Solving the mystery of the boy in the iron coffin

BY AMY ROGERS NAZAROV
Special to The Torch

Were he alive today, the boy buried in an iron coffin in northwest Washington, D.C., before the Civil War would probably be astonished to know how many people have become fascinated by his life story.

From tracing his family tree to developing theories about what caused his death a century and a half ago, several Smithsonian staff have become deeply involved in the brief life of William Taylor White (1837-1852). The mystery surrounding the remains—preserved nearly intact—launched a slew of anthropological, genealogical, radiographic and biomedical research projects by scientists at the Museum of Natural History, a cadre of interns from George Washington University and numerous volunteers.

“Many people have provided their time and expertise to help in this research,” says Deborah Hull-Walski, Anthropology Collections manager and historical archaeologist at MNH. “Everyone wanted to help identify this boy.”

Through painstaking research of death certificates, school records, orphan bonds and other primary sources, Hull-Walski’s team winnowed the number of possible identities for the boy in the coffin down to three, including White. William White, from Accomack, Va., had been a student at a preparatory school near the site where the coffin was found. Additional genealogical research helped track down the living relatives of these three candidates.

Among those people was Linda Dwyer of Lancaster, Penn. “My son answered the phone one day,” recalls Dwyer. “He told me it was someone from the Smithsonian.”

The caller was Hull-Walski, asking if Dwyer, thought to be a descendant of William White’s sister, Sally, would be willing to provide a DNA sample via a cheek swab.

Three previous DNA samples had been obtained from other possible in-liners, but none provided the link that would match them to DNA obtained from the boy’s remains. The team’s hopes were cautiously pinned on Dwyer, though they braced themselves for another negative.

However, the result was a match. Dwyer was William White’s great-great-great niece.

“When Emperor Haile Selassie I was crowned, he received the titles King of Kings, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah and Light of the World. Preachers in Jamaica saw the coronation as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. (Photo detail courtesy of the Library of Congress)
Grammar nominations
The National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences has announced the nominees for the 50th annual Grammy Awards. The Smithsonian Chamber Music Society’s recording of Gustav Mahler’s “Das Lied von der Erde” was nominated in the category of “Best Small Ensemble.” This is the first Grammy nomination for the Chamber Music Society.

Two Smithsonian Folkways recordings also were nominated in the “Best Traditional World Music Album ( Vocal or Instrumental)” category. The nominated recordings are: “When the Soul is Settled: Music of Iraq,” Rahim Al Haj with Souhail Kaspar, and “Singing for Life: Songs of Hope, Healing and HIV/AIDS in Uganda,” various artists, produced by Gregory Burz.

The Grammy Awards will be broadcast on Feb. 10 on CBS at 8 p.m.

Shriver portrait
A portrait of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founder of the Special Olympics, has been commissioned by the Portrait Gallery from artist David Lenz, winner of NPG’s Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition in 2006. The painting, expected to be presented to NPG later this year, will be added to the gallery’s permanent collection. The Portrait Gallery commissions a portrait for the collection from the winner of the Boochever Competition, which is held every three years. Shriver is a good choice of subject for Lenz, his son, Sam, has Down syndrome and is an active and enthusiastic Special Olympics athlete. Lenz is an admirer of Shriver because of the international role she has assumed as the founder of Special Olympics.

“This project is extremely meaningful to me because Mr. Shriver has tirelessly advocated for people like Sam,” Lenz says.

The Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition is made possible by the generosity of Virginia Outwin Boochever, whose gift fosters the acquisition of contemporary portrait for the Portrait Gallery.

Postal Museum
The Smithsonian will continue to showcase the history of the nation’s mail service since its beginning in 1872, through the exhibit, “The Postal Museum: Celebrating 140 Years of the Post Office,” which opened Nov. 6, 2007, through a joint agreement between SI and the Postal Service. Opened in July 1993, NPM maintains and exhibits one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of stamps and philatelic material in the world.

Henry Papers award
The staff who worked on The Papers of Joseph Henry, volumes 1 through 11, were recently awarded the 2007 Eugene S. Ferguson Prize for Outstanding Reference Works by the Society for the History of Technology.

The Ferguson Prize Committee’s citation reads: “From the very first volume, the project has consistently met superior standards for documentary history...The editions have illuminating introductory essays, a careful selection of documents and extensive annotations. The project will, of course, serve as an enduring, indispensable guide for exploring the life and work of Joseph Henry and the earliest days of the Smithsonian Institution.”

The citation concludes with the observation that “The staff of the Henry Papers deserves high praise and congratulations for their well researched and superbly organized editions.”

Latino agreement
The Latino Center has signed a memorandum of understanding with Fundación Carso, which operates the Museo Soumaya, to cooperate. The project will be the Soumaya, a nonprofit cultural institution located in Mexico City whose mission is to collect, research, preserve and exhibit Latin American, Mexican and European art.

The Latino Center and Fundación Carso will develop a series of exhibitions, public programs, educational materials and other activities to highlight Latin American and Hispanic culture and heritage.

Funding Director of the American Indian Museum W. Richard “Rick” West delivered a presentation at his retirement ceremony in November. (Photo by Ken Rahaim)

Assembled for the signing of the Latino Center’s new agreement with Fundación Carso are: seated, from left, Richard Kurin, Acting Under Secretary for History and Culture; Latino Center Director Pilar O’Leary; Carlos Slim, president of the board of directors of Fundación Carso; and Smithsonian National Latino Advisory Council member, Gale Bush. Standing, from left, Guillermo Gutierrez, George Washington University; Gloria Rodriguez, vice chair of the Smithsonian Latino Board; Juan Garcia de Oteyza, executive director, Mexican Cultural Institute; Museo Samayo Director Alfonso Miranda Márquez; Latino Center Core Programs Director Joanne Flores and Noralisa León, Latino Center deputy director and external affairs officer. (Ken Rahaim photo)

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OBITUARIES

Silvio Bedini
Silvio A. Bedini, historian emeritus and an expert on timekeeping and the history of early American scientific instruments, died of pneumonia Nov. 14 at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, Md.

Mr. Bedini came to the Smithsonian in 1961. He was assistant director and deputy director of what was then the National Museum of History and Technology. He wrote more than 20 books, beginning with Early American Scientific Instruments and Their Makers (1964) and most recently, With Compass and Chain: Early American Surveyors and Their Instruments (2001). In 1978, Mr. Bedini became the keeper of rare books at SI’s Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology. He retired in 1978 but continued work as historian emeritus until his death.

Mr. Bedini was born in Ridgefield, Conn., and attended Columbia University before joining the Army Air Forces during World War II. He served in Army intelligence at a top secret interrogation center for German prisoners of war.

After the war, he returned to Connecticut to run his family’s contract and landscaping business. In his spare time, he researched and wrote articles about science and technology for schools, encyclopedias and a hobby magazine before joining SI.

He received the Abbott Payson Usher Prize in 1962 and the Leonardo da Vinci Medal in 2000 from the Society for the History of Technology. Survivors include his wife of 56 years, Gale Bedini, of Silver Spring, Md., and two children, Leandra Be- dini of Hillside, N.J., and Peter Bedini, of Silver Spring.

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New York Times
Published monthly for Smithsonian staff by the Office of Public Affairs, SIB 354, 11th Floor, 355, P.O. Box 37012, Washington, D.C. 20013-7012. To request this publication in an alternative format, call (202) 633-5184 (voice) or (202) 633-5205 (TTY).

Evelyn Lieberman, Director of Communications and Public Affairs
Alex di Giovanni, Editor

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Telephone: (202) 633-5184
E-mail: torch@si.edu
Printed: See “Staff Information”
Nurturing a new generation of scholars

The scientists, scholars, artists and researchers who become leaders in their fields share one defining characteristic: they are passionately committed to their work. Spurred on by passion does not simply appear out of nowhere—it must be inspired and nurtured.

For generations, the Smithsonian has played a critical role in training the next generation of scholars by offering internships, short-term visiting appointments and fellowships at the predoctoral and postdoctoral levels. Funding comes from many sources, including endowments, grants and contracts, federal funds and gifts. All together, SI invests close to $10 million each year in this training.

Postdoctoral Fellow Kris Helgen first came to SI as a college intern with the Museum of Natural History’s Research Training Program. His work with MNH mammalogist Don Wilson led him to the West Indies, Bordeau and the Andes, and research visits to more than 40 natural history museums. He is currently working with SI’s mammal collection—the world’s largest with 600,000 specimens—to describe new species he has discovered.

At 27, Kris is already making an outstanding contribution to his field, having published 30 papers, most recently in the journal Science. In September 2007, he explained to the Smithsonian National Board how the Smithsonian has both inspired his passion and nurtured his talent: “The Smithsonian gave me the privilege and pleasure of setting foot in a true community of scholars focused on the intellectual path I dreamed of walking down. By returning as an intern, a visiting scientist and now a postdoctoral fellow, I have worked with scientists who are giants in their field and with world-class collections. The Smithsonian has been the single most important refrain in my training, development and aspirations.”

According to SI’s Office of Research Training and Services, during fiscal year 2007, the Smithsonian hosted 1,014 interns; of these, about 300 received a stipend—the rest were unpaid. Competitive fellowships were awarded to 210 fellows and 100 more received direct funding from sources outside SI. In addition, 270 short-term visiting scholars and fellows conducted research at SI, including 50 at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge, Mass. My belief in the value of the fellowship programs at SI is reflected in my decision earlier this year to allocate an additional $500,000 to our central Fellowship Program from funds donated by the Smithsonian National Board.

Last fall, I met with a group of graduate school deans from leading American colleges and universities. They were interested in the many fellowship opportunities at SI in the sciences, history and the arts. I urged them to think about their role in creating the pipeline of scholars who apply for our fellowships. The candidate pool needs to be both broader and deeper, with more candidates—particularly underrepresented minorities and women—interested in more fields of study.

Some SI units, such as the Environmental Research Center in Edge-water, Md., have focused considerable energy on raising funds and attracting minority candidates. Approximately 20 fellows and 43 interns worked alongside SERC scientists in 2007 on coastal ecosystems. Over the last 3 years, SERC’s internship program has trained more than 1,000 undergraduates, 30 percent of whom are minorities. Today, about one-third of SERC interns are supported by funding from the National Science Foundation; the others are funded through a variety of grants, including contributions from the SI Women’s Committee.

Some of our fellowship programs have influenced the development of an entire discipline. For example, the residential program at the American Art Museum has enriched the field of American art history for more than three decades, serving more than 340 scholars since its founding in 1970. Graduates of this highly competitive program teach at leading private and public universities and are curators at museums around the world. Cynthia Mills, a former fellow and now academic programs coordinator at SAAM’s Research and Scholars Center, explained the impact of the program to the National Board at the Board’s September meeting: “Our fellows share their experience here to be life-changing—an opportunity to immerse themselves in dissertation and book projects amid a wealth of resources. A number have gone on to be luminaries of the field. The program alumni are a testimonial to the Smithsonian’s central—I should say essential—place in the study of American art and artists.”

In my own travels around the globe, I often meet outstanding leaders who tell me they were once SI interns or fellows, and that the Smithsonian proved to be the transforming experience in their careers.

Ira Rubinoff, Under-Secretary for Science, emphasized SI’s role in creating the next generation of global leaders at the meeting of the National Board. He explained, “Our staff members learn from fellows, and these young people, in turn, become the professors at universities who send their best students to us. “Fellowships create a multigenerational network as skills and knowledge are transferred from one generation to the next,” Rubinoff continued. “The more fellows and graduate students we train, the more vibrant and forward-looking our intellectual community will be, and the stronger the Smithsonian will become.”

We must continue to train the next generation, providing young scholars like Kris Helgen with the best the Smithsonian can offer and helping to create the next generation of leaders. I can think of no better way to invest in our future. ■ — Cristián Samper

FINE FELLOWS

Recently, two postdoctoral fellows at SAAM received national recognition for their achievements. Gaspar Bakos was named one of the nation’s “Brilliant Ten” by Popular Science magazine for his work creating a network of robotic telescopes to search for planets orbiting distant stars.

Lisa Kaltenegger was honored in the Smithsonian magazine article “America’s Young Innovators in the Arts and Sciences: 37 Under 36.” She was recognized for her research modeling the atmospheres of distant exoplanets to determine what signs of life we may be able to detect.

Lisa Kaltenegger peers through the eyepiece of a telescope at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Mass. (Photo by Christine Pulliam)

The exhibition features artifacts and ephemera, such as posters, buttons, costumes and drums, that tell the story of how Rastafari grew and spread not only to Jamaica but around the world, evolving into different “houses” or denominations, and highlighting the repatriated black Westeriners who have formed a Rastafarian community in Ethiopia. “I am smitten by this culture,” Homiak says. In the course of studying Rastafari, he continues, “you become an advocate for the Rastafari. You find that they have a message for the world.”

Homiak hopes visitors to the exhibition leave with an understanding that Rastafari is more substantive than dreadlocks and reggae. “There’s some depth behind this,” he says. “There’s both resolve and poetry to it. It’s about the resilience of faith and commitment and dignity” of the Rastafari who speak in the video, and see the eloquence and dignity “of the Rastafari who speak in the video, and see the eloquence and dignity” of the Rastafari who speak in the video, and see the eloquence and dignity” of the Rastafari who speak in the video, and see the eloquence and dignity” of the Rastafari who speak in the video, and see the eloquence and dignity” of the Rastafari who speak in the video, and see the eloquence and dignity” of the Rastafari who speak in the video, and see the eloquence and dignity” of the Rastafari who speak in the video, and see the eloquence and dignity” of the Rastafari who speak in the video, and see the eloquence and dignity.”

Lisa Kaltenegger peers through the eyepiece of a telescope at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in Cambridge, Mass. (Photo by Christine Pulliam)

Hi Mom! The Air and Space Museum’s Udvar-Hazy Center welcomed its five millionth visitor, Quinn Neibergall, Dec. 8. Quinn, his parents and grandparents received a personal tour of the museum and a number of gifts. Quinn’s dad, Gerdon Neibergall, is a U.S. Air Force F-16 pilot assigned to the Pentagon. (Mark Avino photo)
SPOTLIGHT ON PEOPLE

Pamela West: Someone to watch over NMAI

From her vantage point in the control room of the American Indian Museum, Cpl. Pamela Nash West, a museum protection officer with the Office of Facilities Engineering and Operations, keeps a close watch over the museum she has served since the day it opened to the public.

Among other duties, she is responsible for monitoring the security alarms and the nine closed-circuit television screens that help her and the rest of the NMAI security team make sure that staff, visitors and collections are protected 24 hours a day.

But West, who joined SI in 1998, doesn’t spend all her time in the control room. If the gallery floors are short of officers, she is quick to help out and frequently assumes other duties without being asked. She also has earned praise for her diligence in organizing security for the frequent special events held at the museum.

“Cpl. West acts as a role model, displaying a positive and professional image at all times,” Assistant Security Manager Teresita Marciano says, explaining why she and other managers nominated West for a Smithsonian “Unsung Hero” award presented in September 2007.

“She consistently receives praise from visitors and staff for her outstanding customer service skills,” Marciano continues. “She is committed to providing a welcoming, positive and supportive work environment.” West is modest about her accomplishments and is quick to credit the rest of the security team. “We all help each other out because we are all dedicated to the security of the museum. I think our team is so successful because the managers and officers all get along so well,” she says.

Marciano agrees, but gives West more credit. “Her friendly disposition brings out the best in each individual, recognizing the potential in every person. She is always developing new approaches to improve the way we serve our visitors.”

West’s team-building skills will no doubt stand her in good stead as she works toward her career goals at SI. “By the time I retire, I hope to be a manager,” she says. ■

— Sarah Heffera

Tony Barthel knows even bears need buddies

Merlin, the National Zoo’s adult male sloth bear, has a wonderful new home in the recently opened Asia Trail featuring large rocks to climb and caves and waterfalls to explore — but no one to share it with.

His former companion, Hana, is busy raising their cub, Bala, in the adjacent enclosure. Staff have noticed that Merlin is exhibiting certain behaviors that can indicate increased stress. So how can the Zoo help a lonely sloth bear?

This is just one of the many issues Curator Tony Barthel deals with on a daily basis. He oversees a staff of 17 and a collection of 33 animals representing 11 species.

Barthel manages Asia Trail, the Chertah Conservation Station and the soon-to-be-renovated Elephant House, which, when completed in 2011 as Elephant Trails, will be one of the Zoo’s largest and most state-of-the-art exhibits.

But right now, Barthel is concerned with locating a companion for Merlin. Finding the right fit isn’t always easy. “It’s like a giant puzzle,” he says. “We have to consider genetics, social history, medical history, space requirements and at the same time, we’re competing with all the other zoos in the Sloth Bear Species Survival Program.”

A match was finally made with Khali, a female sloth bear at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle who, like Merlin, is not recommended for breeding and also needs a companion. After a long process of paperwork, vet exams and a ride on a Federal Express cargo plane, Khali arrived in late November. Barthel was there the evening she was introduced to the indoor enclosure of the sloth bear exhibit.

“She was very nervous,” Barthel recalls. “She immediately climbed up the 18-foot-high mesh fencing of her exhibit and clung there for a while.”

Barthel and his staff are working with Khali to train her in different behaviors that help Zoo staff monitor her health and well-being, as well as provide enrichment for her. Last month, she and Merlin were introduced and are slowly getting to know each other.

“We hope that she’ll have a positive effect on his behavior,” Barthel says. “Typically, sloth bears are solitary animals, but Merlin has always enjoyed interacting with other bears.” ■

— Sarah Taylor

PEOPLE IN THE NEWS

Nancy Bechtol, director of the Office of Facilities Management and Reliability, appeared on the cover of Building Operating Management magazine. Bechtol was selected for the profile because her “emphasis on training and teamwork has created a world-class facilities organization.”

VIARC

Amy Lemon, coordinator of the Behind-the-Scenes Volunteer Program, wrote an article about background checks for volunteers for the American Association for Museum Volunteers newsletter.

Air and Space

Curator of Space History Valerie Neuh, Exhibit Design Specialist Stephanie Markgraf and Photograph Eric Long traveled to Florida for the launch of NASA’s Space Shuttle STS-120. Neuh received a crew guest invitation from Commander Pam Melnyk.

Space History Curator Roger Launius and Mike Neufeld appeared on an episode of the Public Broadcasting Service’s television series “Nova.” The program, “Spuntik Declassified,” documents the history of the famous satellite and the early space race. In addition, excerpts from Neufeld’s book about rocket engineer Werner Von Braun are featured on the Nova Web site in a section called “A Tainted Legacy.”

Tropical Research Institute

The governor of the Chiriqui province of Panama presented Stanley Heckadon-Moreno, director of the Office of Communications and Public Programs, with a certificate and medal to recognize him as a “meritorious son to the Chiriqui province,” for his achievements in Panamanian literature. Heckadon-Moreno, who was born in Alanje, Chiriqui province, has written 17 books.

Natural History

Paleobotanist Brian Huber was quoted in a New York Times magazine article “Dino Conspiracy Theory.” He was interviewed as a proponent of the theory that the mass extinction of the dinosaurs occurred 65 million years ago when an asteroid struck the Earth and filled the air with sun-blocking dust.

Betty Meggers, director of the Latin American Archaeology Program, received an honorary doctoral degree from the Universidade Federal de Rondônia (Unir) in Porto Velho, Rondônia, Brazil. This is Meggers’ sixth honorary degree from a South American university.

Kristoffer Helgen, researcher in the Department of Mammals, and Adrienne Kaeppel, curator in the Department of Anthropology, were interviewed live for a WTTG-TV “Fox 5 Morning News” feature. The program highlighted the Museum Support Center as the principal off-site conservation and collections storage facility for the Natural History Museum. Located in Suitland, Md., the state-of-the-art facility houses more than 31 million objects, including very large specimens, such as meteorites and animals. ■

— Mara Jonas

Joel Lemp
Horticulturist
Facilities Engineering, Operations

Salt-cured Virginia country ham — something for the holidays.

What’s your favorite comfort food? Yvette Henderson
Museum Protection Officer South Quad

There’s nothing better than home-made beef stew. I use my grandma’s recipe.

Mark Crooks
Visual Presentation Supervisor Smithsonian Business Ventures

Mom’s Sunday dinner — roasted chicken, roasted potatoes and vegetables.
Making history: NASM’s Don Lopez is an icon of aviation

When Anyi Cruz accepted a job checking coats at Cooper-Hewitt in New York in 2002, she assumed the job would be temporary—and she was right. When she joined before her current position as visitor services staff, she was aware that there were twenty people vying for the position. Cruz now manages the Admissions team in their effort to ensure that all public spaces look polished and presentable—a job both challenging and rewarding. When Anyi Cruz accepted a job checking coats at Cooper-Hewitt in New York in 2002, she assumed the job would be temporary—and she was right. When she joined before her current position as visitor services manager, she now leads the Admissions team in their effort to ensure that all museum visitors have a memorable and pleasant experience. Before coming to C-H, Cruz spent several years working in sales at high-end retail establishments, such as Saks Fifth Avenue. This background prepared her well for the one-on-one interactions that are part of her daily routine. She also is fluent in Spanish, a skill that has come in handy on many occasions when Spanish-speaking tour groups have visited Cooper-Hewitt.

Cruz recently took some time out of her busy day to talk with writer Katie Vagnino about what makes her job both challenging and rewarding. When Anyi Cruz accepted a job checking coats at Cooper-Hewitt in New York in 2002, she assumed the job would be temporary—and she was right. When she joined before her current position as visitor services manager, she now leads the Admissions team in their effort to ensure that all museum visitors have a memorable and pleasant experience. Before coming to C-H, Cruz spent several years working in sales at high-end retail establishments, such as Saks Fifth Avenue. This background prepared her well for the one-on-one interactions that are part of her daily routine. She also is fluent in Spanish, a skill that has come in handy on many occasions when Spanish-speaking tour groups have visited Cooper-Hewitt.

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SERC casts a wider net with Mobile Ecology Lab

BY MARA JONAS
OPA Staff Writer

Laughter erupts as Karen McDonald, outreach coordinator for the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Md., imitates a molting blue crab, pretending to suck in water and expand to break through an imaginary exoskeleton. She is leading the popular “Blue Crab Lab” program for a class of special needs high-school students at Pathways School in Pasadena, Md.

This and other SERC education programs, once offered on-site only, now are being offered at area schools, thanks to the new Smithsonian Mobile Ecology Lab—a cherry-red, 6-by-12-foot trailer that has been fashioned into a mobile laboratory, affectionately known as MEL. It is equipped with a generator to run aquarium pumps and filters, a stainless-steel countertop, special foam-lined cabinets for transporting microscopes, and hooks for hanging waders and seining nets.

With MEL, “we can bring activities normally done on SERC’s docks right into the classroom,” McDonald says. MEL will be especially useful for bringing environmental science education to special needs students, such as those at Pathways School.

“We have always included classroom outreach at some level,” Director of Education Mark Haddern says. According to McDonald, this outreach has usually been in the form of school assembly programs.

Over the years, SERC has seen an increase in requests for classroom-based programs, Haddern says, and MEL is a self-contained way to bring SERC to schools.

Last year, 6,000 schoolchildren attended on-site educational programs at SERC. Education Specialist Jamie Holly says that the programs are often completely booked a year in advance.

“Because of our very full schedule, it can be difficult for teachers to make reservations for our on-site programs. MEL provides a viable alternative,” Haddern says.

“We also can use MEL as a complement to our on-site programs,” Holly says. Haddern adds that he would like to “extend the field trip experience” by taking MEL to a school both before and after a class visits SERC in Edgewater, thus providing a continual and more effective learning experience.

“The possibilities are endless,” McDonald says, citing participation in area festivals and community events and field-based research as other uses for MEL. The MEL program was made possible by a grant from the Smithsonian Women’s Committee, which not only allowed for the purchase of the brightly colored trailer, but also the scientific equipment it carries.

Since the mobile ecology lab program began last fall, MEL has traveled to several schools, where McDonald has led educational presentations and workshops, such as “Bay in a Box,” “Baylander Invaders,” “Introduction to Microscopes” and, of course, “Blue Crab Lab.”

McDonald leads education programs for children and adults of all ages, including teacher training seminars. Programs are structured around Maryland state curriculum guidelines and are based on current SERC research on subjects ranging from invasive species to plankton.

Though the teaching materials are the same—crab shells, worksheets, 3-D models, giant green tongs and a live crab or two for the “Blue Crab Lab”—McDonald says that each workshop experience is unique and that she has “to be ready for anything and adapt to the audience.”

Her presentations are interactive and she challenges students, posing thought-provoking questions about the environment and the role that students can play in protecting it.

McDonald, who has a master’s degree in biology and has been an educator for seven years, is especially skilled at making science accessible to all audiences.

During her presentation at Pathways School, she compared the Chesapeake Bay to the drain in a kitchen sink, explaining that “everything ends up in the bay.” She then suggested simple ways—such as reusing a lunch bag—that students can help protect our waterways.

Karen McDonald holds a male blue crab during a “Blue Crab Lab” she conducted for students at the Pathways School. (Photo by Mara Jonas)

“Tropical Research Institute Helene Muller-Landau is the new lead scientist for the Center for Tropical Forest Science Carbon Dynamics Program. She has been associated with STRI since 2002 through fellowships.

Helene Muller-Landau

American History

New Media Program Specialist Kate Morton has left SI to accept a position as webmaster/content management system analyst at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va.

National Zoo

Lainie Conterras has joined the communications team as a public affairs specialist. Most recently, she was public relations manager for the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore.

Air and Space

After more than 25 years as a federal employee, Phouy Sengsourinh has retired. He served as chief of the Information Technology Division at NASM for the last eight years.

Karen Courington in the new explainer program coordinator at the museum. Prior to joining SI, Courington served 6 years’ active duty in the U.S. Air Force as a C-17 pilot.

After 35 years in education, both as a school teacher and a museum educator, Explainer Program Coordinator Terry Nixon has retired. He plans to volunteer at NASM and the Maryland Science Center in Baltimore.

After seven years with the Collections Division, Doug Dammann has accepted the position of curator at the Kenosha Civil War Museum, scheduled to open in Kenosha, Wis., in June.

Tropical Research Institute

Charles Duncan is the new collections specialist for the New York region. He was a senior consultant with Hollis Taggart Galleries and Francis N’namdi Fine Art and previously owned and operated Digital Fine Arts Inc., a presentation and archiving firm.

Jessica Theaman has joined A&A as the development associate for membership. She previously was assistant manager of the Conservators Membership Program at the New York Public Library, and prior to that, a development assistant at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Suzanne Bybee is the new administrative officer. She held a similar position in the Office of the Under Secretary for Art.

Carolina Furukrona is the new director of development and membership. She was the development officer and director of the Young Benefactors of The Smithsonian Associates.

Helia Moore-Sepulveda is the new staff assistant to the director of Development and Membership. She held a similar position with TSHA and also provided support to the development office.

O’Leary to leave Latino Center

Pilar O’Leary, director of the Smithsonian Latino Center since August 2005, has resigned, effective Feb. 8. She plans to become a consultant for foundations, corporations and nonprofit organizations, building on her longstanding interest in cultural and educational issues affecting the Latino community.

O’Leary has enhanced the public outreach and visibility of the Center. She has brought together leaders from the academic, foundation, government and corporate sectors to support the Center’s work and has developed partnerships with scores of organizations in the United States and across the hemisphere, including, most recently, the Fundación Carso (See related story on Page 2.) She enhanced the Center’s Latino Museum Studies Program, established the Young Ambassadors program to engage high school seniors in museum work, improved the quality of the Center’s award-winning Web site, and developed important resources for teachers.

Correction

The November issue of The Torch reported that Joyce Lancaster, a technical writer in the Customer Support Services Division of the Office of the Chief Information Officer, had retired after 15 years with the Smithsonian. She retired after 25 years with SI and a total of 32 years of government service. We regret the error.
Edward Tyson is a coach for all seasons

Perhaps no other institution is as sensitive to the threat of fire as the Smithsonian. Several early collections—including the papers of James Smithson—were lost when fire destroyed the central portion of the Castle in 1865. The idea of a fire in one of SI’s buildings today is appalling; in addition to the threat to staff and visitors, an uncontrolled blaze could reduce priceless and irreplaceable national treasures to ashes.

Fortunately, SI’s fire safety shop is better prepared than ever to make sure this nightmare scenario never happens.

Edward Tyson, chief of the electrical services division of the Office of Facilities Engineering and Operations’ system engineering division, concedes that SI’s fire safety program has had to overcome some challenges in recent years. Weakened by staff attrition and struggling to meet fire safety standards in SI’s aging buildings, the division—responsible for inspecting, testing and repairing more than 13,000 sprinklers, smoke detectors and other safety devices—turned to a private contractor for help in 2004.

But thanks to a change in management strategy, Patel says, the division is surging back stronger than ever. In response to a challenge from National Capital Region Management and Reliability, Tyson then went to a trade school, learned college football career at the University of the District of Columbia, where he studied electronic engineering until he injured his knee and had to quit his college football career. Tyson then moved to a trade school, learned electrical engineering, and worked for years as an electronics technician before becoming Electronic Technician Leader Edward Ludtke and Electronic Technicians Patricia Gastright, SI’s associate director for systems engineering, says trained fire safety specialists in the Smithsonian are in short supply throughout the park.

The Castle is a lot safer, too, now that staff no longer work by candlelight or use wood stoves for heat. But doing so took strategic planning and a combination of good maintenance practices, vigilance and a little luck.

“Making progress is my winning strategy,” Tyson says. “Even though I was upset on the field, ‘I’m still upset about it, ’’ Tyson admits. Coach Tyson, normally tough as nails, actually shed tears right there on the field. ‘’I still upset about it, ’’ he administered.

Edwin Tisdale, SI’s associate director for facilities management, says Tyon’s work ethic and dedication have helped make the division more efficient, and that the division is now better prepared than ever to handle the job in-house. In addition to the talented SI staff already in place—Electronic basketball, I teach discipline, respect and loyalty,” Tyson adds. He also stresses the importance of education and family by making participation in games contingent upon doing well both at school and at home.

The life lessons that Tyson teaches extend to his team members’ parents, as well. “I encourage parents to come to games and practices,” he says. Tyson’s mother often came to see him coach during his high school football career. She also was there for his high school football games and his short-lived college football career at the University of the District of Columbia, where he studied electronic engineering until he injured his knee and lost his football scholarship.

From left, Patrick Cerrone, Himanu Patel, Ed Chanson, Nick Ludtke, Jason Sawyer, Richard Miller, John Boyd and Soung Rim. (Harold Dorwin photo)

Integrated Mechanic Leader Edward Chanson and Electronic Technician Soung Rim—she and Patel asked a former partner to join SI’s team, which now includes Electronic Integrated Fire Technician Nick Ludtke and Electronic Technicians Patrick Cerrone, Jason Sawyer, John Boyd and Richard Miller. The new employees take great pride in being part of the Smithsonian, Gastright says. ‘’The fact that we attracted these highly qualified technicians speaks volumes about the Smithsonian brand.’’

‘’These workers were so excellent from the start—that’s why we hired them as contractors originally,’’ she continued.”

Edward Tyson is a coach for all seasons

The holidays may be a time for giving, but for Edward Tyson, assistant building manager at the Air and Space Museum, giving back to the community is always in season.

For the last 10 years, Tyson has worked as a volunteer firefighter and basketball coach in Prince George’s County. The Capital Beltway League, for which Tyson coached most recently, was formed to help combat juvenile delinquency by organizing, establishing, promoting and supporting team sports for young children.

Tyson’s commitment to this mission and the families it serves is evident from the many hours he has devoted to the leagues. After a full day of work, there are practices, games, coaches’ meetings and fundraising activities to attend.

A Washington, D.C., native, Tyson now lives in Fort Washington, Md., with his wife, Michelle, whom he met through coaching. They have four children—Kevin Jackson Jr., LaShel Jackson, Edward Tyson Jr. and Chere’ Tyson—all of whom play youth sports.

His warm smile and jovial laugh make it hard to envision Tyson’s stern side, a side he says he often shows as a coach. “I do a lot of yelling on the field,” Tyson says. “I’m very tough, but I’m fair.”

As a coach, Tyson is not only teaching kids to become athletes, but also serving as a father figure for team members. Tyson knows first-hand what it’s like for children growing up without a father, and he remembers his high school football coach was a positive male role model.

“The games of football and basketball, I teach discipline, respect and loyalty,” Tyson adds. He also stresses the importance of education and family by making participation in games contingent upon doing well both at school and at home.

“Making progress is my winning strategy,” Tyson says. “I’m still upset about it, ” he administered. The ability to turn the negative into positive is just another life lesson that Tyson tries to instill in his team. He wholeheartedly believes in the old African proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child.” This philosophy, combined with his love of sports, motivates him to volunteer as a youth coach.

—Maria Jones

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Mystery
(Continued from Page 1)

White’s remains, beginning in the summer of 2005. He and colleagues, including Karin Brullehede, a museum specialist in the Physical Anthro- pology Division, have examined the remains buried in similar iron coffins over the years. “But we had wanted for quite some time to find [remains] that were more completely pre- served...” akin to an “American mummy, if you will,” he says.

Unlike Egyptian mummies, for which salt and other preservative compounds were used to slow de- composition, the body of the 19th- century teenager had been preserved in a sealed container which protected it from agents of natural decay, Hunt explains. Though vandals had broken the glass face plate on the coffin before it was received by MNH, the body, as well as the burial shroud and clothing was largely intact. The preservation allowed Owsley, Hunt and the rest of the team to glean specific details about the boy’s physical health. An- toplasty and laboratory analysis pointed to a lung infection and a congenital heart defect as the probable causes for White’s death at age 15.

For the genealogical side of the re- search, Hull-Walski and scientist Scott Miller and Carolyn Darrow from the Museum of Natural History and Yves Basset from the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama, along with MNH research associates Vojtech Novotny (Czech Academy of Sciences) and George Weihlen (University of Minnesota).

The team collected data for more than three years and built on data from a photographic exhibition that re- port the troops, contribute to the Red Cross and buy bonds to finance America’s participation in the war.


“Worthy of the Nation: Planning America’s Capital,” Ripley Center, closing Feb. 14, presents more than 75 photographs and illustrations that depict the challenges associated with planning Washington, D.C., through- out its history, including the Metro- rail system, the addition of memori- als and museums, the revitalization of Pennsylvania Avenue and more.


“The Potter’s Mark: Identity and Tea Ceramics,” Freer, Feb. 24, 2001, showcases a dozen Japanese ceramics that feature impressed or incised marks relating to their makers. The objects highlight the evolution of this practice, from “seals of approval” im- pressed by patrons who commis- sioned tea wares during the late 16th century to a means by which artists identified their products by the mid- 17th century.


“The Presidency and the Color War,” Portrait Gallery, closing Feb. 24, explores how U.S. presidents shaped or reacted to the events of the Cold War, beginning at Valley Forge when the Stuart and Churchill’s meeting and the col- lapse of the Berlin Wall.

“Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani,” Sackler, Feb. 24, presents more than 100 objects: gold, silver and ceramic vessels; jewelry; Greek bronze sculpture; Greek and Colchian coins; and Greek glassware that together provide a rich and in- formative view of the ancient land of Colchis and its principal city, Vani.

Upcoming

In March, Air and Space will present a photographic exhibition that re- veals the “simple beauty” of aircraft design. — Eddie Sisneros-Gonzalez

Not all rain forests are the same—and neither are the species that inhabit them

BY ALAN CUTLER
Special to The Torch

Rain forests are the world’s treasure houses of biodiversity, but not all rain forests are alike. The number of different species that exist in forests in different parts of the world may vary widely. Biodiversity may be much greater in lowland rain forests than in others and, therefore, may require different management and preservation strategies. That is one of the conclusions of a large- scale Smithsonian study of a low- land rain forest in New Guinea, re- ported in the journal Nature.

Most previous research has fo- cused on diversity “hot spots,” such as upland rain forests in the foothills of the Andes, where dramatic varia- tions in elevation, temperature, rain- fall and other environmental factors boost diversity by creating a number of different habitats in a relatively small area. Such variation in a re- gion where similar species is called beta diversity.

A large proportion of the world’s remaining rain forests are lowland forests in New Guinea, Borneo and the Congo and Amazon Basins. Many researchers speculated that these lowland rain forests would have high beta diversity, but their theories had not been tested. Little data exists on the distribution of species in these vast forests, particularly for insects, which account for a large share of the world’s biodiversity.

An international group of ento- mologists and botanists, including Smithsonian researchers, recently as- sembled distribution data for 500 species of caterpillars, ambrosia bee- tles and fruit flies that live in the undisturbed lowland rain forest of the Sepik and Ramu river basins in Papua New Guinea.

The team collected insects and plants from eight study sites across 75,000 square kilometers of contigu- ous forest—an area the size of South Carolina—and noted the variation in species composition from site to site. The researchers included scientists from eight study sites across 75,000 square kilometers of contigu- ous forest—an area the size of South Carolina and the unique 1849 Double Eagle.

This photograph of a 1993 Carnival celebration in Huautla, Hidalgo, Mexico, is part of the exhibition “Mexican Cyclades: Festival Images by George O. Jack- son de Llano” on view at Natural History through Feb. 15.

A younger holds a Hercules moth caterpillar—one of 500 species of cater- pillars, ambrosia beetles and fruit flies studied by Smithsonian scientists in Papua New Guinea. (Photo by Milian Janda)