

# Pacific Regional Conservation Centre

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The idea of establishing a regional conservation center to serve the needs of museums, libraries and archival repositories in the Pacific area was instigated by the Director and staff of the Bishop Museum. They viewed with increasing dismay the almost complete lack of suitable facilities for preserving the material cultural and historical heritage — artefacts, books, documents, photographs — represented by valuable collections in museums and libraries both in the Hawaiian islands and on islands in the South Pacific. They felt that something should be done to remedy the situation, and in the summer of 1973 I was invited by the Bishop Museum to spend four weeks in Hawaii visiting museums, libraries and archival repositories to assess their conservation problems, and to consider the feasibility of setting up a regional center. Such a regional center would serve the needs of the many small institutions in the Hawaiian islands and spread throughout the South Pacific.

On the basis of my report a proposal was presented to the National Endowment for the Arts (a U.S. Federal organization) for financial assistance in setting up this center. At the same time letters of support were sought and received from museums, libraries and archival repositories who would be willing to avail themselves of the services of such a regional center; in all eighteen institutions agreed to participate in the formation of the proposed regional center. While I was in Hawaii I was asked if I would be prepared to direct the center, and I was glad to accept this tentative invitation.

The National Endowment for the Arts agreed to give financial support to the proposed center in its formative years. An initial grant of \$59,148 was made for the first year and the Pacific Regional Conservation Center was formally established in September 1974. A further grant of \$159,000 has been made to cover the period 1975/77, and it is

anticipated that further financial assistance will be received from the National Endowment for the Arts. These grants are given on the condition that they are matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis by contributions from non-federal sources — private donors, trusts, and foundations.

The Center is located at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu where space for two laboratories, one for work on objects and the other for work on library/archival material and works of art on paper, were provided. These two laboratories were fully furnished with modern laboratory benching during the first year of operation, and at the same time the necessary equipment for carrying out the modern techniques of conservation was acquired. During the first year two members of staff were engaged — one for working on objects and the other on library/archival material and works of art on paper. In the second year two additional members of staff have been appointed.

Membership of the Center is open to any museum, library or archival repository or similar non-profit organization in the Pacific area upon payment of annual dues of \$25, \$50, or \$100 according to the institution's annual budget. It is gratifying to note that during its two years of operation there has been a gradual increase in the number of member institutions. From the original eighteen supporting institutions, the number of member institutions has increased to thirty-eight, of which thirteen are in the South Pacific islands.

To assist in the administration of the Center an Advisory Council was set up consisting of five elected representatives of the member institutions, a representative of the Hawaii Museums Association, two representatives of the Trustees of the Bishop Museum and six other invited individuals selected for their interest in the activities of the Center, together with the Chairman of the Center and the

Director of the Bishop Museum as *ex-officio* members. The President and Secretary of the Council are chosen from among the representatives of member institutions, and the Council normally meets twice a year. There is also an annual general meeting which all member institutions can attend and appoint one delegate with voting rights.

The Center provides the following specific services to member institutions: 1. Advice and consultation on conservation problems, 2. Conservation treatment of artefacts and library/archival material at a nominal rate set by the Advisory Council, 3. Free distribution of a series of bulletins on specific topics of conservation, and 4. The provision of training facilities at the Center for staff of member institutions. As a practical first step towards assessing the conservation needs of a member institution, members of the staff of the Center have visited member institutions to undertake a survey of the collections, both on exhibit and in storage. On the basis of this survey, a detailed report is made to the institution about the environmental conditions and the general state of the collections with suitable recommendations about control of museum and library environment and any material in need of treatment. In this way it is then possible to draw up a long-term program for future conservation work. Some of this may be of such a nature that it can be carried out by the staff of the institution with advice from the Center. Otherwise,

objects or library/archival material requiring specialized expert attention will be sent to the Center for treatment. It has been found that this system of preparing survey reports for member institutions works very well. The staff of the Center becomes familiar with an institution's collection and its particular conservation problems, and the member institution is made aware of what can be done, if necessary, to improve the condition of the institution's collection.

A regional conservation center covering such a large geographical area obviously has its own particular problems in providing a practical service to its widely spread member institutions. This was one reason for the decision to issue a series of bulletins — each dealing in simple terms with specific topics of curatorial conservation — what a curator should know about environmental control of museum and library conditions to prevent possible damage. Recently it has been possible to use the PEACE SAT telecommunication system to hold round-table discussions with the Center's member institutions in the South Pacific Area.

In presenting this report about the establishment and activities of the Pacific Regional Conservation Center, due acknowledgement must be paid to the National Endowment for the Arts for the generous grants which have made possible the setting up of the Center.