

Proceedings of the 6th Annual Federal Depository Library Conference

April 14-17, 1997

Preservation Planning for Permanent Public Access to Paper-Based Collections

Irene Schubert, Library of Congress
Washington, DC

I am delighted to be here and to have the opportunity to talk with documents librarians. My first position as a full-fledged librarian managing a Federal depository collection was invaluable experience, as it essentially involved all aspects of library management. However, I must admit that preservation was at the bottom of my priorities as a novice.

Several years later, in northwestern Ohio, I decided to apply some of my knowledge of Government publications in a history class by writing a paper on the popular and long-lived document entitled *Infant Care*. *Infant Care* was first published in 1914 and has been revised and updated through its latest edition published in 1989. As the second publication in the Children's Bureau "Care of Children Series," it was intended to distill the latest scientific and medical information on how best to care for babies through their first year of life. Not only has *Infant Care* been continuously revised and updated, this 67 to 135-page document has been shamelessly reprinted by commercial publishers.

So, it seemed like a good research project to examine attitudes of professionals about women, their roles in infant care and the role of fathers in infant care and development. I also thought it would be a project which would require a minimum of work to obtain my primary source material.

The first step in this project was to examine all revisions, which became a problem in distinguishing between reprintings, editions and revisions. This bibliographer's problem was tangential but became important to my project. My real problem was in locating enough of the nine printing dates identified in distinct bibliographic records to identify significant revisions. I ultimately had to use the documents collections of three universities and one public library to get what was still an incomplete set of versions of *Infant Care*.

All the libraries had old editions of *Infant Care*, so I was fairly certain that missing copies had not been deliberately weeded out of the collections, although some may have been discarded because they had been damaged. None of the copies I found had been bound or were in any protective enclosure, although all were in various states, from tattered and falling apart to fairly good condition.

I bring this example to you to consider a number of issues about preservation.

Selection for Preservation

The first is selection for preservation. Your Instructions to Depository Libraries and the Federal Depository Library Manual (which would have made my life much easier 30 years ago) deals with the matter of what I call up-front selection and prevention of preservation problems quite thoroughly. Most of us assume that what we select for our collections will somehow be preserved forever. Although selective depository libraries do have the opportunity to weed after five years, they do retain some documents "permanently." But generally, whether we weed or not, we expect materials selected for our collections to be there when a client or constituent wants them, to be there in useable condition, with no information lost due to mutilation, damage, or deterioration.

We need to re-select materials for preservation as our collections get older. And we need to plan for a systematic process for this re-selection. Generally there are two distinct ways of planning for re-selection for preservation, with variations which include components of both.

Use-Driven Preservation Program Planning

One method is use-driven. Clearly some of the copies of Infant Care I examined had been used and returned to the shelf in poor condition. Use-driven preservation plans have several components: decisions for treatment, identification of items for treatment, resources for treatment.

Decisions for Treatment

Every time you review a document for preservation you are making a deliberate decision to keep it. Every damaged document not reviewed is a potential discard.

Policies on Selection

You will need to review collection development or selection policies. Do they provide guidance on re-selection for preservation? Do they need to? How will you apply the policies to decisions to treat or replace materials because of their condition? Will the cost of treatment or replacement affect the decision to keep a damaged item? Who will make the decision? You will find that the benefits of engaging your clients, such as faculty, in making preservation decisions go beyond public relations or good will. For instance, they may become advocates to support your preservation program and they will handle documents more carefully.

Treatments for Preservation

These decisions for treatment include repair, protective enclosure, binding or rebinding, deacidification, conservation, replacement. And, of course, a combination of these treatments may be necessary to preserve an item.

Repairs of materials can be highly cost effective. I recommend SOLINET'S Web site¹ for "Readings and Manuals on Book Repair." You may find that another unit in your library performs these tasks. Protective enclosures may be considered a part of repair or an alternative to repair. SOLINET identifies several works in the same list which discuss the use and application of protective enclosure to preserve books.

Binding or rebinding should be negotiated with other binding operations in your library if you do not work directly with a binder. We have found that staff needs to be aware of the condition of the text block when making a preservation decision to bind or rebind.

Deacidification at a production level is a new option for preservation. The Library of Congress is applying this preservation treatment for 50,000 books this fiscal year. See LC's Web site, "Deacidification Update,"² for more information and links to other information. The Conservation OnLine (CoOL) Website also has a "Mass Deacidification" page with links.³

Replacement of damaged materials includes acquisition of copies in better condition, reprints or microforms, and preservation microfilming or photocopying. I think those of you with experience know how to exploit your regional depositories as well as your colleagues on the Internet in trying to find "free" replacement copies. Your order departments should have good resources for identifying copies or reprints for sale. These same departments should have good resources both in paper and online for identifying microform copies of items to be replaced.

Custom preservation microfilming will be much more expensive. The Research Library Group and the American Library Association have good guides on how to create preservation microfilm and how to establish and manage a preservation microfilm program.⁴ Many libraries contract out for microfilming services.

Preservation photocopying is an option which is very attractive for reference books. See LC's Web site, "Guidelines for Preservation Photocopying,"⁵ and the ALA and National Archives guidelines for preservation photocopying.⁶ Again, libraries usually contract out for preservation photocopying.

Identification of Items for Treatment

People who handle items in your collections discover documents which they think need preservation treatment. These people include your users, your staff and other library staff.

A use-driven program is based on the systematic examination of any item removed from the shelf or files. Staff who reshelve or refile materials should, as part of this task, examine all items for damage and condition. Users may also be encouraged to bring documents that need attention to the staff.

You should provide guidelines to staff on how to examine materials for preservation treatment and sort materials in need of treatment. These decisions for treatment may run the gamut from repairing tears to rebinding to replacement.

You will need to determine resources, e.g., staff, available to perform treatments or the labor-intensive actions preliminary to replacement. Are there library staff in other departments who can perform this work, integrating documents into their workflow? What will be the effect of increased workloads from the documents collection? What training will be necessary to bring staff up to speed? Who will do the training? Do you have adequate funding for additional staff or for contracting for some or all of the preservation actions? What supplies or equipment will you need to acquire?

The advantage of a use-driven preservation program is that the items which are used are treated. The fact that a title or issue was used once increases the odds that it will be used again. Studies seem to show persistently that 80% of our collections are never used. Use-driven preservation treatment/replacement planning is a good use of limited resources.

A disadvantage of a use-driven program is that you have no control over the workflow to treat documents needing preservation action and other workload cycle peaks may coincide with peak intake of documents needing preservation treatments.

Collection Assessment Survey Preservation Program

Staff conduct collection or condition assessment surveys for damaged items and carry out preservation treatments. This method is recommended for microform collections, with a standard for sampling collections periodically as well as criteria for conditions assessments.⁷ While the standard is specific to silver-gelatin microforms, the techniques in the standard could be applied to surveys of diazo microforms.

Paper-based collections surveys may be conducted on all items, although sample surveys can be conducted to determine the degree and kinds of damage for planning purposes. Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) will perform surveys. NEDCC provides some basic information about item-by-item surveys and offers a technical leaflet, "What an Institution Can Do to Survey its Own Collections," at its Web site.⁸

Condition assessments can be combined with inventories, but this complicates and slows down inventories. Inventories are important to preservation programs because if you don't know where it is, you can't preserve it! I am fairly certain that I was not the first to be disappointed in not finding a certain printing or version of *Infant Care*. But those who have combined inventory and condition assessments seldom recommend it to others. Conducting a pilot program to check out results with combined and separate passes through the collections may help you determine whether a combined run is a real cost saver. Follow-up on results of an inventory and the results of a condition assessment survey create different workflows and workloads and these tasks should be considered before you make a decision. Some libraries have conducted condition assessments in combination with systematic cleaning of shelves and materials quite successfully.

The survey method with follow-up actions requires the same decision making and implementation planning as a use-driven program. A benefit of a condition assessment survey for preservation treatment or replacement is that the manager can control the time and workload, based on cycles of other workload demands and availability of staff to conduct the surveys and perform timely treatments or actions for replacements. For

instance, acquisitions staff may have more time to search for the availability of replacement copies during certain times in the budget cycle. Managers can plan for segmented assessments based on availability of resources for both the assessments and actions. Contractors or volunteers may be available and suitable to conduct the surveys. Surveys can provide good statistical data on preservation needs to support requests for additional funding for preservation. The drawback for these surveys is that you may develop backlogs of items selected for treatment or replacement if you don't have a good balance between staff doing the surveys and those performing the treatments. Don't ask the question, "does this document need preservation treatment" if you cannot answer "Yes, and it will be treated promptly." Inadequate resources to fix problems may result in frustration and lack of credibility in a preservation program.

Condition assessment surveys provide you an opportunity for intensive training of staff to exercise judgment in making preliminary sorting decisions on what materials need preservation treatment and the kinds of treatment they need. Trainers or supervisors can review a lot of decisions in a short period of time and provide prompt feedback to staff.

You can combine these two methods, performing use-driven preservation treatments while conducting condition assessments and carrying preservation treatments resulting from the assessment. You could determine which parts of the collections are most heavily used and conduct condition assessments in them first.

Ideally, then, all editions or revisions of *Infant Care* would have been on the shelf in my university's library if it had an established preservation program.

Ah, but you ask, what about those which were missing? Security and preservation are inseparable in a good collection management program. Inventories and shelf reading are part of our equation for preservation. Items which are really missing need to go into the re-selection/replacement loop used for those items so damaged that they need to be replaced.

And, security is also part of prevention for preservation. As the Instructions to Depository Libraries suggests, prevention of damage or unauthorized borrowing is an important responsibility of the depository librarian as the custodian of Federal property. The library staff are absolutely critical to an effective program for security and preservation. Staff should be trained in the best practices for handling and storing materials, to assist and instruct users in the best ways to handle documents. Staff should also be taught to observe how users are handling and photocopying documents and to be alert to users who may be mutilating or removing documents when not authorized to do so. Police or other officials who will respond to a staff report of theft or mutilation may need to be coached on how to respond and the importance of their involvement. Periodic reviews of procedures with staff and police collaborating are useful. Award or recognize those staff who reported unauthorized borrowing or mutilation of material.

When my son, Max, was in first grade, he was very excited about an introductory tour to the school's library. I was quite interested in his account of this formal introduction to what he insisted on calling a media center. Wanting to get a sense of what he learned about what librarians do, I asked him what was the librarian's job in the media center. Max corrected me, "Mr. Smith was a "media specialist" NOT a librarian. So, I asked, what does the "media

specialist" do? Max replied that the "media specialist" "guards the books." I was quite amused at what I thought was a medieval notion of the role of librarians, or media specialists. I'd like to propose that "guarding the books" is still at the heart of our professional responsibility: guarding or preserving the books or information in all formats and media, even electronic, so that future generations may use that information and trust that it is authentic. Choosing what to guard and preserve is also at the heart of our professional responsibility. Doing nothing is choosing not to preserve. Selecting to preserve, using our experience, discrimination and judgment, will give meaning to the past for future generations who use our documents collections. Someone in the future may even come looking for old copies of Infant Care.

1. SOLINET, "Readings and Manuals on Book Repair ."

<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/solinet/bkrprbib.htm>

2. Library of Congress, "Deacidification Update"

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/preserv/rt/deacid.html>

3. Conservation OnLine (CoOL) Web site, "Mass Deacidification,"

<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/massdeac/>>

4. RLG Preservation Microfilming Handbook, Mountain View California: Research Libraries Group, Inc., March 1992; RLG Archives Microfilming Manual, Mountain View California: Research Libraries Group, Inc., April 1994; and Preservation Microfilming, a Guide for Librarians and Archivists, American Library Association, 1996.

5. Library of Congress, "Guidelines for Preservation Photocopying"

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/preserv/care/photocpy.html>

6. "Preservation Photocopying," by the Subcommittee on Preservation Photocopying Guidelines, Reproduction of Library Materials Section Copying Committee, Association for Library Collections & Technical Services, Library Resources and Technical services, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 289-290; "Archival Copies of Thermofax, Verifax, and Other Unstable Copies," by Norvell M. M. Jones, Technical Information Paper No. 5. Washington, DC: National Archives & Records Administration, 1990.

7. The American National Standard for Information and Image Management - Recommended Practice Inspection of Stored Silver-Gelatin Microforms for Evidence of Deterioration, ANSI/AIIM MS45-1990.

8. Northeast Document Conservation Center, "SURVEYS"

<http://www.nedcc.org/tsurveys.htm#gensurv>

NEDCC's technical leaflet "What an Institution Can Do to Survey Its Own Collections."