Educating the educators

by Richard I. Ford, editor, CMA Newsletter and director, Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan

How often have you visited a social anthropologist's home decorated with rare ethnographic art as a symbolic reminder of the last trip to Melanesia? When was the last time a botanist or zoologist brought an archaeological "pot" to you for identification and evaluation?

These are daily occurrences for many curators. Academic collectors present museums with special difficulties. Travels of professors in all disciplines expose them to exotic art, often ethnographic, and to illicit, though seemingly legal, vendors of antiquities throughout the world. Purchase of these objects is as reflexive as acquisition of any souvenir. No thought is given to violation of local laws, to the destruction of the archaeological record innocent purchases cause, or to the anthropological value these objects would have for scholars if such items were part of the public domain.

It is, unfortunately, a problem for which the solution is in the exclusive hands of museum curators. While public education has been a paramount obligation of museums, we have naively assumed that our professional, non-museum colleagues share a similar value system.

This is not the case. As the availability of traditional materials becomes scarcer, our task is to convince friends and professional associates to mend their ways by ceasing to participate in illegal purchases and by donating or willing their ethnographic art to museums.

Bonnie Burnham's The Protection of Cultural Property (1974) published by The International Council of Museums is indispensable to inform curators and their academic associates about national laws and international agreements covering archaeological and ethnographic "art." Graduate students

continued on page 4
history, astronomy, botany, folk life
studies, geology, history, history of
technology, or zoology. The program
should include course work in such a
discipline and the equivalent of no less
than six semester hours of museum theory,
practice, and history. The graduate de-
gree may be awarded either in the aca-
demic subject or in museum studies.

Such a program ordinarily will require
a period equivalent to not less than
four academic terms and should include
a supervised museum internship or super-
vised full-time work experience of not
less than two months. Ideally the full-
time internship or work experience will
be six months or more in length. The
internship or supervised work experience
must be designed to benefit the student.
While the student may do work valuable
to the museum, this contribution should
not be the touchstone of the program.

The curriculum should include instruc-
tion in the following areas:

(a) The ethics of the museum profes-
sion, public accountability, and the
history, philosophy, and purposes of re-
presentative kinds of museums.
(b) The collection, care, handling,
preservation, and conservation of museum
objects; the management of collections
including registration and cataloging.
(c) Research and the study of objects
as sources of information; the use of
objects to impart understanding; objects
as sources of aesthetic experience.
(d) Education and interpretation.
(e) Exhibitions and experimental stu-
dies of how museum visitors learn from
and respond to museum programs.
(f) Museum administration, which may
include: trustee-director-staff rela-
tions; relations with governmental agen-
cies; legal problems; fund raising, bud-
getting and accounting; the museum audi-
cence and community relations; personnel
and labor relations; administrative plan-
ing and evaluation; physical facilities.

EDITORIAL continued

in particular should be told in advance
of their departure what laws apply in
the countries where they will study.
Occasionally academics in other fields
inquire about buying "things" abroad,
and they, too, must be informed of the
harm to the anthropological record their
acquisitiveness may cause.

Granting agencies have a responsi-
bility as well. Most foundations re-
quire that all objects purchased with
funds they distribute be deposited in
an appropriate repository. Enforce-
ment of these provisions is difficult,
however, and often ignored. These sti-
pulations are further complicated by
the fact that many objects received by
ethnologists are gifts from informants
or were purchased with personal funds
even though nothing would have been
obtained if the grant had not been a-
warded.

Objects already in private collec-
tions are the final area of concern.
Many of these were obtained before new
export laws were passed or traditional
ethnographic materials became unavail-
able. The solution, I believe, is to
encourage academic colleagues to bequest
these items to museums. Their senti-
mental value will not be the same for
children or other heirs, and though
they may accrue significant monetary
value through the years, their ines-
timable scientific merit should be ac-
corded highest priority.

Arrangements for museums to re-
ceive personal collections or even in-
dividual objects require more than just
a legal arrangement. Since most person-
al collections are not cataloged or
given even minimal description ex-
cept by oral recall, written documenta-
tion of the objects in question de-
serves immediate attention.

The lax attitude many anthropolo-
gists accord these objects and their
scientific significance reflects the
continuing problem museum anthropolo-
gists face convincing academic col-
leagues of the intrinsic value of
material culture for anthropological
study. Our educational mission ob-
viously does not stop with the public.