

Excerpt from Marigene H. Butler's FAIC oral history interview conducted by Joyce Hill Stoner on September 2, 1999 at the Winterthur Museum

MHB: In '73, Paul Perrot wanted to have a gathering of heads of labs in Washington to talk about setting up a center for conservation. Dick Buck and others were terribly paranoid about this, that somebody was trying to take over control of conservation labs, (Laughs) but finally agreed to go trek off to Washington for this meeting. And I was allowed to come along, thank heavens! And it was really a great session. There were about seventeen or eighteen of us. There weren't that many major labs in the country at that point. We were there for about three days, and we set up the framework of the NCAC. And I was appointed chair of the Regional Center Study Committee.

[We made a report]... because we were being so pressed by John Spencer to develop some guidelines for basic regional centers so that every museum and art department couldn't just set aside a closet in the basement as a lab and get funding from the government.

I think the biggest challenge in those days, at that time, was getting all of the other labs to collaborate. A, to not be afraid of NCAC and B, to collaborate as institutions rather than as individuals under AIC. And it was just before Reagan--about the time Reagan became President--and we developed a plan; well, Reagan aside, we developed a plan for what a national institute should look like, and the results of our various studies and publications spelled out more specifically what a national institute should do to serve all of the labs across the coun[try], all the conservation efforts across the country. And I think remember speaking to the AIC meeting in San Francisco about NCAC, and answering hostile questions from Arthur Beale and (laughter) a lot of other people who became..oh, Ross, Ross Merrill, for one. Yes, a lot of people who were, who later became leaders of NCAC/NIC were so hostile at first, and we ... sort of saw our role as sort of disarming them and taking their fears away. (Laughter) And then, the Getty set up it's... Well, they just took over our plan. Lock, stock and barrel, and they didn't call themselves the National Institute, but it was about then, when Arthur Beale took over as chairperson, that we decided that we'd better call ourselves, transform ourselves from NCAC into NIC, which was what happened. But I think that we sort of got over the hump of people being... There were study committees.

Sheldon Keck headed a survey of AIC members to find out what their concerns were about a National Institute. There were lots of things we did to sort of assuage people's fears. I think that's what I dealt with mostly.

But we had a lot of study reports that were on-going and needed to be finished. Paul Banks on library needs and Chris was working on, Chris Tahk was working on the science requirements.