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To Have and to Hold: Traditional Preservation in the Digital Age

My role on this preservation panel is to represent the viewpoint of the director of a regional conservation center. As such, I would like to preface my remarks with a brief review of the activities of the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), in Andover, Massachusetts. NEDCC is a non-profit service organization providing third-party conservation and preservation services to libraries, archives, and museums in the Northeast. It performs conservation treatment of paper, books, photographs and a wide range of paper-based artifacts on a fee-for-service basis. It also provides reformatting services, including duplication of photographic materials and preservation microfilming. It has a staff of highly trained conservators and much specialized equipment, which makes possible a cooperative approach. It also has a well-developed field service program, which channels technical assistance to smaller and medium-sized institutions. The basic field services include training, surveys, answering technical inquiries, publications, and disaster assistance.

People who are preoccupied with preserving the past cannot help noticing that the world is rapidly changing. I never cease to be surprised that the younger members of our staff have never heard of Albert Schweitzer or Chang Kai Shek. When I suggest that they should not split their infinitives, they look at me as if I were sadly misinformed. Wet pipe sprinklers, which were considered dinosaurs when many of us learned about preservation, are now back in favor as the option of choice for fire suppression. The age of chemical photography must now be viewed as a historical period, with an ending as well as a beginning. As a result, supplies that archivists and curators have depended on for making duplicate negatives and duplicate positives will very probably become unavailable. Even flatbed scanners are

expected to disappear from the markets. As the publishing industry turns to more expensive overhead scanners, these are the only kind of equipment that manufacturers are likely to continue to support.

But some traditions continue. I am happy to report that in 2003, NEDCC celebrated its 30th birthday. This is an indication that a cooperative approach to providing preservation services is still a hot idea. Of course the Center needs to evolve to meet the changing needs of its clients. Certainly the Internet has changed the way it provides preservation information. NEDCC's Website, at www.nedcc.org, receives 2 million hits per year, and enables the Center to reach a greatly expanded audience. Thus NEDCC has a mandate to maintain services to its region while at the same time expanding its scope to meet national needs. To do this, it looks to more collaboration with regional preservation centers in other parts of the country to provide outreach to areas that do not yet have their own centers.

Challenge 1. The Need for Training in Preservation

Curators and archivists need to learn to be preservation managers. Staff who are responsible for collections care must understand how to manage all aspects of providing a stable environment, creating safe storage, organizing rehousing projects, overseeing housekeeping functions, writing policies on use and exhibition of collections, and negotiating with vendors for rebinding, reformatting, and conservation.

How do archivists and curators learn what they need to know about preservation? A need has been recognized for integrating preservation education into formal graduate programs on archives and librarianship. In April 2004, the Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science organized a conference on preservation education. Dean Michele Cloonan, who heads the School, observed that little has changed in preservation education in the last ten years. A survey conducted at the University of Pittsburgh revealed that only a handful of library schools have a full-time faculty member

with the expertise to teach a course on preservation; these are all schools that offer an archives specialty. Nearly half of accredited MLS programs still have no preservation offering. Jeannette Bastian, Associate Professor and Archives Program Director at Simmons College, reported on a survey of the content of preservation courses in library and archives graduate programs. She observed that there is no core curriculum for preservation, as there is for the archives field. That is to say, there is no generally agreed on list of topics and no generally consistent group of readings. Participants in the Simmons conference concurred that there is need to build field-wide consensus on a basic curriculum for preservation education. Further, there is a need for greater sharing of ideas between library/archives educators and preservation administrators.

NEDCC has strong interest in formal education in preservation. It has taught preservation courses as part of the MLS curriculum at Simmons College GSLIS since 1980, and demand for these courses is increasing. NEDCC recently received a Librarians for the 21st Century grant from IMLS to work with library/archives educators as well as other regional preservation centers to develop national consensus on a curriculum for an introductory course on preservation. The project will create detailed lesson plans and make them available online. The participating regional centers will present the course on a pilot basis in several library schools. After it has been evaluated and refined, the curriculum materials will be provided to all 57 accredited library schools, which means there is the potential to have a field-wide impact.

But most professionals working in the field today have learned what they know about preservation through workshops and sessions at museum and archives association meetings. There is a great need for training in place for people who are already performing collections care functions. More continuing education opportunities are needed, at a more advanced level than the familiar one-day workshops.

NEDCC is exploring ways to work with other regional centers to meet the national needs for continuing education. IMLS has made a National Leadership Grant to a consortium of regional preservation centers, the University of Washington, and OCLC to develop a comprehensive curriculum for an intensive course on preservation management and teach it cooperatively in Pacific Northwest. Each participating center will be responsible for teaching one week-long unit. The target audience is administrators who oversee preservation management from a position of mixed responsibilities. Online modules, based on the course units, will be developed to reach a broader audience. In the future, this model will be used to reach out to other underserved geographic areas and audiences.

Challenge 2: New Horizons in Disaster Planning and Recovery

A hot topic that has recently become hotter is disaster planning and recovery. New interest in emergency preparation has been driven by post-9/11 concerns about the vulnerability of collections. The Homeland Security Department currently provides funding through state and local emergency management agencies for emergency preparation and mitigation. This provides a good opportunity to make state and local first responders aware of the risks to cultural property. In 2003, Heritage Preservation undertook the Alliance for Response project, sponsoring conferences in four major cities: Boston, Dallas, New York and Cincinnati. The purpose was to bring together representatives of cultural institutions with first responders. Both groups recognized the need to work together with a goal of expanding the emergency response plans of FEMA and state emergency management agencies to include cultural institutions. Following up on the momentum of these conferences, the next logical step would be training a cadre of people from larger institutions in one city who are willing to help other institutions at times of area-wide disasters.

In another initiative to promote disaster planning,, NEDCC has received an IMLS National Leadership Grant to work with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners to develop an online disaster planning tool, based on automated fill-in-the-blank forms. The purpose is to streamline the process of writing an institutional disaster plan by merging institutional data with corresponding boilerplate to create a customized plan. The completed disaster plans will be stored on NEDCC's server, which will provide a mechanism for updating the plans periodically, incorporating experience with real world disasters. NEDCC will pilot the online tool, known as dplan, in Massachusetts and then disseminate it more widely.

Challenge 3: The Need for Training and Tools on Digital Preservation

Is digitization preservation? After 15 years of intense experimentation and discussion, the jury is still out. One thing is certain, digitization does nothing to preserve unique materials that need to be kept in their original format. In the last few years, strides have been made in articulating standards for Trusted Digital Repositories. But whether the costs of long-term maintenance of very large files will make digital archiving feasible is unknown. The business model is not yet in place. Lacking an adequate IT infrastructure, all but the largest institutions will need to depend on outside service bureaus for digital archiving. OCLC is currently the only provider of such services; the high costs of providing long-term maintenance suggest that we will not see widespread use unless institutions plan for the cost of digital archiving at the same time they plan digital conversion projects.

Consciousness raising is needed to make museums and records creating agencies aware that they should be concerned about preserving their digital assets. NEDCC's *School for Scanning* conferences have been successful in attracting large groups of participants over an nine-year period. The high level of interest demonstrates the existence of a huge audience for information on building good digital

collections. IMLS has made a Museum Leadership Grant to NEDCC in partnership with the Museum Computer Network to develop a survey methodology for assessing preservation needs of digital assets in museums. The project aims to produce tools to help institutions build sustainable digital collections.

Challenge 4: Raising Funds for Preservation

The good news is that the climate for funds for preservation has never been better. In the post 9/11 environment, more people understand importance of preserving and protecting cultural heritage. The Save America's Treasures Grant Program pumps large amounts of federal money into conservation projects and raises the profile of icons of American culture, such as Babe Ruth ephemera, the letters of Ernest Hemingway, and the journals of Lewis and Clark. The involvement of legislators in earmarking the federal funds has had the unexpected benefit of bringing them into the process and making them sympathetic to preservation goals.

NEH's relatively new Preservation Assistance Grant Program helps small institutions bring in consultants to conduct preservation surveys. These non-matching grants also support staff training and purchase of supplies. The NEH Access Grants now include funding for rehousing, reformatting, and conservation treatments in the same projects as cataloguing. Several new state level programs are awarding grants for preservation, for example, the Moose License Plate Grant Program at the New Hampshire State Library. A new grant program at the New Jersey State Archives is based on a land transaction fee, which has brought \$70 million into the state coffers in its first year.

In conclusion, museums and archives can best position themselves to raise funds for preservation by demonstrating their institutional commitment to collections care. Important first-steps include having a conservation consultant perform a survey of preservation needs, writing a long-term preservation plan,

and budgeting even a modest amount for preservation. The future of our collections is in the hands of archivists and curators. The money is out there, so roll up your sleeves and go for it.