

commentary

from other pens...

Smithsonian museum digs into its own past

By Carl Hartman

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — A century ago, when a gentleman would routinely provide a spittoon for his office and carry a pocket watch with a fancy fob, Washington already had a museum to remind future generations of how things used to be.

Now the Smithsonian Institution, which runs the National Museum of American History, is publishing a book on its own history of collecting. It says people need to be reminded of how their grandparents lived in order to understand the currents of modern life.

"Legacies," by Steven Lubar and Kathleen M. Kendrick, has an illustration on nearly all of its pages to support the argument the past is worth holding onto.

The authors quote John Steinbeck's classic novel "The Grapes of Wrath" about a poor family agonizing over what to take along as they prepare to move from Oklahoma to California.

"How will we know it's us without our past?" is the question.

Watch fobs and spittoons have stories to tell, but the museum and book include much more.

For example, there's a casting of Abraham Lincoln's face and the top hat he wore to Ford's Theatre on April 15, 1865. There's a 1790 spinning frame from a mill in Rhode Island, the 1849 patent model of Samuel F.B. Morse's telegraph, and a 1936 child's chemistry set. There's George Armstrong Custer's fringed buckskin coat, and a 1987 panel from the AIDS memorial quilt. All make a point about the American past.

There are the chairs from the McLean House at Appomattox Court House, Va., on which Gens. Robert E. Lee and Ulysses Grant sat when they agreed to the terms that ended the Civil War.

There's a Stradivarius violin from the 1700s and Duke Ellington's manuscript score for "Light" from about 1940.

But what is a fob?

The watch pocket, which most clothing manufacturers have abandoned, was called a fob. But the fob was also the name of the ornament that hung from the watch chain outside the pocket. It enabled the gentleman to avoid an unseemly struggle when he hauled the watch out of the tight pocket.

Although the book quotes a former gatekeeper of museum collections as banning "personal memorabilia," the current generation of curators have found that personal things still say a lot.

An illustration in "Legacies" shows a watch and fob made in 1886 for A.W. Callen of Junction City, Kan. Callen had them encrusted with gold nuggets from his Colorado mine.

Today's taste may find them tacky and ostentatious. In their time they were considered beautiful as well as valuable. Moreover they were a testimony of family love from "Old Grizzly," as Callen inscribed himself. Watch and fob were bequeathed to the Smithsonian in 1963.

Only a small fraction of the more than 3 million objects in the American history museum's storerooms is on display at any one time.

Some exhibits are incomplete, despite the best efforts of collectors. Of George Washington's uniform, the museum explains he actually wore the waistcoat with its dozen buttons and tight britches during the Revolution. The coat comes from his time as president.

The museum has only found parts of ENIAC, the huge "electronic numerical integrator and computer," even though it began collecting every component it could find in the 1960s.

Most historians, it says, recognize ENIAC as "the first electronic, programmable, general-purpose, commercially successful digital computer," though there is still some debate. The U.S. Army used ENIAC for ballistic calculations after it was built in 1945.

Prized for its place in the history of technology, the bulky array of wiring is said to have less calculating power than today's digital watches.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Carl Hartman has reported for The Associated Press for more than 50 years. He covers the art and museum scene.



Bin Laden's tax haven in the Bahamas

Be patriotic, fly Old Glory and buy into the stock market.

A prayer service in Yankee Stadium you say? Well, things are really bad when Oprah Winfrey leads a prayer in Yankee Stadium. What would Casey Stengel say about that?

It is hard not to see a U.S. flag on the CNBC cable channel. Unbelievable! After four days, the paradigm of cyberspace (American) capitalism is open again and those fancy guys were nervous as a cat on a tin roof. They wanted everyone to be patriotic and buy the American stock market.

Yeah, but it would be isolationist if we didn't buy Chinese. Bet they don't say the same thing when we import cattle from Canada and Australia, or sugar fructose for Pepsi and Coke.

Was it buy American when tax evaders opened offshore accounts in the Caribbean? These off shore banks are as secretive as the People's Liberation Army of China.

Things are bad when eight year old girls are chained to a machine making U.S. flags 12 hours a day. So buy, buy, buy Chinese.

Say whatever happened to those black berets made in China, was that buy American? Was it buy American when someone made a stupid suggestion that the meat we eat should be labeled domestic or imported? Whatever happened to the right to know?

The ink was not dry on the North American Free Trade Agreement before there was a rash of food contaminations and some wondered if it was Montazuma's revenge, but what better way for terrorists to contaminate our food chain than to come across our borders.

We have a Secretary of Agriculture that nullified a dually held commodity referendum checkoff vote.

We have Chinese espionage agents who confess to passing secrets to China, but are not prosecuted. Then we wonder why we still are holding military-exchanges with People's Liberation Army of



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• wayne's world

China. It was great for Jaing. The Chinese gained valuable information but the U.S. got what the little boy shot at (nothing).

So its not surprising we are vulnerable to terrorist attacks. There is more to this than who has funny looking beards.

We have the eco-terrorists. They are like the Chinese when they commit terrorists acts they never go to jail. All that happens is the local sheriff's department says we are looking into the incident but we haven't arrested anyone. Does that sound familiar?

The eco-terrorists claim the same moral rectitude as the Muslims it was all those white guys fault.

We are hearing a lot of tough talk from the White Teepee. They say we will go after anyone that had anything to do with the implosion in New York City but do they really mean it?

He says he will impound the terrorists money, but they would be the village idiot if they didn't have their money in some offshore bank in the Barbados. Someone should tell him money is not farm exports.

It is easier to ship the EP-3E Lockheed Aries II to the Pentagon than to export agricultural commodities. You would think food was a nuclear satellite. It takes an export license from the Commerce and State Department to export our farm surpluses. Money is not gold bouillon all it takes to export money is a computer. Bin Laden can move money with the speed of light across time zones, across continents and never be caught.

It will be easier to send a Chinese spy to jail than it is to find Bin Laden's money. We should look in our caves first, some of the most prestigious names in banking, have offshore shell banks, there.

So good luck to the big Chief in the White Tee-

pee. It might be impossible to impound Bin Laden's bank accounts. He can't count on New York City hedge funds like George Soros and Long-Term Capital Management to be patriotic. When it comes to money its a world with no national flags.

So go ahead the U.S. Federal Reserve is printing money like it was the central bank of China. Alan Greenspan has promised the European Union \$50 billion to bailout its banking system. He has made available another \$20 to \$30 billion to create liquidity (inflation) for the U.S. stock market.

You farmers don't need to worry they are shipping 100,000 metric tons of wheat to the Taliban and Bin Laden in Afghanistan.

The Maritime Service should be happy too they will make \$1.14 a bushel shipping it to them. While tensions in the Middle-East are always a factor, but this anti-Americanism may have began back in July of 1997 when nearly every central bank in these Islamic nations was driven off their U.S. dollar peg. Over night U.S. wheat cost them \$10 a bushel in their currency. What had been an Asian tiger economy had become a dead cat bounce.

What did that Pioneer Village along the Potomac do? It started the printing presses again and bailed out the stock market, that had dropped 500 points. That was great for the let them eat cakers but for emerging nations like Indonesia and South Korea it was back to the Stalingrad choice.

For 20 years the above mentioned was pulling their people out of poverty but after the Asian contagion the poverty in these Islamic nations went from 11 percent to 50 percent, of their people.

Even if those fancy guys had their brains removed they should have known that it would have been better to give them our surpluses THEN — than fighting them NOW.

What did they say? They said we can't do that, but we are. We are sending 100,000 tons to Afghanistan under the Mother Jones Act, and it is WAR.

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Good, bad or ... diplomacy



diana west

• commentary

Thanks to British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, we now see how it's really done: how a wily mastery of diplomacy can coalesce any coalition, poof, before you can say "Death to America."

Hang on a second. You mean that's not what happened following Straw's "historic" visit to Tehran this week? Not exactly. As Straw put it, according to the London Telegraph, "The phrase that I think would be more appropriate (than coalition-building) is that of an international consensus."

"Consensus" may be a couple notches down from "coalition," but it's a start. What sort of consensus did Straw build, and, equally important, how did he build it?

One day after conferring with Secretary of State Colin Powell, Straw jetted to Tehran, marking the first time a British Foreign Secretary had traveled to the radically anti-Western country since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Carrying what the State Department characterized as "no particular message" from the United States (which, of course, severed diplomatic relations with Iran following the fall of the Shah and the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran), Straw was clearly out to gauge the chances of Iran joining the international coalition to be led by the United States against state-sponsored terrorism.

Problem is, Iran itself is a state sponsor of terrorism — often against the United States. Remember the 1983 suicide bombing of the U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut that killed 241 young men? That was the work of Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militia. Among other massacres, Iran is implicated in the 1996 bombing in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 airmen, and is a suspect, along with Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda, in the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. It may even have had a bloody hand in the attack on America of Sept. 11. This sort of thing might present a stumbling block to the average Joe, but not to the professionals in the British Foreign Office.

Straw determined that the best way to defuse the pesky terror issue was, to coin a phrase, to feel the terrorists' pain. On the day before his arrival, he contributed an inflammatory op-ed piece to the Iranian press in which he came perilously close to rationalizing terrorism by linking it to the plight

of "Palestine." That old canard requires a willful misreading of the facts, from Ehud Barak's shockingly numerous concessions to Yassir Arafat (rejected), to Osama bin Laden's infamous hatred not for Israel, but for the United States and its interests in the Middle East. Perhaps worse, it reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the global and cultural scope of the mission before us.

Too bad not every Iranian could concentrate on his article; the chanting outside the British embassy of "Death to Britain," "Death to America," was too loud. And who could possibly hear that Straw was actually offering Iran a significant role in shaping Afghanistan's post-Taliban government? The important thing, of course, is that Iran's leaders heard him out. This seems to have been rather thrilling to the Foreign Secretary, who declared Britain and Iran to be in "absolute agreement." About what, however, wasn't clear. "What I've started today is a high-level dialogue with the Iranians of a kind that we've not enjoyed for years," Straw said before departing for Tel Aviv, where he would face understandably livid Israelis. "I want to see that continued."

What continued? Iran waited until Straw was out of town before Ayatollah Ali Khamenei gave an answer. Amid cries of "Death to America" — kind of brings on nostalgia for the hostage crisis — and "Death to Israel," the Ayatollah announced that Iran would provide zero help to America and its allies, whoever they might be. "We do not trust America. We do not think America has the competence and sincerity to lead an international move against terrorism, as the world's most dangerous terrorists are sitting next to it," he said, referring to, of all countries, Israel. He went on to say that America was "over-expectant" in regard to assembling a coalition, and, in general, engaging in "distrusting" behavior. Which seemed to remind the Ayatollah that, as he put it, "Israeli leaders are all

terrorists ... America ... blood ... Zionist regime ..." The coalition needs this guy like it needs Osama bin Laden.

Believe it or not, the State Department isn't so sure. "We would still be interested in what Iran is prepared to do against terrorism," spokesman Richard Boucher said after the Ayatollah's outburst. Didn't Iran make itself clear? Even its "moderate" president, Mohammad Khatami, came out to dismiss President Bush as "arrogant" for attempting to "distinguish between good and bad." Meanwhile, thank heavens for Bush's "arrogance" — a "vice" diplomats don't seem to have.

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The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

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Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: gdnadv@nwkansas.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$22; six months, \$38; 12 months, \$72. By mail in Kansas, Colorado: three months, \$ 28; six months, \$50; 12 months, \$95. (All tax included.) Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$25; six months, \$40; 12 months, \$75.

Incorporating:

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County Herald**

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