

Excerpt from Dr. Robert L Feller's oral history interview conducted by Maura F. Cornman on April 5, 1977

Occasionally some very fancy, high-level meetings were held at Winterthur to discuss conservation problems. These were held about once a year and I understand that they were very nice affairs indeed. Bill Young, Caroline and Sheldon Keck and George Stout-- I don't know how many people went to that--would sit around and learnedly discuss conservation problems. I was always quite impressed that this was indeed a very fancy and high-level meeting of some kind. But I never knew quite what the objectives were. It really shows that there was a long interest down at Winterthur going way, way back. That's an aside but it does need looking into. Some of the details of the origin of NCAC can be found in the first publication--the principal publication--"Conservation of Cultural Property in the United States" [Note: published in 1976] There is an appendix too in which its origin and objectives [are mentioned] and there was a conference supported by the NEA held at the Winterthur Museum in 1973. I don't know all the reasons for that conference, but it was primarily twenty-five participants to discuss training. And at that meeting since I was not in a training program, I didn't go, and the Library of Congress was not invited. There was a proposal, a resolution made that a central reference point or consulting committee be established to interchange ideas. And that was a formal resolution coming out of that meeting at Winterthur. The National Museum Act was meeting within the same month and through their generosity they were able to authorize something like \$25,000 for the establishment of an office that would handle those problems almost at the adjournment of their own meeting several weeks later. So, the mechanism was set up where there could be sort of a secretary's office in Washington, D.C. to establish what later became the NCAC. Now there are a number of needs for this. Many things happen in life because there is a demand for them somewhere and the government was trying to decide on the need of a center for conservation. Senator Pell was beginning to be active and pressing for conservation on a very broad program. So, it was thought that the people who are actively concerned in conservation in this country should have a place to meet together... a mechanism. It really was to the foresight I think of people like Paul Perrot and Peter Powers who saw that some kind of advisory council probably could serve the whole field as well. So, they began looking around for a mechanism. How do you get the membership of such an organization in a hurry? Well, again, in its appendix it says that the initial membership was based on the delegates to the International Center Advisory Committee. There is a Rome Center and so forth A Rome Center Advisory Committee that had been established in Washington serving the advisory council for historic preservation. So, they really took the people that were already on that list and gathered them together. We didn't [initially have] everybody on that committee, but we took all of those people. I would say 80% of the people on that Rome Center guide ended up on NCAC. These were the 80% who were immediately concerned with conservation. The schools, the laboratories, and so forth. The rest is sort of history.