

Honor Your History:



Celebrate Your Heroes!

Above: Monuments Men Dale V. Ford (left) and Harry Ettlinger (right) inspect this *Self Portrait* by Rembrandt in the Heilbronn mine, Germany. The painting was ultimately returned to the Karlsruhe Museum. Right: Robert Edsel (center) talking about the Monuments Men in the Raphael's Salone at the Vatican Museums.

By Robert M. Edsel

How can we safeguard our shared cultural and artistic heritage for future generations without knowing the rich legacy of the people who came before us and so ably pioneered the development of museums in this country? Are we so focused on our ambitions for the future that we have overlooked our past?

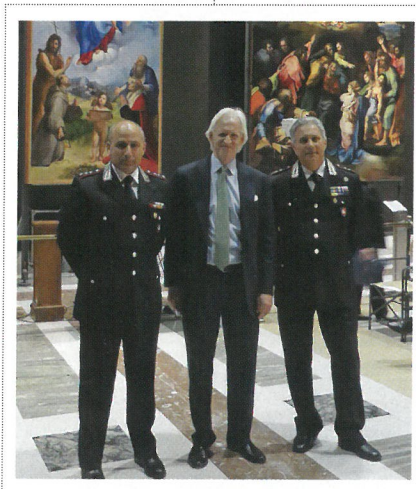
The Monuments Men performed a service to civilization without precedent. These mostly middle-aged men and women walked away from established careers—and their families—to become a new kind of soldier, one charged with saving, not destroying. They set a standard of respect for the cultural treasures of others that didn't exist before and hasn't been equaled since. I have spent much of my life gathering their stories and piecing together the mosaic of their experience before, during and after World War II. The privilege of getting to know these elderly veterans and their families has been accompanied by an unavoidable sadness: of the 20 Monuments Men and Women I have interviewed, only 6 are still living.

Ignorance or Busyness?

Nine years ago, before writing my second book, *The Monuments Men*, and long before George Clooney's eponymous film, I contacted the Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco about speaking to their audience. "What would you speak about?" I was asked. "Howe," I replied. Understandably confused, she responded, "I didn't ask *how*, I asked *what*." "Howe," I repeated. "Thomas Carr Howe." Her reply was an eye-opener: "Who is that?" I proceeded to explain this man's remarkable

service to the arts as the pivotal director of the Legion of Honor Museum in 1939, and then again in 1946 following a leave of absence to serve his country during World War II, including time as a Monuments Officer. In fact, many of the outstanding works of art that adorn this beautiful institution were acquired through donations and gifts from the most important collecting families in the Bay Area during Howe's nearly 30 years of service.

This became a fairly common occurrence in the years that followed. I frequently found myself sharing information with leaders of museums and other cultural institutions about the towering figures of their past whose service helped build the cultural country we have inherited today. Whether through ignorance or busyness, we are blinded not just to the achievements of the cultural forefathers of our country and other Allied nations, but the innovation and passion that enabled them to overcome many of the obstacles confronting museums today.



Local Connections

I have spoken about the Monuments Men and Women to audiences totaling about 60,000 people in just the past six years, from the majestic Raphael Room at the Vatican Museum to august auditoriums in our National Gallery of Art and other leading art museums, to community centers, secondary schools, colleges, synagogues and churches. I LOVE speaking about these heroes and do so frequently. One thing has been a constant: a near insatiable curiosity about each community's connection to the Monuments Men. Through my

ongoing research and that of the Monuments Men Foundation, I have learned that there is always a local connection. Frequently audience members share with me stories about their friendship with a previous museum director or curator only to express surprise that despite that friendship, they knew nothing about their military service during World War II. Like so many other members of the greatest generation, these men and women rarely spoke of their wartime experiences. They believed that the true heroes were the 390,000 men and women who did not return home, including two Monuments Men killed in action.

More Than Just Art

One common misconception among audiences is that the Monuments Men all had art museum backgrounds as directors, curators and art historians. This is not so. Their experience and contributions to the arts and sciences is as varied as the institutions that they served.

Consider for a moment Frederick Pleasants, an anthropologist at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard; or Gordon Chadwick, the architect and designer of the information center at Colonial Williamsburg, or zoologist Edward T. Boardman, who served as the assistant director of the Rochester Museum and Science Center and as curator of aquatic biology at the Cranbrook Institute of Science. And what about Norman Newton, an architect who designed the crosswalks and lawns that have welcomed millions of visitors

to the Statue of Liberty?

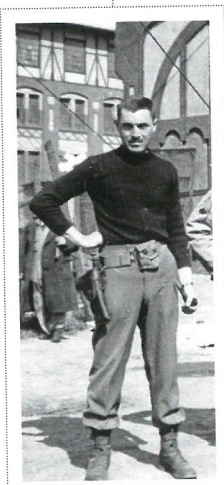
This holds true for Monuments Men from other nations, including Charles Mitchell, curator of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England; Guthorm Kavli, superintendent of the Royal Palace in Oslo, Norway; mineralogist and crystallographer Raymond Hocart, professor of mineralogy at the University of Paris; and Sir Gilbert Archey, assistant curator of zoology at the

Canterbury Museum and director of the Auckland War Memorial Museum, whose pioneering work as a zoologist resulted in a frog being named after him—Archey's frog.

While many Monuments Men and Women did serve as directors and curators of art museums, such titles fall far short of describing their lasting contributions and do little to provide insight into how they went about achieving so much with so few resources, especially in those nascent days of museums. Paul Sachs created the first museum studies

program in the United States, at Harvard, a course that emphasized the importance of connoisseurship. Almost half of his 341 students went on to become leaders of our nation's most prestigious cultural institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern

Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. One of his students, Lincoln Kirstein, even founded the New York City Ballet! Years later, with the outbreak of war at Pearl Harbor, the fullness of



Top: Monuments Man George L. Stout. Bottom: Monuments Man Stout works carefully to remove Michelangelo's *Bruges Madonna* from the salt mine in Altaussee, Austria.

Sachs's achievement emerged: 23 graduates of his museum studies course were selected and served as Monuments Officers.

Early Innovators

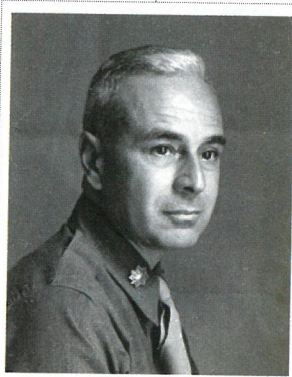
Paul Gardner, the first director of the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City (today known as the Nelson-Atkins Museum) in 1933, strongly believed that education was a critical responsibility of a museum. Lacking funding, he devised a plan to use Junior League volunteers as lecturers to work with both children and adults. A very young Otto Wittmann (who would, years later, become the legendary director of the Toledo Museum of Art) took the lead in training the volunteers. The program set such a high standard for public volunteerism and community engagement that museums across the country, including the Met, replicated it.

George Stout applied innovative technical studies and investigations into the conservation of works of art that established it as a respected field of academic study. Years later, he reflected on his pioneering work saying "I think we got some work done, back at the start, because nobody knew us, nobody bothered us—and we had no money." He took his ideas one critical step further by arguing for the creation of cultural preservation officers that would be attached to our fighting forces—the men

and women we know today as the Monuments Men. Charles Sawyer founded the Museum

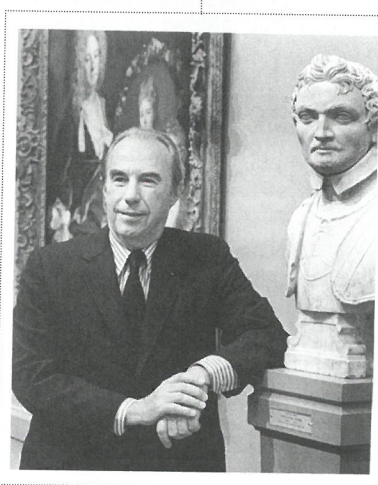


Practice Program at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, which remains one of the leading training grounds for the next generation of museum administrators. Like Paul Sachs before him, S. Lane Faison Jr., a professor of art at Williams College, cultivated a number of renowned museum directors out of his many students, including Kirk Varnedoe, James Wood, Thomas Krens, Glenn Lowry (current director of MoMA) and Rusty Powell (current director of the National Gallery of Art).



Forefathers of Preservation

Monuments Men also rose to the highest ranks of the American Alliance of Museums: Paul Sachs (1932–1936), David Finley (1945–1949), and Charles Parkhurst (1966–1968) each served as president of AAM. But their legacy extends far beyond just national service. Determined to put what they had learned to its fullest and best use, various Monuments Men set in motion initiatives that led to the creation of new organizations dedicated to the arts and humanities, including UNESCO and the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed



Top: Charles Sawyer. Middle: Paul Gardner. Bottom: Otto Wittmann.

Conflict, the International Council on Museums and Sites (ICOMOS) the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts. Even today, after the passage of so many years, we continue to benefit from their vision and hard work.

War is certainly the most dramatic example of the threats that the Monuments Men had to overcome, but it hardly completes the list. Natural disasters, such as the earthquake in L'Aquila, Italy, and man-made problems, including the corrosive impact of atmospheric emissions on revered monuments like the Colosseum, create enormous challenges for preservationists today. Other dangers, seemingly mundane when compared to war, can prove just as threatening to a museum's survival, including budget shortfalls, overexpansion, uninformed leadership, personal agendas and out-of-control egos. The Monuments Men and Women, working without the benefit of today's tools of technology—and with far fewer resources—successfully confronted many of these problems in the course of their civilian and military service. Who among us would not benefit

from knowing more about them and their management skills?

Paul Sachs, the great educator of so many Monuments Men and Women and the 16th president of AAM, had an acute appreciation of the skills required to build great institutions and maintain them over many years, something he spoke about forcefully at the 25th anniversary of

the founding of MoMA.

“Trustees and staff have as a team kept alive the spirit that animated the founders—while moving forward. They have continued to take chances. They have avoided the dangers that dog the footsteps of

the complacent. They have made the museum a telling instrument in the field of general education...Only by ever pioneering boldly and by taking risks will the museum continue to escape the dangers that go with timidity.”

Honoring Our Predecessors

When I founded the Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art, I had hoped that those in the museum world would not only embrace our efforts, but also take a leadership role in honoring their predecessors. A few museums and other cultural institutions did embrace and promote their



Top: On October 22, 2015, the Monuments Men and Women were collectively awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor bestowed by the United States. Four of only six living Monuments Men and women were able to attend the ceremony.
Bottom: Robert Edsel with George Clooney and Grant Heslov, executive producers of the 2014 film *The Monuments Men*.

Monuments Men connection, but far too few. While *The Monuments Men* film by George Clooney, my three books about these scholar-soldiers, the recent awarding to them of the Congressional Gold Medal—our nation’s highest civilian honor—and the ongoing work of the Monuments Men Foundation have succeeded in creating worldwide awareness of these heroes of civilization and their good deeds, we live in a world where memories fade quickly. The

advocacy of the Monuments Men Foundation is certainly important, but the lasting solution to preserve these men and women’s legacy depends on the organizations

that have benefited most from their sacrifices and accomplishments. Many of them were members of AAM; they are you.

Collective Responsibility?

This, then, is the challenge I lay down before AAM and its members. What will be said 70 years from now about how you responded to the challenge of protecting and utilizing the legacy of our cultural forefathers—the Monuments Men and Women? Will future generations reflect on your efforts with pride, as we do those who preserved civilization’s cultural heritage during the most destructive war ever, or will they wonder why those who benefited most allowed these heroes’ legacy to gather dust on the shelves of history?

British Monuments Man Major Ronald Balfour prepared eloquent remarks about the importance of preserving culture and history, which he intended to share with the men under his command. Tragically, he died before he could deliver his speech, killed by German artillery while relocating church treasures out of harm’s way. Balfour underscored the importance of respect not just for cultural and historic objects, but also for the personal items

of others—even those belonging to Germans. The sentiment of his message also emphasizes the responsibility we each have to preserve the history of the



Monuments Men and Women, individually and as a group. “No age lives entirely alone; every civilization is formed not merely by its own achievements but by what it has inherited from the past. If these things are destroyed, we have lost a part of our past, and we shall be the poorer for it.” «

Robert M. Edsel is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of three books about the Monuments Men: Rescuing da Vinci, The Monuments Men and Saving Italy. He is the co-producer of the acclaimed documentary film, The Rape of Europe. He is also founder and chairman of the Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art and 2007 recipient of the National Humanities Medal, our nation’s highest honor for work in the humanities. He will be one of the speakers during the 2016 AAM Annual Meeting & MuseumExpo.

Above: President George W. Bush presented the Monuments Men Foundation with the 2007 National Humanities Medal, the highest honor bestowed by the United States for work in the humanities.