

Excerpt from Arthur Beale's oral history interview conducted by LeeAnn Barnes Gordon on June 24, 2012 in Scituate, Massachusetts

Issues for the profession as a whole, and the way they were addressed by NIC or NCAC previously was through study committees. They got the best minds together to issue publications, some white papers. They were all issued in a rainbow of colors, but they in a sense were for me the kind of protocols that we established at the MFA the same sort of thing. They were designed to get the best and most professional approach, best thinking and most current thinking and to save a lot of people from reinventing the wheel -- individuals. For example, when there'd be a crisis for the example the energy crisis in the United States. That forced museums to make economic choices about what's too expensive or we can't afford fuel to maintain 50% relative humidity and 72 degrees plus or minus two degrees, 365 days a year. So, what are we going to do? That became a national issue, and so a lot of these bigger issues that had to be addressed collectively and a protocol that had to be established nationally. Particularly when these institutions loan to one another and they establish environmental criteria for example. If we are going to borrow something from the MFA, it's going to have a different set of requirements than if we borrow it from the National Gallery of Art in Washington. So, establishing national standards.

At a time when the Getty Conservation Institute was being established there was a time when they looked at all these rainbow of color of books, the published by NCAC and NIC. Said "Well you've covered all major subjects...", but the organization was founded by the Smithsonian and NCAC. A lot of the funding came from the National Museum Act through Paul Perrot. It was founded to decide whether we needed a national institute. In other words, the governmental or organization to oversee many aspects like the National Science Foundation. Senator Pell of Connecticut was very much in favor of this and he talked to some conservators and there was lots of debate. Do we need a national institute the government organization basically? So, before it became a political and it never did become really a political hot potato based on whether we needed more government. The organization was established with a sort of different criteria than a huge laboratory complex in Washington. Or a conservation facility and it became something that took a leadership role but in coordinating not only some conservation efforts through its publications, but also the funding agencies that were supporting these activities in individual museums. The Institute of Museum Services later to become the Institute of Museum and Library Services, The National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities all of which and eventually the National Science Foundation, all of which were putting relatively large sums of money. Giving it to museums to preserve and care for their collections, and to fund exhibitions and so forth and many aspects of them. So that needed to be coordinated and again professional advice given to these agencies. Maybe in some cases more participation on the part of bridging conservation programs such as the ones at IMS, or IMLS and also really under the National Museum Act which supported a huge number of conservation activities when it was still functioning.

The biggest concern of all was what was the Getty Conservation Institute gonna do? Was it about to take that job over? Or were they going to simply take the blueprint that we made for establishing a national institute. Put their money into it and fund it? It turned out in conversations with them, and they didn't decide that they wouldn't do that. They had some areas of conservation particularly in regard to anthropology and archeology that they didn't have an interest in. So, they wanted to cherry pick, they want to do this and that. So, we made this very tough decision to say, "Well we don't necessarily have the resources. We are going to take the big leap; we are going to incorporate. We are going to establish a National Institute, and that we are going to serve the whole conservation community. We are not

going to allow them just to get a piece of it". So, the story goes on from there, but basically that's the role we cut out to do.