

Excerpt from Paul Perrot's FAIC oral history interview conducted by Joyce Hill Stoner on February 9, 1979 in Washington, DC [Assistant Secretary for Museums at the Smithsonian from 1972 to 1983] [NCAC]

Whatever happens in conservation in the nation at large obviously will be influenced by the needs outlined in the various priorities identified by NCAC in the various reports issued by its committees. I am very proud and pleased by the way NCAC has carried out its activities. The organization has been funded by the National Museum Act ever since its creation in Winterthur in 1973. However, in so far as its activities are concerned, why it does what, is entirely free of Smithsonian involvement. It could just as easily be on the other side of the moon or in a Kremlin basement! The NCAC is its own creature but, obviously, its studies will have an effect on what we and others will do. . Conservation should not be a first or second priority when one speaks abstractly and a fifth or tenth when allocating resources. It should be a line item, at the same level of priority as guardianship, heating and cleaning and those other unglamorous activities, which are essential if a museum is to function properly. To suggest that museums can postpone conservation or dispense with it or have occasional access to an independent conservator outside of the museum world, is not right. We need to have conservators within the museum profession. This does not mean that others, in independent practice, are not needed. They are for their specialized expertise and to provide unbiased inspections, assessments and emergency treatments, following, however, the principles expressed in the Pease report since if those principles are not fully observed the work should not be done.

A National Institute, a "doing work" organization, has not been proposed by NCAC. I do not see it as a national laboratory. Rather I see it as being a coordinating agency, fostering regional development, providing education in conservation related matters, building awareness and creating a climate furthering development.