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Field Report for visit to Columbus Museum

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Field Report for visit to the Columbus Museum

Accession number: MAC-JP-F092101.A

Researcher's name: Jessica Phillips

Event: Trip to the Columbus Museum

Place: 480 E. Broad St. Columbus, OH 43215 614/221-6801

Co-workers present: Peg Tazewell, Melissa Dabakis, Dan Younger, Judy Sacks

The trip to the museum was really an exciting experience for me, a chance to finally see some of these art pieces that we had been talking about so much. Nanette, who was very nice and would prove to be a fountain of information, met us in the lobby. The museum seems willing to work with us on this. She took us to the hallway in which the "Father and Son" exhibit had been held. My first reaction was one of jaw dropping; I simply couldn't believe the size of some of these carvings! The pieces in the hallway included *The Mayo Special*, *Black Pig*, *Brown Pig*, *Twenty Mule Train*, *The Baker*, *Turtle*, *Greyhound Jumping through Hoop*, and *Jacob and the Angel*. The detail and evidence of skill in these works was amazing, particularly in *Twenty Mule Train* and *The Mayo Special*. It is not only the size of these works that is impressive but the small, meticulous details, such as the leatherwork on the mules. There was only one painting in the hallway by Walter L., and that was *E.A. Schlairer Tractor-Trailer*. We stood and talked in the hallway for quite awhile, and discussed the work of Walter L. One of the interesting things that Nanette said was, "We don't know where he learned how to carve, but we are hoping you guys will find that out". This statement hinted at the reasons for the interest and helpfulness of the museum; we are doing work that they didn't do. Nanette said that they put the exhibit up very quickly and were not able to get into the lives of these men as much as she would have liked. She also let it slip out that the museum was not very interested in the work of Walter L., but were very interested in Walter O. We talked about folk art v. real art, and Nanette really seemed to separate the two. She knows a lot about the Columbus folk art tradition and other Africa-American folk artists, and is a wealth of information that should be mined later!

Finally Nanette had to run off, and she had someone take us to storage where there were more pieces of artwork. In storage were *Chief Pontiac*, *Maharaja Riding an Elephant*, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream*, *Rooster*, and *The Logging Team*. After taking a look at these pieces, which again seem to be in good shape and mostly clean, we asked to see some of the Walter L. paintings. The woman who took us into storage could not find their location on the computer, which is another indication of how they do not really care about the work of Walter L.

After seeing the works in storage we went upstairs to see some more carvings. *The Ark of the Covenant* and *Camel* were all in a hallway with the works of Elijah Pierce and William Hawkins. It was interesting to see the works of Walter O, which seem devoid of an obvious racial consciousness, displayed against the very racial carvings of Elijah Pierce and Hawkins.

The museum seems to be displaying and treating the carvings of Walter O. Mayo with utmost respect. Nannette seemed to think that the work of Walter O. must be

connected to some kind of woodcarving tradition, and this is something that the project should look into. There are no dates on any of the carvings, and this is something that the project should tackle. After we saw all the carvings we stood around and talked for awhile. We agreed to proceed slowly with the idea of racial consciousness in the carvings, since some of us saw it and some didn't. We don't want to be so intent on finding it that we push racial consciousness onto the works. We all saw an interesting religious context, and hope that we will see the same in Walter L.'s work when we finally get to see it.