

It has been 40 years since the founding of the International Fund for Monuments—as WMF was first known—which has become the leading private organization dedicated to safeguarding and preserving imperiled architectural heritage around the globe. To mark the occasion, ICON asked WMF president Bonnie Burnham to discuss the organization, its impact on the field of preservation, and the challenges that lie ahead.

ICON: WMF's mission—to preserve mankind's built heritage that is at risk—is a hefty one. Do you think WMF's existence over the past 40 years has made a big difference for the world's cultural heritage?

BB: Yes, of course I think so. But to answer that question properly, one must look back at what the field of cultural heritage looked like 40 years ago—and, of course, it looked very different. In the early 1960s, the things that we consider today to be the milestones of the field were just happening, and these events were a shock. The flooding of Nubian Monuments at Abu Simbel by the construction of the Aswan Dam in 1963, the destruction of Pennsylvania Station in New York in 1964, and the Florence and Venice floods of 1966 set the stage for a new concern about the survival of art and architecture. On an intergovernmental level, UNESCO began to mobilize

WMF AT 40

CHANGING THE FACE OF PRESERVATION

the international community to work together to protect great monuments and natural sites, and this culminated in the World Heritage Convention in 1972. In the U.S. the National Trust for Historic Preservation got its legs with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, following Penn Station's loss. WMF was part of this moment in history, but the impetus for its creation was completely different.

Colonel James A. Gray, who founded the International Fund for Monuments, was a retired U.S. Army officer who had a layman's interest in antiquity and a knowledge of engineering. He also shared the vision and ideals of a generation whose values were framed by the devastations of World War II, and who believed the world should be a better place as a result. Gray watched as UNESCO undertook its campaign to raise Ramses II's 3300-year-old temple at Abu Simbel from the flood waters, and wondered how a regular guy like himself could help in such an effort. After making inquiries, he found out that there really was no formal mechanism for channeling private interest and support for international historic preservation. So he decided to create one, and in May 1965, the IFM (which was WMF's name until 1985) was born.

ICON: Why was it important to create a private organization in the field, with government bodies and UNESCO paying attention to these issues?

BB: No government and no intergovernmental body, no matter how wealthy, has enough resources to care for its heritage adequately, and even the most important sites in the world are sometimes put at risk. Private organizations can begin to address this by calling attention when and where they see it is necessary, and by providing support.

The rock-hewn churches of Lalibela in Ethiopia were among the first beneficiaries of WMF support when the nascent organization hired Italian conservators to assist the Ethiopian government in finding a method to remove a bituminous coating that was abetting the deterioration of delicate paintings and polychrome finishes within the sanctuaries. Once a treatment was devised, the U.S. government paid for the large Ethiopian work force that was trained to carry out the restoration project, which continued until the country's government fell to revolutionaries in 1972.





William Mulloy, a pioneering American archaeologist who conducted the first restorations of ceremonial altars on Easter Island in the 1960s and 1970s, decided to send a detached head of one of the moai on a world tour with stops in the U.S. and Japan to promote knowledge of the island's extraordinary cultural heritage. Today, WMF continues to support management planning, conservation, and interpretation at sites on the island, including Rana Raraku, the quarry from which the moai were carved.



Non-profit organizations like WMF can be flexible and innovative in finding solutions to meet preservation challenges. This has been a hallmark of our work since the beginning. But in addition, our mandate is to defend the public interest. Private organizations capture the passion of the people they represent. They are successful when they engage moral and financial support from a constituency that cares about what they do.

Since no one guarantees our budget, we have to choose our battles carefully, and we have to show results. The projects we choose to do must be effective, appropriate, and meaningful. You can't always say that of the public sector.

ICON: What were some of IFM/WMF's early projects?

BB: *The first projects were interesting because they had all the earmarks of the way we work today. From the beginning, the Colonel realized that the challenges facing sites in need of preservation had several dimensions—there were technical problems, financial needs, and a lack of public awareness. IFM tried to address all of these issues in its choice of projects. Among its first activities were feasibility studies to address the progressive tilting of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, for example, and the deterioration of the stone literary lions, Patience and Fortitude, that stand in front of the New York Public Library. These well-publicized activities got the ball rolling.*

With the support of the legendary philanthropist Lila Acheson Wallace, the organization was able to assist the Ethiopian government in developing a technique for restoring murals within the twelfth-century rock-hewn churches at Lalibela. And in the late 1960s, following a visit to Easter Island, Gray arranged for one of the island's enormous 1,000-year-old sculptural heads to be transported to the U.S. to be exhibited in front of the Seagram Building in New York and the Pan American Union in Washington to call attention to the plight of the island's ancient monuments and raise funds for their conservation. This exhibition generated tremendous publicity and enough donor interest for the IFM to embark on a long-term restoration campaign on the island.

ICON: Is there a specific kind of event that triggers WMF involvement in a project?

BB: *Since the earliest years of WMF, the words "endangered" and "cultural heritage" were inextricably linked to its mission. Ever since its mettle was tested when the floods hit Venice in 1966, disaster response has been a specialty. The Venice Flood evoked a response from people everywhere, and*

Gray tapped that outpouring of concern. He pulled together groups of people all over the United States and encouraged them to create local chapters and adopt projects. Under his leadership, the organization proved it could efficiently manage a large portfolio of projects, and attract the support for them—which is how we continue to operate today.

The 1985 earthquake in Mexico City provided another opportunity to respond to a major international catastrophe, which left in its wake 10,000 dead, thousands more homeless, and billions of dollars in damage, much of it concentrated in the city's historic center. Once again, we were able to quickly identify projects and attract international donor support. We have a sustained interest in revitalizing the historic center of Mexico City and WMF is still working there, most recently in partnership with the Fundacion Centro Historico, under the vigorous leadership of businessman and philanthropist Carlos Slim.

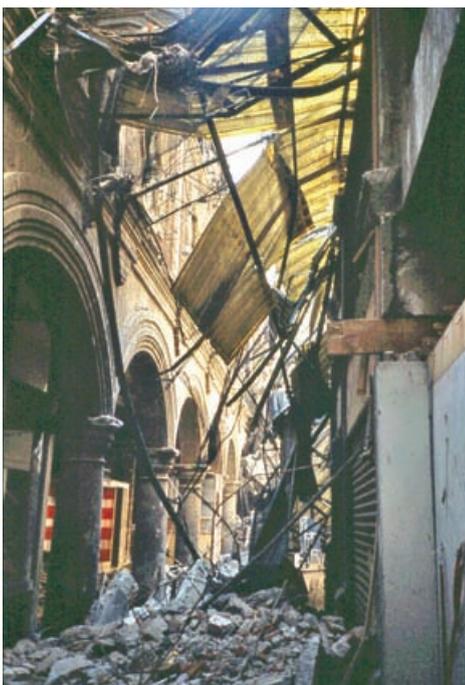
After 9/11, WMF brought together the various organizations devoted to historic preservation in New York at the municipal, state, and national levels, to pool our resources and avoid any overlap as we worked toward a common goal. The result was the establishment of the Lower Manhattan Emergency Preservation Fund, an umbrella organization charged with setting priorities and channeling funds for restoration work on historic buildings affected by the terrorist attack or needing advocacy to avoid being lost to redevelopment.

And within weeks of Hurricane Katrina striking the Gulf Coast, we were able to dispatch a technical mission to the region to assess the damage to historic properties and identify pilot projects, which we're carrying out in partnership with local and national organizations. WMF adds an international endorsement to local concern that precious buildings and sites may disappear in the aftermath of disaster. Our presence is often very important.

ICON: Speaking of joint ventures, WMF has forged a number of key partnerships with other organizations. How has that increased the organization's capacity to carry out work in the field?

BB: WMF would not have been able to sustain its commitment to preservation without the numerous partnerships we have established over the years. Some of these have been with donor organizations

Following the 1985 earthquake that struck Mexico City, damaging Aztec, Colonial, and Modern structures, WMF embarked on the restoration of important modern murals within the city's civic buildings. Two years ago, WMF formed a partnership with philanthropist Carlos Slim to revitalize the city's entire historic center.





In 1989, WMF carried out the restoration of the painted cupola of the Dome of the Invalides in Paris, above, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution and celebrate the launch of the organization's French affiliate. Taking cues from WMF, the French government restored the magnificent exterior gilding of the dome for the occasion. The restoration project initiated a long-term exchange program between preservation crafts people in the United States and France, sponsored by the Florence Gould Foundation. Facing page, a French apprentice works on Tiffany windows in the Brooklyn Stained Glass Conservation Studio.

such as the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, which has long been committed to the conservation of important works of European art. Others include our partnership with American Express to establish the World Monuments Watch, and with the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, which helped us launch our Jewish Heritage Program.

We also regularly join forces with local preservation organizations wherever we work around the world. Relationships with local specialists, funders, and community members are key to our work. It is imperative that projects have support—whether financial or logistic—at the local level and that the people living in the shadow of important sites have a vested interest in their preservation. Our goal for the sites we preserve, which are often derelict when we start working, is to find vigorous new uses, so they can be sustained locally and will not need our help again. Otherwise, our investment will be wasted.

ICON: With so many sites in need around the globe, how does WMF prioritize projects?

BB: A decade ago, we realized that we were facing an ever-increasing demand for our help. We launched the World Monuments Watch and its biennial listing of 100 Most Endangered Sites to identify sites at great risk, to highlight their plight, and if possible to deliver the technical assistance and financial resources they needed. Since then we have listed well over 400 sites in more than 100 countries.

The Watch program has been a huge success. It has allowed us to build close relationships with other preservation groups around the world—both public and private—and it has given us vast experience in dealing with a range of problems that affect different types of heritage sites. Archaeological sites are often negatively impacted by unmanaged tourism and encroachment; religious properties are affected by the loss of a vital community of users; and modern buildings often lack legal protection and public recognition of their importance. We are now gaining the capacity to diagnose problems and recommend solutions based on our knowledge of successful case histories.

The Watch program has also made WMF a major player financially. American Express, its founding sponsor, committed \$1 million a year to the program for the first ten years, which was an unprecedented level of support for a corporate sponsor in the field of preservation. This support has leveraged more than \$150 million from other sources to save these sites. We still need more funds to address the problems of all the sites on the endangered list, but we know we're making a big difference for most of them.

ICON: How is WMF able to work on so many projects in so many places with such a limited budget?

BB: Leverage is the answer. Our support usually unlocks a wealth of local resources—in terms of funds, technical capacity, and public good will. Even a small commitment from WMF for planning or emergency work has a lot of local impact. The corollary is also true: we have discovered long ago that success is difficult without a strong local commitment.

To stimulate local investment in projects, WMF's trustee Robert W. Wilson offered us a challenge

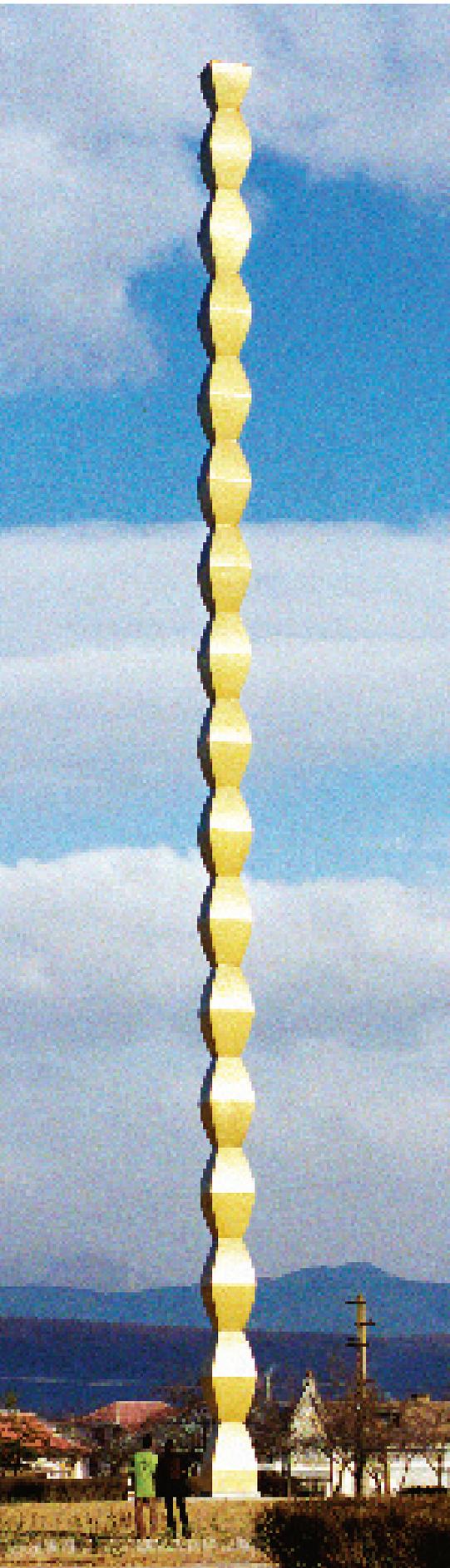


five years ago. He would be willing to personally commit up to \$10 million a year to support projects around the world, if we could find equal funding from partners abroad, as well as donor support in America to match his funds. Since then, our Wilson challenge funds, matched with partner commitments, have channeled about \$100 million into conservation projects everywhere. The scale of our involvement has also increased—we can mobilize huge projects that would have been beyond our reach in the past. This fall, Wilson doubled his challenge. We have a very exciting time ahead when we can focus strategically on the most important sites and the most entrenched problems that need solutions.

ICON: How have world events influenced the selection of projects in WMF's portfolio?

BB: *The constantly changing political landscape—especially since the end of the Cold War—has been a big factor in setting our global agenda. We have often found ourselves in the aftermath of war and political isolation. We were among the first international organizations to be invited into Cambodia to help with the conservation of Angkor. Since 1989, we have been working at this extraordinary monumental complex to train a new generation of Cambodian conservators and architects (see page 32).*

Eastern and Central Europe have also been a focal point of our work in the past 15 years. In these countries, preservation can have an enormous impact on the economic life of local communities. The participation of an international organization, bringing funds, professional resources, and good will, is received with great pride and enthusiasm. You can even say that our work is a diplomatic gesture without the political baggage.



The architectural heritage of Eastern Europe was in a sorry state following the fall of the Soviet Union. WMF helped focus governmental and non-profit resources on important sites, including the Alexander Palace outside St. Petersburg, above, and with a new roof, top right; the Tempel Synagogue in Krakow, right, and the Endless Column in Romania, left. Building consensus among local groups, government agencies, and the international preservation community—all of which have differing conservation philosophies—to resolve technical challenges has been a feature of WMF's projects in the region.



One of our most pressing concerns at the moment is for the cultural heritage at risk with the ongoing conflict in Iraq. Shortly after the war broke out, we joined forces with the Getty Conservation Institute and Iraq's State Board of Antiquities and Heritage to launch the Iraq Cultural Heritage Initiative. The first objective of this joint initiative—to develop a management tool, in the form of a database, that will allow Iraq to monitor the condition of its heritage sites and establish its priorities based on objective criteria—is almost complete. We are training Iraqis in rapid site assessment so that priority conservation projects can be identified. But we are still very worried about how long it will be before work can start on the ground—and how much more damage will occur in the meantime.

ICON: What is WMF doing today that is different from past years?

BB: The opening up of China in recent years has presented us with opportunities unimaginable a decade ago. We have embarked on the restoration of the eighteenth-century emperor Qianlong's Lodge of Retirement and gardens in the Forbidden City, which is bringing about a revival of the artisanal skills needed to carry out the work, but is also giving our Chinese partners their first opportunity to work with Western partners. Through the project, WMF is acting as a bridge between China, an economically vibrant country emerging from decades of isolation, and the international conservation community. We have gathered together not only the very substantial financial resources needed to preserve this unique environment, but we are engaging the most qualified professionals in the world to create an unparalleled museum environment that rivals any institution in the West. This is a very exciting and unprecedented undertaking.

ICON: Are the challenges WMF faces becoming more intense despite our best efforts?

BB: While the threats to cultural heritage have not been reduced, we have honed our ability to respond. The world now acknowledges the need to preserve the past as part of our world today and for future generations. As more people realize just how precious this cultural heritage is, and how fundamental it is in their lives, I believe we will gain the recognition we need to be even more effective. ■

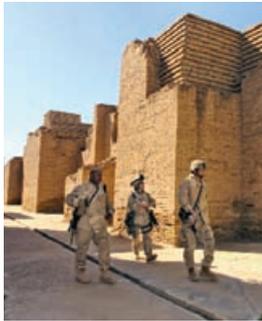
CHARTING A COURSE FOR THE FUTURE

WMF LAUNCHES FOUR NEW INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS NEW CHALLENGES IN PRESERVATION

To enhance its ability to respond to new threats to cultural heritage with vigilance and preparedness, WMF has launched a number of new initiatives targeting areas of concern in the field of preservation. These initiatives—which complement a number of WMF’s existing site-specific programs—represent a substantial organizational commitment in dollars and professional resources.

Iraq Cultural Heritage at Risk

Launched in partnership with the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) shortly after the war broke out and carried out in coordination with UNESCO and Iraq’s State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, the GCI/WMF Iraq Cultural Heritage Conservation Initiative has embarked on a program to enable Iraqi conservation professionals to regain the capacity to care for their cultural heritage damaged during the war and in its aftermath. Cultural heritage professionals are being trained in the latest techniques for rapid site assessment and are creating a database of important sites and monuments—which number more than 10,000 and chronicle millennia of human history—so that they may establish conservation priorities when the country is safe and funds for restoration become available. The initiative also seeks to keep the issue of Iraq’s threatened cultural heritage in the public eye, and has created a mechanism to leverage additional public and private support.



Endangered Modernism

Whether classified as Functionalist, Rationalist, International Style, or simply, Modern, twentieth-century architecture was shaped by the rejection of traditional classical design and ornament and the use of emerging technologies and mass-produced materials to explore new theories of form, function, and space. These methods and materials—as well as the original political and social ideas that underpin their design—are often the very attributes that embody the landmark qualities of modern architecture.

In recent years, WMF has taken up the escalating battle to save great works of modern architecture that are threatened by neglect, deterioration, and demolition, culminating in the launch of its Modernism Initiative in 2005. While the issue of preserving modern architecture has lately gained prominence in public dis-

course, the threats to modern buildings continue to arise, in part, because the greatest threat to Modern architecture can be that too few people believe that buildings of our own time and the not-so-distant past are important enough to be preserved for future use. The 2006 World Monuments Watch list of *100 Most Endangered Sites* includes nine endangered Modern landmarks—the highest number yet—and most of them are threatened with demolition.



Reviving Traditional Building Arts

With the Traditional Building Arts Training Initiative, WMF has designed a two-tier response to the need for sustainable education and training in the building crafts and preservation arts around the world. On a national level within the U.S., WMF has brought together representatives from organizations both within and outside the preservation

mainstream to identify issues impacting traditional building arts training, assess available resources, and formulate solutions, including the development of national standards and guidelines. At the local and state level, WMF is working with communities and partners to develop hands-on training programs that harness and expand extant resources—including existing education programs—and create the opportunities needed to support and institutionalize long-term traditional building arts education. On an international level, WMF is continuing its efforts to revive “lost” or disappearing arts to carry out a host of projects, including its restoration of Qianlong’s eighteenth-century Retirement Lodge in the Forbidden City. WMF cannot fulfill its mission to save our most treasured sites unless there are skilled and experienced crafts people to carry out the work.

Saving European Fine Interiors

The European Fine Interiors Program, managed by WMF-Europe,



addresses the challenges of preserving major historic decorative ensembles, which often require special expertise and attention. Projects include survey and documentation of interior finishes, technical assistance, and the development and funding of full-scale conservation treatment, in cooperation with European institutional and philanthropic partners. Opportunities for training in traditional crafts and preservation arts

will be an integral part of this program and will be developed in cooperation with the Preservation Arts and Training Initiative. A dozen sites in five countries were selected as the core projects of the program at its launch. These projects represent important interiors in former residences as well as religious and civic contexts. The program seeks to provide for their restoration, maintenance, and interpretation for the public.

