at the Voortrekker Monument Museum (figures 75 and 76), natural elements are combined with people and objects, to provide a realistic display. A scene set in this way appeals to the museum visitor through its pictorial representation of life. On the other hand, an object exhibited without context, such as the display of the coach in the Africana Museum (figure 77), would not give the visitor the same insight in the contemporary lifestyle.

The experience that the museum visitors enjoyed when confronted by the new displays, in particular those at the Old Museum and the Voortrekker Monument, changed the image of museums for many people. Coetzee's contribution here should be recognized: not only did she devise these designs, but she also planned and assembled the objects in accordance with a set of accepted rules, and she thus raised the standard of displaying cultural history material.

Growth of the collection

To achieve her goals Coetzee had to ascertain which objects were lacking in the history collection of the Transvaal Museum. The expansion of the cultural history collection was carefully planned and executed. A collections policy was devised and Coetzee set out clear principles for collecting. Her greatest gift to cultural history museums lies in her new perception of objects and the way in which this perception is reflected in her collections management activities. She regarded an object as a document of the past, a testimony to the lifestyle, work and even to the thoughts of the people who made the object.¹⁰⁹ Coetzee succeeded in persuading the staff working under her, the other staff at the Museum, the board members and the public in general to accept this credo, and even many years after she had left the Museum, a former staff member still testified:

Die één ding wat ek by Kotie Roodt-Coetzee geleer het, was dat dit in die museum nooit net om die voorwerp en die versamelstuk mag gaan nie. Daardie versamelstuk, hoe kosbaar-uniek of eenvoudig-algemeen dit ook mag wees, het te doen met die mens. Iemand het dit gemaak, gebruik, waardeer en 'n waarde daaraan geheg. Dit vertel 'n geskiedenis van mense wat in hulle eie tyd sin wou gee aan hulle eie lewensomstandighede en van 'n worsteling om met skeppende arbeid hulle lewensruimte te veredel of moontlik net daarin te oorleef.¹¹⁰

In the context of the South African museum scene, historical or cultural historical objects were traditionally regarded as “specimens,” thereby placing man-made history or cultural history objects on the same unemotional level as natural history specimens. Even Beukes talked about “a fair number of interesting specimens pertaining to Bantu life”.¹¹¹ This may well have been a remnant of the traditional British museum system which had been prevalent in South Africa, but Davison argues that the object is only diminished to become a specimen after it has been catalogued, because this process reduces the meaning of the object.¹¹² Other words that have been used frequently are “relics” and “curios” or accessions or acquisitions,

¹⁰⁹ NCHMA, System 1 No 18 TM1/6, K. Roodt-Coetzee, *Uitstalling van Kaapse Silwer en meubels*, radio talk, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ P. de Beer, Die merkwaardige Mev Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, *Museum Memo*, 22(1), March 1994, p. 2. [The one thing that Kotie Roodt-Coetzee taught me was that the object or museum piece is not primarily the mainstay of a museum. That piece, whether it is valuable and unique, or simple and commonplace, deals with a person. Somebody made, used, and valued it. It tells the history of people who in their life and times wanted to make sense of their unique circumstances, of their struggle to enrich their living space with creative labour, or perhaps just to survive. (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

¹¹¹ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1935 - 1936, departmental report for ethnology, p. 1.

¹¹² P. Davison, *Material culture, context and meaning*, p. 123.

or even worse, “curiosities”. These words all convey the impression that a historical or cultural historical object has been regarded as a keepsake, valued and kept in the museum solely for its rarity or interesting association with a famous person or outstanding event, or even for its strangeness or unusual qualities.

The term “Africana” was also widely used. According to Bradlow this “term is applied to books, pictures, printed matter, objets d’art and furniture pertaining to Africa, and in South Africa, particularly to Southern Africa ... The primary requisite of any object of Africana is that it must have some association with Southern Africa ...”¹¹³ The definition of the term Africana as used by the Africana Museum, corresponds in the main with Bradlow’s: “the kind of Africana which is suitable for museums, especially historic pictures, furniture and crafts, coins and medals, banknotes and all those miscellaneous items which can be classed as historic relics”.¹¹⁴

Yet another term that was used (also by Coetzee in the very beginning of her career) was “antique”. The Historical Monuments Commission used the word to refer to moveable objects of aesthetic, historical, archaeological or scientific value of more than 100 years old. This meaning did not appeal to the Africana Museum, as many objects worth preserving were less than a 100 years old. Of more importance to the Africana Museum were two other aspects, namely the intrinsic and the record value of the objects, the latter referring to the broad educative usefulness of awakening interest in and understanding of South Africa’s past.¹¹⁵

In all these terms the very crux of the object had still been overlooked, the fact that every object reflects the creative spirit behind its existence. It is this aspect that Coetzee highlights by giving an entirely new meaning to a historical or cultural object, one that goes beyond the ordinariness of the above terms. This is a far cry from the opinion held by the Africana Museum in Johannesburg that the object in itself was of prime significance. An object was, according to Coetzee, a document – in modern museological parlance, a message-bearing

¹¹³ F.R. Bradlow, *Africana Books & Pictures. A selection of published papers*, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ H.G. Oliver, The importance of preserving and recording Africana, *SAMAB*, 10(2), September 1941, p. 241.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

entity¹¹⁶ or a data carrier¹¹⁷ – from which could be read the life and style of the maker or user of the object. The object in itself need not be rare or pretty or unusual, or associated with an important individual or event, but it must be imbued with the spirit of the maker or user and the times in which he or she lived.

Collecting *per se*, said Coetzee, was not the final aim; she wanted to explain the spirit of the past that pervaded the objects to her own people and to others. Special efforts had to be made, through the radio and press to collect objects lacking in the collection.¹¹⁸ Although there was still no comprehensive collections policy in use at the Transvaal Museum for its anthropological, archaeological and historical collections, the basic tenets adhered to by Coetzee were clearly reflected in the systematic way in which she enlarged the cultural history collection, either by donation, purchase or loan.

One of the most important reasons for Coetzee's success was the effort she made to meet people on a personal level. Her conviction was that she was not working for personal gain, but for a cause, and this persuaded them to respond to her request for objects. She made personal contact with people who visited the Old Museum in search of historical information or to pursue their studies.¹¹⁹ Many of the letters she wrote to ask for donations and information – which she called “my nasionale bedelary” [my national begging campaign]¹²⁰ – were conducted in a free-and-easy manner that reflected the fact that she had indeed made friends with the people concerned. She would often add personal details, asking for example, after the person's health, or their children.¹²¹ She also made a special effort, either by letter or personal contact, to get to know collectors, connoisseurs, curators, antique dealers and even the bureaucracy, hoping that they could in some way or another aid her in her work.

¹¹⁶ See S. Pearce, Objects as meaning; or narrating the past, in S. Pearce (ed.), *Objects of knowledge*, p. 127.

¹¹⁷ See P. van Mensch, Methodological museology: or, towards a theory of museum practice, in S. Pearce (ed.), *Objects of knowledge*, p. 146.

¹¹⁸ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1953 - 1954, departmental report for division of history, p. 35.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 34 and 1957 - 1958, departmental report for cultural history division, p. 36.

¹²⁰ NCHMA, System 1 No 18 TM1/62, letter Coetzee to D. Malan, dd 26 September 1962.

¹²¹ Ibid., System 1 No 11 TM1/56, letters Coetzee to A. Grabe, dd 28 December 1956 and System 1 No 12 TM1/57, to L. Pretorius, dd 3 January 1957.

She also followed the traditional way of collecting material for the Transvaal Museum: field trips. Collecting began to take place on a continuous basis as a spirit of preservation was awakened in the citizens of Pretoria,¹²² and which later spread throughout the country. By 1964 there were still parts of the Cape Province that had not been visited, but Coetzee claimed it was becoming more and more difficult to acquire objects for the Museum because many people were assembling private collections and purchase prices for such objects were rising.¹²³ This may have been, in part, the result of Coetzee's endeavours to inspire country-wide interest in cultural history objects.

One of the most important ways in which objects needed at the Old Museum were publicized were the many public lectures and talks that were presented by Coetzee on every aspect of the collection, preservation and study of objects.¹²⁴ She addressed women's associations, cultural boards and associations, students and school children, teachers' associations, historical and art societies and town councils.¹²⁵ In one year she delivered no less than 11 papers to various audiences in Pretoria and Johannesburg, but also in towns like Koffiefontein and Rustenburg.¹²⁶ For Coetzee, this was not a new venture: she had been interested in the preservation of the cultural heritage of South Africa, and specifically that of the Afrikaners, for many years. She received many invitations to address organizations and student bodies during and after the Voortrekker Centenary celebrations in 1938 and was also involved in organizing old fashioned wedding ceremonies and giving advice on period clothes.¹²⁷

Except for the occasional newspaper article that appeared, Coetzee's high profile and passionate promotion, in such a variety of ways, of the importance of the history collection and the deficiencies in the Museum collection was a completely new way of persuading

¹²² T. Venter, Huldeblyk aan Mev Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, *Museum Memo* 22(1), March 1994, p. 4.

¹²³ Cultural History Committee agenda, meeting 7 February 1964.

¹²⁴ See for example, Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1953 - 1954, departmental report for division of history, p. 36.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1954 - 1955, departmental report for history, p. 33 and 1956 - 1957, departmental report for cultural history, p. 34.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 1956 - 1957, departmental report for cultural history, p. 34.

¹²⁷ See NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, correspondence in files Persoonlik 1 and Voortrekker-kultuur 1938.

people to part with heirlooms and other treasured objects. The growth of the history collection is at the heart of the changes she wrought. The fact that the historical collection in particular continued to grow, is an accolade to Coetzee's endeavours and she received many expressions of thanks from the public. The collections, and the accompanying documentation, that she amassed for posterity are one of the most positive and praiseworthy aspects of her collections management style and her expertise was also reflected in her displays.

Her influence is also apparent in the collections management practices she introduced, including classification, cataloguing, marking and information retrieval. These were executed with single-mindedness and reflect the care and attention given to detail. The new procedure for classifying and cataloguing the objects was comprehensive. For the first time control over the location of objects was in place by annotating the catalogues with respect to storage or display locations. The growth of the collection exceeded all expectations, and the clearance of incoming material could barely be sustained. With the establishment of the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum forthcoming, Coetzee anticipated that the staff would have to be increased considerably to keep abreast of the continuous influx of material.¹²⁸

Coetzee did not start a new series of catalogues to incorporate her own particular style. Instead she used the existing catalogues in a new manner by classifying each object and by recording these particulars in the catalogue. The catalogues bear ample witness to her curatorial expertise, as she could also account for the collection by using the catalogues. She also designed and implemented a new information retrieval system in the form of a card catalogue for the history division. The standard of maintenance of the cataloguing was on a high level, because Coetzee did much of the work herself, or had the work done under her supervision.

The new procedure was a comprehensive one and dealt with the immediate entry of the objects in the documentation system and into the collection. The daily routine, as Coetzee called it, consisted of seeking out antiques, cataloguing, numbering and setting out these

¹²⁸ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1963 - 1964, annual report from the acting director, Old Museum, p. 11.

items on display.¹²⁹ The result, unfortunately, was that there was no time to work on the backlog of cataloguing.¹³⁰ Many objects, either without accession numbers or not yet accessioned, were unearthed and had to be documented. Although work on the backlog did progress slowly,¹³¹ by 1959 it was reported that “the arrears are so overwhelming that the most diligent efforts of the staff seem to have little visible effect in making up the leeway”.¹³² The pressure of the backlog remained throughout this period, as uncatalogued objects kept cropping up. Nonetheless vigorous attempts were made to establish a reliable and up-to-date cataloguing and information retrieval system. This is one of Coetzee’s most commendable documentation activities, particularly if it is taken into consideration that she established a card index system of at least 16 712 entries in ten years (see table 6).

Coetzee was also aware of the importance of preserving the collections in a correct and professional manner. The standard of maintenance of the objects was high as objects were sorted and then arranged in an orderly manner in storage. She also put into practice “a more scientific method of packing”¹³³ and where possible, conservation measures were taken for the objects on display. Another landmark reached in collections management practices, was the introduction of a conservation section. Historical material was restored in the Museum itself after the appointment of the first restorer, but objects outside his field of expertise were also contracted out and in this way satisfactory progress was reported in the field of restoration.¹³⁴ At a later stage an assistant was appointed, who, under Coetzee’s tuition, became an expert in textile preservation and the manufacture of replicas. Coetzee’s conservation knowledge was also enhanced by two overseas visits.

Training

Although there was still no training in museology available, Coetzee regarded in-house training as essential and the work on the card catalogue in particular could not be placed in

¹²⁹ Ibid., 1954 - 1955, departmental report for history, p. 32.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 1956 - 1957, departmental report for cultural history, p. 36.

¹³² Ibid., 1958 - 1959, departmental report for cultural history division, p. 38.

¹³³ Ibid., 1954 - 1955, departmental report for Africana division at Old Museum, p. 32.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 1957 - 1958, departmental report for cultural history division, p. 37.

the hands of an untrained person.¹³⁵ She gave instruction to the professional staff and the assistants on a continuous basis, but, says a former staff member, more important than this professional training was the moulding influence she had on them and the way she instilled an affinity for their own cultural goods.¹³⁶

As the need grew for cultural history museums throughout the country, Coetzee unceasingly gave advice at both provincial and local levels on the establishment, organization and requirements for local cultural history museums.¹³⁷ Either by letter or lecture, the collections management principles that she underwrote were spread country-wide. She stressed the importance of the classification and cataloguing of the objects according to factual information rather than hearsay or stories.¹³⁸ The eventual establishment of a post-graduate diploma course in museology at the University of Pretoria in 1976 can be ascribed to Coetzee's unstinting efforts and convincing argument that there was a dire need for the training of museologists.¹³⁹ In the training courses offered on documentation, collections, collections policy and collecting, conservation and exhibitions, basic collections management principles featured strongly.

Factors that influenced Kotie Roodt-Coetzee

Many factors influenced the mind set of this prime mover in the history division, many of them dating back to years before Coetzee's appointment at the Transvaal Museum. She regarded herself as an Afrikaner.¹⁴⁰ This was to a great extent the result of her upbringing, which was the most decisive factor in her life. She was born in the district of Lichtenburg, in the Transvaal, but grew up in the vicinity of Wolmaransstad. The family later moved to the district of Bronkhorstspuit, where they lived on the historical farm Nooitgedacht. Her mother, a teacher in the ZAR, influenced her to become a nationalist. Her father was a respected figure in both church and political circles. From him she learnt many things about

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1957 - 1958, departmental report for cultural history division, p. 38.

¹³⁶ O.J.O. Ferreira, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee, kulturele mentor en voog van vele, *Museum Memo*, 22(1), March 1994, p. 3.

¹³⁷ Transvaal Museum Annual Report, 1960 - 1961, departmental report for cultural history, p. 32.

¹³⁸ See for example, NCHMA, System 1 No 14 TM1/59, letter Coetzee to C.J. Joubert, dd 25 November 1959.

¹³⁹ Ibid., Kotie Roodt Coetzee Archives, file Memorandums. Memorandum oor die Opleiding van vakkundige personeel vir kultuurmuseums, n.d.

¹⁴⁰ A. Gay, Africana collection, *South African Country Life*, no. 21, September 1996, p. 37.

the vicissitudes of the Boer pioneers and a love for their material culture, how they built houses, made furniture and cured hides.¹⁴¹

As a student at the University of Pretoria, Coetzee studied cultural history in the new department of Afrikaans Art and Culture that was established in 1931. The head of the department was Prof. M.L. du Toit, an inspired and gifted teacher. Under his guidance a cultural and art society with the name *Castalides-kunsvereniging* was established to give its members insight in the beauty of the Afrikaans culture, to promote art and to assemble a collection of Afrikaans cultural objects.¹⁴² Whether this last aim was ever realized, is unclear, but as chairperson of the society, Coetzee had already developed a close relationship with cultural history objects. As first year student she had to write a paper on the Boer prisoners of war. At the Old Museum she worked with “’n rommelkis met ongeïdentifiseerde, ongedokumenteerde en ongenommerde voorwerpe uit die verskillende kampe” [a chest filled with oddments, unidentified, undocumented and unaccessioned objects from various camps]. She describes this experience as follows:

Saam met hierdie eerste kennismaking met ‘n kultuurmuseum groei die besef van die noodsaaklikheid van stoflike voorwerpe by die teoretiese studie van kultuurgeskiedenis en die vraag ontstaan: Hoe beskryf ‘n mens sulke voorwerpe?¹⁴³

Under the auspices of the Department of Afrikaans Art and Culture students decided to publish a new magazine, *Castalia*, with a view “om ons eie die vergetelheid te ontruk en aan ons voor te hou” [to save what is ours from oblivion and hold them close to our hearts].¹⁴⁴ Two articles appeared in this first issue, the one entitled *Die krygsgevangenes as ‘n kultuurgroep*, written by Kotie Roodt in conjunction with P.C. Coetzee. The other article was *Sosiale basis van Kuns*, and was also by Kotie Roodt.¹⁴⁵ In this article, albeit with

¹⁴¹ NCHMA, Kotie Roodt Coetzee Archives, C.V. Kotie Roodt-Coetzee en die kultuurhistoriese museumwese in Suid-Afrika, pp. 1 - 2.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 394.

¹⁴³ K. Roodt-Coetzee, My herinneringe aan die voorgeskiedenis van die Nasional Kultuurhistoriese en Opelugmuseum, *Museum Memo*, 17(3), September 1989, p. 5. [Along with this first acquaintance with the cultural museum, the realization grew that it is essential that material objects should also form part of the theoretical study of cultural history. And the questions arises: How does one describe such objects? (Translated from the Afrikaans.)]

¹⁴⁴ H.G. Viljoen, ‘n Nuwe tydskrif, *Castalia*, no. 1, October 1934, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ K. Roodt and P.C. Coetzee, Die krygsgevangenes as ‘n kultuurgroep; K. Roodt, Sosiale basis van kuns, *Castalia*, no. 1, October 1934, pp. 13 - 18 and 36 - 39.

reference to art, Coetzee uses for the first time the words that would become her manifesto,

Dit is as't ware 'n dokument¹⁴⁶

[This is, in truth, a document]

and adding that art has to express something of the environment and the spiritual aura in which it has been created. In the years to come she would extend and expand upon this view and come to include all cultural objects.

Prof. (P.C.) Coetzee was a trained librarian and later became professor of library science at the University of Pretoria. As such he was knowledgeable about documentation and information retrieval systems. Prof. Coetzee also had an excellent knowledge of philosophy, the classical cultures and in particular Western cultural history.¹⁴⁷ Throughout their married life, during the years of Coetzee's involvement in the Voortrekker festivities of 1938 and 1949, during her career at the Transvaal Museum and later as director of the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum, he remained her friend, mentor, inspiration and teacher par excellence in all matters regarding cultural history and its documentation and museology.

Her view on the cultural heritage of the Afrikaner was augmented by avid reading of Afrikaans writers such as F.C.L. Bosman, who wrote about Afrikaans culture¹⁴⁸ and S.P.E. Boshoff, who propounded the theory of inherited goods, own goods and borrowed goods (Afrikaans: *erfgoed, eiegoed en leengoed*)¹⁴⁹ that would later find a place in Coetzee's own way of viewing cultural objects.

Another decisive influence that shaped Coetzee's ideas and ideals for a cultural history museum was an address delivered at the opening of the University of Pretoria on 25 February 1938 by Prof. J.F.W. Grosskopf. He spoke about the museums that he had seen in the Scandinavian countries with their collections of buildings and cultural objects. He was of the opinion that no other kind of display would bring visitors so intimately into contact

¹⁴⁶ My bold. K. Roodt, *Sosiale basis van kuns*, *Castalia*, no. 1, October 1934, p. 39.

¹⁴⁷ K. Roodt-Coetzee, *My herinneringe aan die voorgeskiedenis van die Nasionale Kultuurhistoriese en Opelugmuseum*, *Museum Memo*, 17(3), September 1989, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ NCHMA, Kotie Roodt-Coetzee Archives, F.C.L. Bosman, *Afrikaanse kultuur en kultuurbesit*, 'n oorsig. Reprint from *Die Burger*, 15 - 18 December 1931, dated 1934 in Coetzee's handwriting.

¹⁴⁹ S.P.E. Boshoff, *Volk en taal van Suid-Afrika*.

with their ancestors than this complete image of the past.¹⁵⁰ Yet another important influence on her philosophy probably was a paper, delivered at a meeting of the Royal Society of Arts in 1949, found in her archives and also describing folk museums. Here she probably found many links with her own views that objects were “precious thoughts of the past”¹⁵¹ and that a folk museum is

a museum of life and culture and consists, in its most satisfactory form, of two sections: a museum block of galleries and an area of park land ... [that] provides what may be termed the ecological setting, where specimens are exhibited in houses, while the houses are set out in their true environment ...¹⁵²

Giliomee, in a recent publication, claims that

During the 1950s the Afrikaners in growing numbers saw themselves as part of a *volksbeweging*, a people on the move, putting their imprint on the state, defining its symbols, making bilingualism a reality, adapting to an urban environment and giving their schools and universities a pronounced Afrikaans character.¹⁵³

He could with justification have added:

... and inspired by Kotie Roodt Coetzee, who gave new meaning to their cultural goods and their assemblage in cultural history museums.

Testing the hypotheses

In view of the above assessment the following conclusions can be made:

There is a direct relationship between previous collections management practices for the anthropology, archaeology and history collections at the Transvaal Museum for the period 1913 - 1953 and the problems encountered at present (2005) by the collections management department of the National Cultural History Museum. The fact that the Transvaal Museum was for all practical purposes a natural history museum, contributed to a large extent to these problems. The changes in collections management over time can also be explained in terms of the prevalent features of the period under discussion and the museological

¹⁵⁰ K. Roodt-Coetzee, ‘n Opelugmuseum vir Pretoria, *Pretoriana*, no 46, December 1964, pp. 7 - 8.

¹⁵¹ I.C. Peate, The Folk Museum, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, XCVII (4803), 9 September 1949, p. 794.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 796 - 797. Coetzee also quotes from Peate’s paper in her article, ‘n Opelugmuseum vir Pretoria, *Pretoriana*, no 46, December 1964, p. 18.

¹⁵³ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners, biography of a people*, p. 491.

dynamics of the time.

It is clear that many problems experienced in the pre-1953 period were addressed in the one that followed (1953 - 1964), especially with regard to cultural history, but subsequent events leading to the development of the National Cultural History and Open-Air Museum are probably responsible for additional collection and management issues that remain unresolved. It is recommended that another research project be undertaken for the period 1964 to the present to unravel still outstanding issues.