The future ain’t what it used to be.
-- Yogi Berra

If you worked at a museum in 1985, you might have dreamed of several things.

You may have wished for one of those sexy new Macintosh computers being advertised, though it wasn’t obvious how it would help your job performance any more than your old reliable IBM Selectric typewriter.

You may have heard of something called a cellular telephone that might be helpful in your work, but you probably didn’t have a briefcase big enough to carry it.

And you might have hoped one day to earn $40,000 a year, more than your museum’s director, but since your pay was just under $21,000 – the average for New England museum workers at the time – you most likely shrugged it off as a pipe dream.

Museum work is often said to be mission-driven, a quaint euphemism for low-paying. And while it is true that many of us love our work and would, in a perfect world, do it for nothing, most of us also need a paycheck. So it is with great interest that we speculate on the relative value of that paycheck. How am I doing compared to my museum colleagues? Compared to other fields? Compared to the national average?

For more than 25 years, NEMA’s Salary & Benefits Survey has enabled museum professionals to measure their own compensation with that of others. Now, for the first time, we provide an in-depth historical look at museum salaries and examine how our field has fared since 1985.

**The Big Picture**

First things first. Is the museum field indeed as low-paying as the euphemism implies? Compared to national averages, the answer is no.

Between 1985 and 2010 average New England museum salaries increased from $20,984 to $54,226, an average annual jump of 6.3%. The average U.S. salary during the same time period increased from $16,823 to $41,624 according to the federal Social Security Administration, an average increase of 5.9%, and the general U.S. inflation rate averaged 2.9% annually. By these measures, museum pro-
fessionals have enjoyed positive growth in their earning power.

Compared with other fields, New England museums also enjoyed better than average growth in the past 25 years. In 1985, the wages of our region’s museum professionals lagged behind the national averages of three major employment sectors, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: manufacturing, finance, and higher education. And while finance and higher ed continue to average higher salaries than museums (noting that prior to the Great Recession museums in New England virtually tied those sectors), museums have enjoyed a greater average annual increase than any of the sectors measured here.

Comparison of Museum Positions

Within New England museums, salary growth has been uneven since 1985. Although all positions compared here measured overall salary gains, outpacing both the average national inflation rate of 2.9% and the average national salary, some museum positions did better than others in the last 25 years.

Executive Directors made substantial gains in salary, from an average $37,484 in 1985 to $102,309 in 2010, an average annual increase of 6.9%. However, the position to enjoy the most dramatic increase was the Director of Development, with an average annual gain of 8.4%, from $29,594 in 1985 to $91,578 in 2010.

The other positions compared here, though, lost ground compared to the overall 6.3% annual average for wage growth in New England museums. Education Directors experienced the slowest growth rate, 4%, going from $27,675 to $55,259, followed by Membership Directors ($21,601 to $47,600 or 4.8%), Conservators ($31,216 to $71,076 or 5.1%), and Registrars ($18,793 to $44,345 or 5.4%). Membership Directors and Registrars were especially hard hit by the Great Recession, experiencing painful wage cuts between 2007 and 2010.

Inflation Adjustments

Adjusting for inflation magnifies the disparity between salary growth rates among our sample positions. Executive Directors enjoyed a 34.7% real growth in their salaries between 1985 and 2010.
and Development Directors did even better, with 52.7% real growth. At the other end of the spectrum, Membership Directors improved just 8.7% over the 25-year span, while Education Directors actually lost 1.5% in the purchasing power of their salaries*.

*Figures are based on the Consumer Price Index, provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

From Top to Bottom

Wage disparity is in the news frequently these days, and although disparity in the New England museum field does not quite approach the levels seen in other industries, the gap between the museum CEO and least-paid worker (consistently the position of Curatorial/Educational Assistant) has widened since 1985. In that year the Executive Director was paid three times the salary of the least-paid museum worker. Between 1985 and 1990, wage disparity dropped, with CEO salary 2.5 times the least-paid employee. The gap has expanded since then to a factor of 3.4 between the CEO ($102,309) and least-paid worker ($30,529) in 2010. Compared to private industry, though, the museum field is rather egalitarian: companies in the S&P 500 currently pay their CEOs 142 times the average employee salary.
NEW JOBS FOR A NEW AGE

The NEMA Salary & Benefits Survey provides an interesting look at how museum jobs reflect their times. Over the past 25 years, new job positions have been added to the survey as museums opened new revenue streams (Museum Store Manager/1990), placed greater emphasis on technology (Information Services/1998), and joined the digital revolution (Social Media Manager/2010).

1990
Museum Store Manager
Administrative Assistant to the Director
Marketing Director
Librarian
Editor/Head of Publications
Volunteer Coordinator
Building Superintendent/Operations Manager/Head of Maintenance
Chief of Security

1992
Deputy Director - Programs
Chief Financial Officer

1998
Information Services Director
Information Services B
Office Manager

2001
External Affairs Director
Public Programs Manager
Visitor Services Manager

2010
Librarian B
Functions Manager
Grants Manager
Graphic Designer
Major Grants Officer
Social Media Manager
Web Manager

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Women Surge Ahead

Females have long served as the core of the museum work force, and since 1985 they have become an even greater factor, now comprising 72% of museum employees compared with 64% in 1985.

In the past 25 years, women have made substantial gains in New England museum leadership. Just 29% of executive directors were female in 1985, but by 1992 women overtook men at the institutional helm. In 2010, women represented 64% of our region’s executive directors. (Note: the 1990 survey did not present gender data.)

Education Levels Remain Constant

Education data first appeared in the 1992 NEMA Salary & Benefits Survey. Somewhat surprisingly, overall education levels of the surveyed positions in the 2010 survey are similar to those in 1992, despite the growing popularity of college and university museum studies programs offering master’s degrees. (Note: numbers may not total 100% due to rounding.)
Employee Benefits

Whereas New England museum salaries overall have made steady gains over time, data from the NEMA Salary & Benefits Survey suggest that employees have lost ground with regard to their benefits.

Museums in 1992 were far more generous in providing health insurance than 2010, with marginal-ly more museums offering at least some coverage and almost half paying 100% of the employee’s premium. Sharp annual increases in insurance premiums are the likely explanation rather than an upsurge of museum miserliness.

Vacation time, likewise, showed subtle declines between 1992 and 2010. Presented here is data reflecting minimum paid annual leave, which museums provide their new hires. In 1992, 5% of museums generously offered at least 4 weeks of vacation to new employees. In 2010, no museums in the survey offered that level of paid leave; a greater percentage of museums instead offered new employees a more modest 2 weeks of vacation time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Insurance/1992</th>
<th>Health Insurance/2010</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Offered</td>
<td>48%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museum Pays &lt;100%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>Museum Pays 100%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Offered</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museum Pays &lt;100%</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Museum Pays 100%</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vacation/1992</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Week</td>
<td>2 Weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Week</td>
<td>2 Weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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Join your colleagues at these fun, informal NEMA-hosted events to mingle, relax, catch up with old friends and meet new ones.

April 23, 3-4 pm
Student Prince Cafe, Springfield, MA

April 26, 2012, 8:15 pm
Orleans Bar and Restaurant, Somerville, MA

April 30, 4:30-6 pm
A Gathering of New Englanders in Minneapolis!
The Local, Minneapolis, MN

May 2, 4-5 pm
The Boynton, Worcester, MA

May 10, 3-4 pm
British Beer Company, Sandwich, MA

May 14, 3:30-4:30 pm
Half Door, Hartford, CT
Co-hosted the Connecticut League of History Organizations

May 18, 4-5 pm
Old Timers, Clinton, MA

June 4, 5-6:30 pm
Embassy Suites, Waltham, MA

June 5, 5-6:30 pm
Rue De L’Espoir, Providence, RI

June 6, 5-6:30 pm
Brian Boru Public House, Portland, ME

June 13, 5-6:30 pm
Brix Wine Bar & Bistro, Pittsfield, MA

June 14, 5-6:30 pm
Canoe Club, Hanover, NH

RSVP Here