



Conserve O Gram

July 1993

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) is entrusted with the care and preservation of an extensive and diverse collection of museum objects. The NPS uses the term *museum object* to refer to all types of materials included in a park's museum collection. Museum objects are defined as pre-historic and historic objects, artifacts, works of art, archival documents, and natural history specimens that are part of museum collections. Elements, fragments, and components of structures are objects if they are no longer a part of the original structure.

Museum collection preservation includes organization, adequate housing and storage, protection, environmental monitoring and control, maintenance, proper exhibition, and conservation treatment of museum objects. To carry out this work, the NPS provides parks with guides, such as *NPS Management Policies* (Dec 88); *Cultural Resources Management Guideline*, NPS-28: Release No.4 (in press); *Natural Resources Management Guideline*, NPS-77: Release No.1; NPS Special Directive 80-1, "Guidance for Meeting NPS Preservation and Protection Standards for Museum Collections"; *NPS Museum Handbook*, Part I: Museum Collections, (revised 9/90); *NPS Museum Handbook*, Part II: Museum Records, (under revision); *NPS Tools of the Trade*, and *Manual for Museums*, by Ralph Lewis (1976, out of print). These references provide NPS-specific philosophy, policy, and guidelines to be used in conjunction with the wide range of information available throughout the museum profession.

With the introduction and acceptance of new techniques and practices in museum collections preservation, the above-listed guides may not provide the most current or detailed instruction required for the ongoing daily care of museum objects. *Conserve O Gram* technical leaflets are published to ensure up-to-date information is

available and to guide and assist park staff in carrying out, in a professional manner, projects identified in collection management planning documents.

Conserve O Gram topics include:

- recent changes in specific NPS collection preservation and protection procedures and techniques
- specific procedures, techniques, and materials for storage and exhibition of museum objects, and for ongoing preventive conservation, including housekeeping
- curatorial health and safety updates, including material hazard information, changes in safety standards, and recommendations on procedures, product use, or protective gear
- information concerning the characteristics of specific materials and advanced laboratory treatments to assist park staff in recognizing deterioration, evaluating and describing object condition, and reviewing treatments proposed by professional conservators
- information on new techniques in the museum field that supplement or revise generally accepted museum collection preservation practice
- sources of assistance, including bibliographies.

The *Conserve O Gram* series does not provide broad policy statements, introduce fundamental museum concepts, nor serve as either a complete collection management or conservation manual.

Who Is the Conserve O Gram Audience?

Conserve O Gram leaflets are intended for all NPS park staff responsible for the care or use of

museum collections, including museum curators; museum specialists, technicians, and aids; collection managers; park rangers; and resource management specialists. The *Conserve O Gram* series is distributed to all NPS parks and centers and is available by subscription outside the NPS to professionals in historical societies, museums and other organizations and to interested individuals. Subscription information is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, FAX (202) 512-2233. The updated and revised basic set will be followed by semi-annual supplements of updates, revisions, and new issues.

Some leaflets provide guidance for staff with little or no previous museum training or experience, while others provide updated information for the experienced staff member. If there is any doubt concerning the correct application of *Conserve O Gram* information, NPS readers are encouraged to contact the author named on the leaflet, the Regional Curator, the Curatorial Services Division, WASO, or the Harpers Ferry Center Division of Conservation before proceeding. Non-NPS subscribers may contact the author named on the leaflet, a local conservator, NPS, Harpers Ferry Center, Division of Conservation, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia 25425, or NPS, Curatorial Services Division, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia 25425.

Conservation Limits

The physical care of collections is an ongoing process involving both preventive conservation, the purpose of which is to prevent or retard deterioration of objects, and conservation treatment, whereby the object is actively stabilized from further deterioration. The *Conserve O Gram* focus is on ***preventive conservation***. In the NPS, complex conservation treatments are performed by professional conservators, either within the Service or on contract, at the request of the responsible park staff. The *Conserve O Gram* may assist the park staff in identifying appropriate levels of treatment and in recognizing conditions that require professional conservation attention. Related treatments beyond those described in the leaflets should be undertaken only with the direct

oversight of a trained curator or conservator, or by those who have had specific training or experience in such procedures.

Updating the Series

The *Conserve O Gram* series is produced in the form of loose-leaf pages to allow for changes as practices and technology evolve. *Conserve O Gram* leaflets are reviewed periodically and updated or revised as necessary. A *Conserve O Gram* is removed from circulation if its content becomes obsolete, or if it is incorporated into a more permanent document such as an NPS handbook or guideline. The Table of Contents is updated to reflect all additions, revisions, and deletions. Many of the leaflets in the *Conserve O Gram* series have been renumbered. The Table of Contents reflects this change. All *Conserve O Gram* Tables of Contents dated before July 1993 should be discarded.

Contributing to the Series

The *Conserve O Gram* series is produced under the direction of the NPS Curatorial Services Division, Washington, D.C. with the assistance of the NPS Harpers Ferry Center Division of Conservation. The staff welcomes contributions in the form of comments, suggested topics, or *Conserve O Gram* drafts. Before submitting a draft, please contact NPS, Curatorial Services Division, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia 25425, (304) 535-6410, to discuss the topic and format.

Note

To assist readers with identifying, locating, and obtaining supplies and equipment discussed in the series, specific products, vendors, and manufacturers may be cited by an author. Mention of a product, a manufacturer, or a supplier by name in this publication does not constitute an endorsement of that product or supplier by the National Park Service. Sources named in a *Conserve O Gram* are not all inclusive. It is suggested that readers also seek alternative product and vendor information in order to assess the full range of available supplies and equipment.