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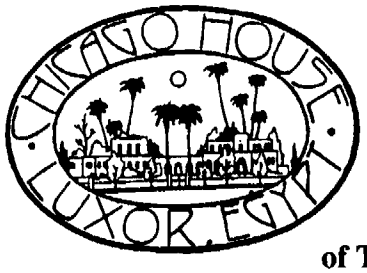

CHICAGO HOUSE BULLETIN

Volume III, No. 3
August 15, 1992

Privately circulated

Issued by The Epigraphic Survey
of The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago

THE 1991-1992 SEASON AT CHICAGO HOUSE

By Peter Dorman, Field Director

The 1991-1992 season at Chicago began like every other—and, like every other season, quickly attained its own pace and character, imprinting on our lives an extraordinary sequence of events that made it unique. In looking back over the schedule, it is hard to imagine so much could have been crammed into just six months of quiet provincial living, even if this particular province is one of the winter tourist meccas of the world.

The signal achievement of our field season was the completion, after sixteen years of work, of the one hundred twenty-six drawings that document the reliefs of the Opet Festival and which adorn the lowest and best preserved register in the Colonnade Hall at Luxor Temple. Even so, the completion of the drawings required careful planning and a concerted push at the end of the season, with many of the staff working long extra hours during the final month of epigraphy. The effort was clearly worth it: the drawings will be published in the largest volume ever produced by the Survey, the preparation of which has consumed much of our time this spring.

Against the background of this concentrated work routine, which reached a high pitch in the month of March, a number of events happened that typify what all seasons are like and at the same time make them quite distinct from one another.

The season opened officially on October 1, 1991, and, fittingly, we took the wooden scaffolds and ladders into Luxor Temple, having first received the kind permission of Mohammed Saghir, the Chief Inspector of Antiquities in Luxor. The first collation sheets were worked on that same day, while back at the house, workmen continued to exhume the library from the newspaper shrouds that embalm the books and protect them from summer dust. To observe the occasion, drinks were served on the director's balcony that evening, as we tried to cool off in the warm October night. One of the first orders of business: pruning the fourteen stately palms that line the central walkway, and collecting the small, sweet dates that drop onto the ground by the hundreds. And administrator Paul Bartko was engaged in another happy chore: setting up new computers in the offices, for the first time linked together on a single network for instant communication.

On arrival in Luxor, we had learned that the east range of columns in the sun court of Luxor Temple would eventually be dismantled by the Antiquities Organization for reasons of conservation. So just one week into the season, photographer Cecile Keefe began her first (and unexpected) field assignment: photographing the colossal inscribed architraves that rest on top of the columns. These photos will be used not only as record shots, but as the basis for final drawings when the time comes to record them. For two weeks, Cecile and James Riley perched high above the ground, baking in the October sun (the best time for photography was, predictably, high noon) and balancing the field camera on the edge of sheer drops on either side.

As the work of epigraphy picked up at Luxor, another team crossed the Nile to Medinet Habu, where the rituals of opening

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SUE ON THE NILE

By Susan Lezon, Staff Photographer

"... hot and out of humor."

(Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, chapter 58, describing his descent from the top of the Great Pyramid)

(Editor's note: During the last three months, Sue Lezon and James Riley have been acting as representatives of the Oriental Institute at Chicago House, living in a portion of our on-site guest house and observing with fascination Phase I of the Chicago House renovation, which commenced in early July. Excerpts from Sue's daily log have been filled with surprises, humor (notwithstanding Mark Twain), and adventures, some of which we share in the paragraphs below...)

13 July. After five days of frightening heat, the temp is down to 90 F and the wind no longer depletes you of moisture after walking across the compound. Still, the big question of the week remains: How long will fifteen cases of 1.5 liter bottles of Baraka last? Wanna make any bets?

14 July. Ayman [the supervisor from Bechtel Egypt] and James and I went all through the residence and shot photos of light fixtures, bathroom fixtures and kitchen and architectural details. The house is very, very eerie and has no feeling of life to it at all. It just looks like an old, crumbling house.

15 July. Gharib [the photographer's assistant] delivered our bread at 6:30 AM as usual, except today the bread was fresh. I should have known it was going to be an unusual day .... I arrive at the darkroom and am just settling in when one of Sami Saad's men [the general contractor] arrives and says that in order to bring the port-o-cabs [portable office cabins] into the compound, the tennis court will have to be cleared and rolled flat. He speaks almost no English and is patient with me, but we are obviously not totally understanding one another. Perhaps that is because we're standing in front of the darkroom and what I judge to be about 200 children are banging at the back gate and screaming. I excuse myself and go to the gate only to find the noise is ALL being made by Saleh [the Chicago House chief engineer], who wants to come into the compound through the back gate for the first time in thirty years. He and Safwat [the Sami Saad representative] decide with Ayman's help that the port-o-cabs should actually be lifted by crane into the badminton court. OK, no problem . . . until Safwat finds that he can't borrow the crane from the reconstruction of the Ninth Pylon at Karnak . . . (hello?) . . . and the nearest one is in Esna. Safwat leaves for Esna at 2:00 PM. At 4:00 PM a small man with dark brown teeth arrives with a large truck containing two port-o-cabs. He is hard to communicate with and insists that he will call Safwat in Esna. (Where? The local "CRANES R US" store?) Finally—this was incredible—Abd el-Zaher [our 83-year-old back-gateman] walks outside the compound with us to the convention center next door . . . looks at the truck, looks at us, and starts yelling at the driver. The tourist police come over and the matter is settled very quickly—the driver will stay with the truck until the crane arrives from Esna.

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1990-1991 Season *(continued from p. 1)*

traditionally include the Obtaining of the Keys, the Oiling of the Locks, the Sweeping Out of the Dust, the Praying for Electrical Power, and the Checking for Scorpions. That same week, our first group library tour (out of a total of 29 group tours for the season) was given on October 8th to thirty students from Gronigen University in the Netherlands; in all, over eighty library tours were given during our field season, averaging almost one every other day. In the meantime, James Riley and Ellie Smith were attacking our guest rooms in Healey House with sandpaper and fresh paint. Healey House had been water-damaged from last year's heavy rains in Luxor, and in just a few days the rooms were shining with pink and blue pastel colors mixed from garish tints that are available in a local hardware store.

On October 28th, Tom and Ellen Granger hosted an advance cocktail reception for all Cairo residents who had signed up for the FOCH tour (held over Thanksgiving weekend, the events of which were recounted in the December Bulletin). The evening was a wonderful opportunity for us to get together with old friends after the summer's absence. And back at the ranch, one of our previous photographers, Tom Van Eynde, returned to Chicago House for a cameo appearance to complete our photographic coverage of the small temple at Medinet Habu. The spaces are so tight at the temple that the photographers had to use every trick in the book to eliminate distortion in the field camera, producing almost two hundred negatives in just three weeks.

One of our guests in early November was Arthur Clark, a regular reporter for Aramco World magazine, whose company we enjoyed very much for several days as he grilled us about all aspects of life and work in Luxor; his article on the Survey should appear in Aramco World this fall. We had to turn down another request to use our facilities, unfortunately, when a local media scout asked to use our residence courtyard as the scene location for a convent, for a movie now in preparation in Egypt.

House trips to visit the excavations of our colleagues are often memorable events, but none more so than our visit on November 10th to Abydos, a two-hour drive north of Luxor. We were given a magnificent tour of the earliest royal cemeteries by Dr. Gunther Dreyer of the German Archaeological Institute, who discussed the recent discovery of tombs that

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Sue on the Nile *(continued from p. 1)*

16 July. At about 9:00 AM I was working in the office and realized Nikon's bark was slightly different than usual. That was because she was alerting us to the presence of a snake in the rose bushes. Hassan charged into the bushes in his bare feet while James, Gamal, Taya, Gharib, and I looked on. He made short work of it. . . . It wasn't a cobra, but had rather serious looking fangs, so we assume it was poisonous.

18 July. James spent yesterday with the Land Rover, trying to determine what parts are needed to make it run. Since it was so hot, I spent the day working on accounts.

19 July. Work began yesterday on the house. The compound is full of men from Cairo and laborers from who knows where. We spent part of the morning at Mohammed el-Saghir's office [chief inspector of antiquities in Luxor], where he signed the papers giving us permission to dig on the grounds of Chicago House, provided we call him if we find any statues! . . . The big excitement was the arrival of a crane yesterday afternoon to place the cabins in the badminton court.

22 July. I don't know where the last three days have gone. . . . The work on the house is going at breakneck speed. Working in the darkroom has continued to be very difficult, due to the heat. But this morning two men arrived to install my new air conditioner. It took them all day, but it's finally in. Not that it works . . . no electrical hook-up.

23 July. The heat hits you like a ton of bricks when you walk outdoors. . . . Today we had electricity some of the time and water some of the time. We just never had them at the same time. . . . "There was always gonna be a 23rd of July, 1992." I'm just glad its practically over.

27 July. Have spent most of the last two days in bed with a stomach/headache ailment. . . . At 4:00 AM today, Nikon raised the roof when Sayid and Abd el-Haris [gatemen] came to the door of the guest house. Not that they could get near the door [due to Nikon's watchfulness]. They had to hit the wall with a *shuba* [large walking stick] to wake us up. The reason? Mahmoud had taken a bad fall off his watchman's bench [from which he soon recovered]. . . . It was time to extend our tourist visas for three months, so we changed the correct amount of money, gathered Saleh, and headed for the Luxor passport Office. When we arrived the woman looked at our exchange receipts and said "Ah, but they aren't stamped. I can't help you

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Announcing:

THE FRIENDS OF CHICAGO HOUSE DAY

February 13, 1993

Due to renovations at Chicago House it is not possible to offer our regular weekend package this year. You are cordially invited, however, to a DAY WITH CHICAGO HOUSE including:

- ***Tour of the Chicago House Library***
- ***Epigraphy Demonstration at Luxor Temple***
- ***Gala Black-Tie Dance***

(Travel and Hotel Arrangements are up to you!)

For more information contact:

In Egypt: **Chicago House**
Luxor, Egypt
(011) (20) (95) 372525
fax 581620

In the U.S.: **The Epigraphic Survey**
1155 East 58th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
(312) 702-9524/9853(fax)

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Please make a note...
of our new telephone and fax numbers.

Our new telephone/fax number is: (011) (20) (95) **581620**
Our new telephone number is: (011) (20) (95) **372525**

1991-1992 Season *(continued from p. 2)*

apparently belong to kings who ruled Egypt before the 1st Dynasty and who are known to history only by such names as "Scorpion" and "Seashell." An even bigger surprise awaited us at the nearby Pennsylvania excavations, where with gaping mouths we saw over a dozen solar boats encased in mudbrick mastabas, each 30 meters long, laid out carefully in a row. These boats not only predate the well preserved Khufu boat found at the Great Pyramid by two hundred years, but they also provide considerable information on the earliest funeral rituals practiced at Abydos twenty-eight centuries before the beginning of the Christian era.

In early December, we were pleased to entertain several directors of the various branches of the J. Paul Getty Trust. This was a very special visit for us, since the Getty Grant Program has supported our program of conservation in the photographic archives for the last three years. At the same time, four architectural firms from Cairo made lengthy visits to Chicago House in response to our invitation to submit proposals to renovate and expand our facilities in Luxor. This competition concluded three months later with our selection of Bechtel Egypt as the consultative architects for the project (see the next story for the latest word!). One exciting discovery in a storage room: the original plans for Chicago House, all beautifully hand-drawn, including the earliest conceptual designs for the house, some of which seem quite bizarre.

The Christmas season was celebrated with the usual festive rites, and our guests this year included Helen and Jean Jacquet, our dear friends from the French Institute dig at North Karnak, and the Australian team of Boyo Ockinga, working at a tomb on the West Bank. The movies chosen for viewing that day, to appeal to as many people as possible: Home Alone and The Prisoner of Zenda. Later that week, as a surprise for the director's birthday, the entire staff turned up for dinner in Star Trek uniforms and props, with a birthday cake that was carefully lettered: "Beam me up, Scotty!" "He's dead, Jim."

In January we played host to the small but lively team led by Carol Meyer, who all worked at Bir Umm Fawakhir for two weeks, mapping the remains of a mining settlement in the Wadi Hammamat. The end of the month was greatly saddened, however, by the death of one of our oldest employees, Yusuf, who began working as a boatman at Chicago House thirty-seven years ago (when our boat still operated regularly) and who was trained by director Charles Nims to be an exceptional photographer's assistant in the 1960's.

Ambassador Robert J. Pelletreau, Jr., and his wife, Pamela, arranged a gala reception for Chicago House in February at their residence in Zamalek, where our Cairo friends and professional colleagues met some of the members of the Oriental Institute tour to Yemen (then on their way home). This annual occasion remains one of the highlights of our season. In the week following, we had special friends from the University of Chicago as guests in Luxor: Ray Tindel, Gretel Braidwood, and Warren and Ellen Heemann, whose first evening at Chicago House was marked by a most spectacular electrical blowout and a dinner that was held by candlelight—impressing on us the urgency of immediate renovations!

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Sue on the Nile *(continued from p. 2)*

until they are stamped." We went back to the bank and had them "stamped." After returning and filling out forms in triplicate in English, the clerk took the forms and spent half an hour filling out the same forms in triplicate in Arabic. We paid for the special fiscal stamps on the forms. She then poked huge holes in the stamps with a leaky ballpoint pen to prove they'd been paid for. But the best was yet to come. It seems the customs man at Cairo airport had marked our passports incorrectly when we entered the country on June 29. He gave us only 24 hours to extend our visas! This meant we were already a month overdue... this meant trouble. Saleh and I spent the next half hour sitting in "The Colonel's Office." The colonel is a two-star, one-stripe rank in the army, and he likes his uniform. He glared over his glasses at me and essentially said "we have a *mushkila* [problem] here, little lady." To make a long story short, a phone call to Cairo straightened things out.

1 August. I keep forgetting to mention the various folks who wander into the compound on almost a daily basis. An Argentinean woman who lives in New York City came by to tell us there were people on the West Bank dealing in antiquities, and she felt her life might be in danger since she knew about it. We advised her to enjoy her vacation and forget about the rumors she'd heard! A German gentleman burst through the compound gates last night, past Abd el-Zaher and his strenuous objections, and requested access to records in the library "for a friend" who was researching a temple in Nubia. ... He was distressed to find he couldn't get what he wanted. ... Meanwhile Abd el-Zaher is muttering in the background about the crude behavior of this fellow. I had to agree. Nikon barked all night long. Unfortunately she was sitting on our front porch steps. I'm QUITE sure her diligence saved us from a fate worse than death ... or a cat.

5 August. Just back from two long, tiring days in Cairo. Four large Egyptian men, James, and I wedged ourselves into a small, un-airconditioned car and drove through almost every street in Cairo looking for tile samples and light fixtures. It was hot. At one point we ended up 40 km outside of Cairo, in the middle of the desert. Suddenly on the horizon loomed a huge city and industrial area. This is the city called 6th of October. ... We returned to Luxor late last night. It seems like paradise here compared to Cairo.

7 August. Such is life here these days that the high point of the week may just have occurred. We went toilet shopping in downtown Luxor. Several of the toilets in the house need replacing, and we've chosen a model that seems to fit our needs. But nothing is as simple as it seems. We ordered a standard white toilet—I fully expect we'll get something completely different. The coverage of the Olympics has been quite odd. Every evening on Egyptian television, we see male weight lifters bearing up under increasingly heavier loads. You would think there are no other events taking place. But once, James swears to me he saw a three-legged bag race between two obscure African nations.

10 August. Mahmoud has come back to work, but on the day shift only (so that we don't have a repeat performance of

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1990-1991 Season *(continued from p. 3)*

As a last fling before diving into our final month of work, we celebrated Mardi Gras with an array of wild costumes, including authentic versions of a carefully padded-out Akhenaton (Jay Heidel), an obese Amenhotep III (Ray Johnson), Elizabeth Taylor in a wedding gown (Carlotta Maher) and "Space, the Final Frontier" (Sue Lezon and James Riley, painted black with gold stars stuck on their clothing). The month of fasting for Muslims, Ramadan, began on March 5th, which meant a slower schedule for our workmen as a counter-point to our more frenetic pace.

On March 15th, a cooking gas shortage in Luxor caused near-riots in town, and our expedition vehicles made several trips to the government distribution center before our gas canisters could be retrieved—a week later. In the meantime, we operated mostly on kerosene and hope. The last round of epigraphy included final photography of all the approved drawings, and the last director's check was conducted on April 4th, extending the season by only a few days. As this Bulletin goes to press, and as summer comes to an end, it seems hard to believe that in only six weeks it will be starting all over again!

END

Sue on the Nile *(continued from p. 3)*

his tumble off the bench). . . . Darkroom work is going very well, all things considered. I find that venturing into the house is very disturbing. All the tiles have been removed from the living area downstairs as well as the outdoor courtyard and walkways. Pipes protrude from most surfaces at odd angles, and I find it hard to believe it will ever be put back together again. James is much more philosophical about it all, and even optimistic from time to time. . . . The guava and lime trees continue to produce fruit at an alarming rate. Garafi [the chief gardener] gets distraught when I say we can't eat all he's bringing us, so some of it goes home with Saleh, and Gharib often takes a lime or two. Several dozen bananas from last week's haul are rotting in the next room and we are trying to figure out how to sneak them out of the compound so that Garafi will never know we didn't eat them all! News flash!—just walked through the kitchen. The Sornaga floor tiles are down and they are gorgeous! **END**

ADDRESSES OF THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY:

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