The state of Oregon preservation in 1995: A survey by the Oregon Library Association's special committee on preservation

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The preservation of library materials is one of our key professional duties. Although each library must assume some level of responsibility, associations can contribute to a wider effort by providing leadership in the establishment of sound preservation practices, advising and assisting libraries in developing solutions to preservation problems, and promoting education within the profession.

- Charge to the Special Committee on Preservation

OLA’s Special Committee on Preservation was established in 1995 by Deborah Carver, then OLA president. The committee was chaired by Jew Wann of the Oregon State Library and included Kris White, Oregon Historical Society; Layne Sawyer, Oregon State Archives; and the author.

The committee was charged with three tasks:
- Investigating major preservation issues and concerns in the state
- Determining efforts currently underway to address those concerns
- Recommending a role for OLA to assume with regard to preservation

The survey covered four areas: scope, age and condition of collections; age and condition of facilities; resources and scope of preservation activities; and interest in preservation development.

Preservation Survey Responses
It is difficult to determine how many libraries had the opportunity to participate in the survey, and this makes it difficult to calculate a response rate. One hundred fifty responses were received, which seems to indicate relatively good participation. (A handful of additional surveys came in well after the deadline and have not yet been incorporated into the analysis.) The committee interpreted the apparent high response rate as an indication of moderate to strong statewide interest in preservation.

Respondents were given two levels of response. All respondents were asked to identify themselves and their library and indicate the type of library. In prominent type, the next portion of the survey instrument stated: “Does your library have any interest in preservation? If not, you can stop here and return the survey as is. If so, please continue to answer questions.” Of the 150 respondents, 70 percent chose to complete the full survey. Some of those who completed the survey indicated little interest or apparent need for preservation within their library, but the data provided useful control comparisons.

Formats Within Collections
With mixed success, the survey attempted to identify and analyze the collections. Respondents were given a checklist of formats and asked to indicate what percentage of their collection fell into each. The survey was successful at identifying the range of materials held within collections, but the responses were incomplete and inconsistent. In many cases, the percentages identified did not add up to 100 percent of the library’s collection. Further, it seems unlikely that
only 84 percent of the responding academic libraries include books in their collections.

Although these numbers must be viewed with some suspicion, they probably present an accurate overall picture of the scope of collections. The wide range of formats encompassed demonstrates the complexity of the preservation problem in Oregon. The common perception is that preservation means book repair. The needs of photographs, sound recordings, and artifacts are very different from paper format materials. The ability to address the needs of non-paper formats adequately requires knowledge of different technical standards, environmental standards, preservation materials, and equipment—all of which can impose a substantial barrier on a small or under-funded institution.

**REtENTION AND QUANTITY OF FORMATS COLLECTED**

The committee was interested in correlating preservation needs with retention. Libraries that have brief retention rates, such as those serving the public, corporations, and the legal community, were expected to have perceived less need for preservation. However, the retention data provided proved unquantifiable.

**CONDITION OF COLLECTIONS**

Respondents were asked to comment on the overall condition of each format within their collections. Suggested responses were good, fair, bad, or crisis. (Many respondents did not complete this portion of the survey. Some answered “varies,” which was not useful for analysis.) Of 553 collection condition responses, 60 percent considered the collection to be in “good” condition, 36 percent in “fair” condition, and four percent in “bad” condition. Only one format in one collection (ephemera in a corporate library) was described as in “crisis.”

**PRESERVATION ACTIVITIES**

For this survey, preservation was defined as “any activity that maximizes the lifespan and utility of the collection.” The survey requested information about the kinds of preservation activities supported by each library, whether an activity was contracted or performed within the library. Additionally, the survey asked whether libraries possessed unique, rare, or valuable materials in need of preservation.

Forty-one percent of all respondents indicated they had valuable or rare collections in need of preservation: 15 percent of those were held by public libraries. Only half of the respondents stated that they are performing repair on their collections: both of the two archives that responded and 68 percent of the academic libraries. Archives are the most active in preservation, followed by academic libraries, historical societies and museums, and special libraries. Corporate libraries reported no preservation activity.

**FACILITIES REVIEW**

The survey included a checklist of disaster and environmental controls for both the respondent’s main facility and for any offsite storage facilities. Data analysis was hampered by the design of the data

| Table 1. Percentage of Libraries Holding Specific Formats, by Type of Library |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Responses               | Academic| Archive| Corporate| Historic| Law| Public| Special| Overall |
| Books                   | 84%     | 100%    | 25%      | 100%    | 25%| 63%   | 6%      | 6%      |
| Miss                    | 5%      | 50%     | 0%       | 89%     | 0% | 9%    | 0%      | 0%      |
| Archives                | 39%     | 100%    | 0%       | 89%     | 0% | 8%    | 0%      | 0%      |
| Govdocs                 | 53%     | 50%     | 0%       | 67%     | 0% | 32%   | 0%      | 0%      |
| Newspapers             | 74%     | 50%     | 25%      | 33%     | 0% | 54%   | 6%      | 6%      |
| Maps                    | 53%     | 100%    | 0%       | 67%     | 0% | 38%   | 0%      | 0%      |
| Ephemera                | 50%     | 100%    | 25%      | 89%     | 0% | 22%   | 6%      | 6%      |
| Microforms              | 66%     | 100%    | 25%      | 67%     | 13%| 34%   | 6%      | 6%      |
| Artifacts               | 26%     | 50%     | 0%       | 89%     | 0% | 5%    | 0%      | 0%      |
| Photographs             | 39%     | 100%    | 0%       | 89%     | 0% | 13%   | 0%      | 0%      |
| Sound recordings        | 68%     | 100%    | 0%       | 100%    | 0% | 43%   | 0%      | 0%      |
| Other nonprint          | 71%     | 100%    | 25%      | 89%     | 0% | 47%   | 6%      | 6%      |
| Other media             | 11%     | 50%     | 0%       | 17%     | 0% | 4%    | 0%      | 0%      |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Percentage of Libraries Engaged in Specific Preservation Activities, by Type of Library</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have holdings in need</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have disaster plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have preservation resources, usually unspecified</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perform repair</td>
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<td>Perform commercial binding</td>
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<td>Perform microfilming</td>
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<td>Perform digitization</td>
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<td>Perform photocopying for preservation</td>
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entry system, which did not differentiate between a negative answer and no answer. Therefore only positive answers to questions were counted in the analysis provided in Table 3.

This portion of the survey helped shape the direction of the committee’s work. Noting the extent of potential hazards reported (23 percent had leaks, more than half had the potential for environmental problems, and less than half had adequate fire suppression systems), and recalling that only 13 percent of all respondents had disaster response plans, the committee decided that disaster planning was an important goal that could be achieved. The importance was magnified shortly after the survey was completed, when the Pacific Northwest experienced some of the most severe weather in its recorded history. Widespread flooding occurred in February of 1996 and again the following winter. Amazingly, very little damage occurred to library collections, in part because volunteers acted swiftly to minimize damage. (Citizens of Mapleton broke into the locked library to shift collections, in Portland a plywood wall helped keep the river in its banks. Only the Clatskanie public library experienced significant loss.)

The final portion of the survey solicited information about future preservation endeavors. How many libraries were interested in participating in preservation workshops? What was perceived as the major impediment to adequate preservation of the library’s collection? And finally, what did libraries wish to see the OLA Preservation Committee accomplish?

Many libraries requested workshops and continuing education opportunities, both through the workshop portion of the survey and through the OLA goal section. OLA’s annual meeting was suggested as a potential venue for workshops. Other libraries pointed out the need for inexpensive regional workshops, workshops suitable for a diverse group of libraries. The committee noted that because preservation duties such as book repair are often assigned to the support staff and not librarians, it would be beneficial to bring presenters to selected venues throughout the state and minimize the need for expensive travel by attendees.

Approximately half of the respondents identified the major impediment to adequate preservation as some combination of money, staff, time, space, and expertise. Not surprisingly, money was the primary impediment. The committee considered the expressed interest in cooperative preservation efforts and determined that pursuit of shared ventures might prove cost-effective for a group of libraries. One suggestion was a state-level shared commercial binding contract which would set a single rate for all libraries and establish uniform specifications for binding. This would reduce the bindery’s costs and lower costs to libraries. Use of a shared contract would also enable libraries with little knowledge of commercial binding standards to piggyback on larger libraries’ knowledge. Shared knowledge appeared to be a low-cost method of facilitating preservation within the state.

**GOALS FOR THE OLA COMMITTEE**

Expressed goals ran the gamut from miracles to more concrete ideas. A recurrent theme was organization, coordination, and provision of centralized access to resources. Advocacy for and heightened awareness of preservation needs was important. Training was requested repeatedly. The committee concluded that the responding libraries shared many parts of its original vision of an organized preservation effort for the state of Oregon.

**ROLES FOR OLA**

The committee considered how OLA could foster the development of preservation within the state. It was decided that a useful first step would be for
OLAs to hold disaster-response workshops throughout the state. Preservation workshops fit well within the scope of OLAs activities and resources.

The committee also concluded that OLA could not establish a successful preservation network by itself, but that it could carry the need for such a network to larger bodies. Accordingly, the committee recommended that OLA initiate conversations with major stakeholders on the topic of preservation networking and advocacy for preservation.

Jey Wann presented the committees findings and recommendations to the OLA Executive Board, which responded enthusiastically. Committee members presented their conclusions during a session at the OLA annual conference in 1996. Although only a handful of people attended, response to the committee’s efforts was again enthusiastic, and their recommendations for further development of preservation activities within the state were applauded.

Although the committee appointment was extended the following year, the authors personal circumstances precluded any convention of the committee, and no action occurred. Although the timing was unfortunate, it seems probable that the time for action has not passed and that a 1997 committee could achieve the goals set out in 1995.

**CURRENT OREGON PRESERVATION RESOURCES**

The Preservation Department of the University of Oregon Library has been serving as a resource for Oregon libraries for several years. A number of libraries have sent staff members to the librarys conservation lab to be trained by Senior Preservation Technician Jan Roberson in basic book repair. Items cataloged for the Preservation Reference Collection can be searched in Orbis and borrowed through interlibrary loan. A project to provide Web access to uncataloged resources is in the planning stages but should be completed within a year. Libraries interested in access to preservation resources or with questions about preservation are encouraged to contact the University of Oregon Preservation Department through the author.

The Library Support Staff Round Table (LSSRT) has frequently sponsored preservation workshops, and Roberson will conduct *Preserving Your Collection* at the July 18 conference in Portland. Other conservation practitioners within the state have offered occasional workshops on book repair, and announcements are normally posted to the statewide library list, Olib (www2.ors.state.or.us/archives/olib-or.html).

The primary electronic reference tool for preservation is Conservation Online (CoOL), a Web site run by Walter Henry of Stanford. CoOL (palimpsest.stanford.edu) has a wealth of documentation and links to other sites and holds the searchable archives of the Conservation Distribution List (listerv. CoOL is available to any library with Web access.

The Northeast Document Conservation Center in Massachusetts (www.nedcc.org) is an example of a regional conservation facility that provides conservation services to members of local consortia. Conservation Professionals of the Pacific Northwest is a Washington-based organization that is working to develop a shared conservation facility to serve the needs of the region’s cultural institutions. Oregon has a number of private conservators practicing within the state who might offer conservation services to a preservation consortium.

**MODELS OF PRESERVATION NETWORKS**

Successful preservation networks have been established in other areas of the country. Some of the more prominent networks, such as SOLINET (www.solinet.net/presvtn/preshome.htm) in the Southeast and AMIGOS (www.ipp.unicc.net/amigos/preserve.html) in the Southwest, began within the framework of bibliographic utilities and have expanded to address the preservation needs of their members. The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners has established a full-time preservation administrator for the commonwealth’s public libraries and requires them to develop disaster plans before they are eligible for grants or participation in bibliographic networks. In California, a statewide preservation program has facilitated the establishment of entities such as the Bay Area Preservation program (palimpsest.stanford.edu/byorg/bapnet). (palimpsest.stanford.edu/)

Oregon does not have a history of successful preservation networking and has had little experience in cooperative preservation efforts. However, the connectivity fostered by electronic communication has made it easier for libraries, and particularly for library staff, to contact each other for information without establishing formal institutional relationships. In many libraries, it is not the administration but the staff that has direct contact with the collec-

| Table 4. Percentage of Respondents Interested in Cooperative Preservation Efforts, by Type of Library |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Cooperative preservation effort | 74% | 100% | 0% | 100% | 38% | 31% | 47% |

**See Survey page 17**
Survey
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tions, perceives a need for preservation, and seeks solutions to the problems of deteriorating materials. Providing information to staff members may be the most cost-effective way for libraries to tackle preservation, which has a reputation for being expensive. There are many inexpensive techniques for preventing or reducing damage to library collections, such as covering windows, using bookends, and shelving oversized books with adequate support, but the information needs to be widely disseminated and accepted by institutions to effect change in procedures and priorities.

Grant funds have been available in the past for statewide preservation planning and for statewide disaster planning, but no Oregon institution is now in a position to put forward a grant proposal for a statewide project that would require widespread coordination and cooperation from many institutions. The Oregon Newspaper Project (Refer to page 14.), part of the U.S. Newspaper Access and Preservation Program of the National Endowment of the Humanities, which is now underway at the University of Oregon Library, may usher in a new era of cooperative preservation projects for Oregon libraries. As sparse resources continue to dwindle, Oregon libraries are becoming more cooperative, more creative, and increasingly reliant on shared resources and activities. Preservation could be a beneficial outcome of these fiscal hard times.

In Oregon, library consortia such as Portals and Orbis have the potential for fostering cooperative preservation. Establishing a successful preservation network will require institutional commitments for support, and governmental support and potential assistance would substantially increase the likelihood of success. Above all, some group of library directors needs to say, “Let’s do it.”

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Disaster Preparedness
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security microfilm of public records. One vault is for records with a retention period of 10-99 years; the second is for records with a retention period of 100 years or more. For additional information, contact the Oregon State Archives, 800 Summer Street NE, Salem, OR 97310.


13. Ibid., p. 12.


15. Ibid., p. 13.

16. Ibid., pp. 15-20; Canadian Council of Archives, Basic Conservation, p. 46.

17. Oregon Freeze Dry, Inc., is located at 525 25th Ave. SW, Albany, OR 97321; 541-926-6001.


20. Murray, Basic Guidelines, pp. 22; Canadian Council of Archives, Basic Conservation, p. 49. Companies that specialize in removal of mold from library and archival materials include Disaster Restorations, Albany, 541-928-7267, and BMS CAT, 303 Arthur Street, Ft. Worth, Texas 76107.
