

## RECENT EVENTS



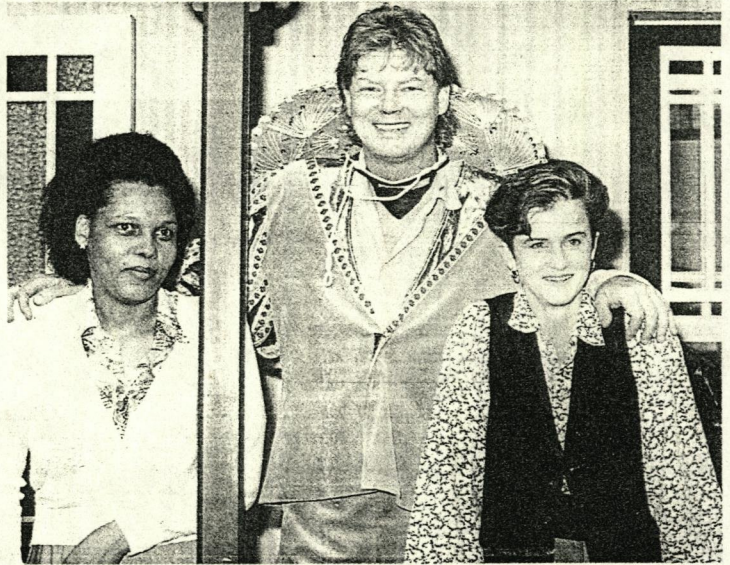
Dr Brian Stuckenberg, Director of Natal Museum, with Hilary Vickers and Dr Brett Hendey of the Natural Science Museum, Durban, at the opening of the 'KwaNunu' Arcade.



Maureen Smith, Natural Science Museum volunteer takes a group of trainee volunteers through their paces in the Museum's marine gallery.



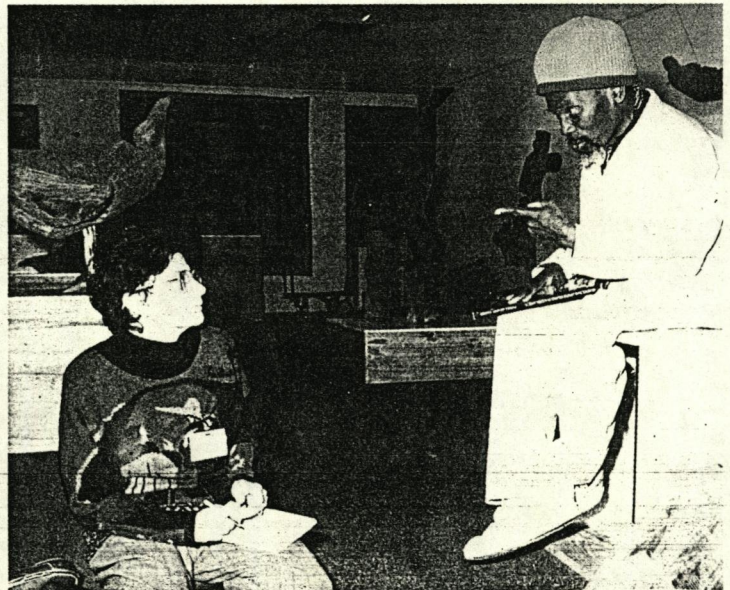
Peter Eldridge, Mrs Lillian Hughes and Councillor Derek Watterson at the opening of the Pyrates Room and Show at the Natal Maritime Museum on Friday 12 October 1990.



Valencia Gushu and Kelly Guilfoyle, Local History Museum staff members, with Peter Engblom the producer and scriptwriter of the Pyrates audio-visual show.



A series of origami workshops were held at the Durban Art Gallery whilst the 'Japanese Toys' exhibition was on view.



A piece of Jackson Hlungwani's works was recently acquired by the Durban Art Gallery. Seen here is Education Officer, Carol Brown interviewing the artist.



# COLLECTING THE GAPS

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*Potter, Bangamaye.*

One of the Local History Museum's priorities is to try and redress the dominant-culture bias that has existed since the founding of museums in Durban (and the wider Western world). What this means in effect is our moving into the space between the mainly academic work of oral historiographers, and the activities of private collectors and dealers in African art. A song recorded, an image captured or an artefact conserved will often "speak" much more eloquently to the layman than a pageful of history. And a piece collected without accompanying data about its original context is practically "mute" in terms of its value to the future as historical source. The middle ground is therefore important.

Traditionally, post-colonial museums have approached their task of documenting and representing (in the sense of 'exhibiting') the unempowered through the collection, interpretation and exhibition of traditional (that is to say, rural) material culture. In entrepôts like Durban, with one of the fastest rates of social transition in the industrialising world, the disappearance of much of what is today cherished as 'traditional life' has become a cause for concern for some, and profit for others. Museums



*Matrons, Nazarite festival.*



*Human chain demo, Mobeni.*



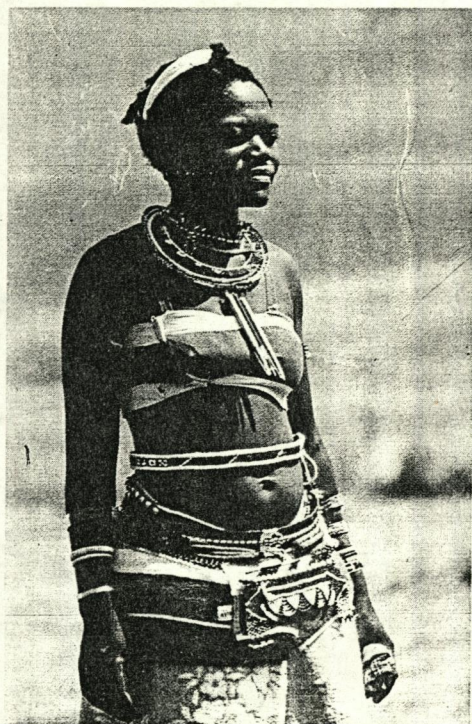
*Ex-Christian Sangoma, Elandsdraal.*

have largely collaborated with ethnology in "salvage ethnography" - i.e. "rescuing" by recording what remains of pre-industrial culture before it disappears. But here at the vortex of one of the biggest, modern rural-urban migrations, collections policy cannot stay confined to such a narrow brief. The South African history museum of today is also charged with collecting, in various media, artefacts of the culture of struggle, both political and economic - so little known outside its own Group Area.

That this is not a straightforward business under prevailing conditions goes without saying: a museologist visiting ceremonial occasions in the life of rural communities is scarcely ever given other than a warm welcome. But it would be unrealistic to expect the same in the shacklands and peri-urban ghettos of the Durban Functional Region, where people daily endure conditions unimaginable in the metropolis. One way out of this impasse has been to concentrate on research into the Church response to Natal's century-old trauma of urbanization. Another has been to try and identify how aspects of the culture of the countryside - such as certain belief-systems and their materials - persist into new conditions, and process the results as records and, in time, as displays.

Hopefully, though, a slowly resuming peace and the normalization of political life will allow the Local History Museum to become more closely associated with the people whose history we seek to reflect. Their involvement in our activities is perhaps the single most urgent issue facing institutions like ours across the nation. After all, as a proverb goes in the Zulu: "Amehlo ngamabhek'eshiya" (Eyes do not see all).

ROBERT PAPINI



*Party dress north of Msinga.*



*Nazarite dance.*