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On the Road with OR C2C

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On the Road with OR C2C

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“It is ... the duty of every good citizen to use all the opportunities which occur to him ... or her, for preserving documents relating to the history of our country.”

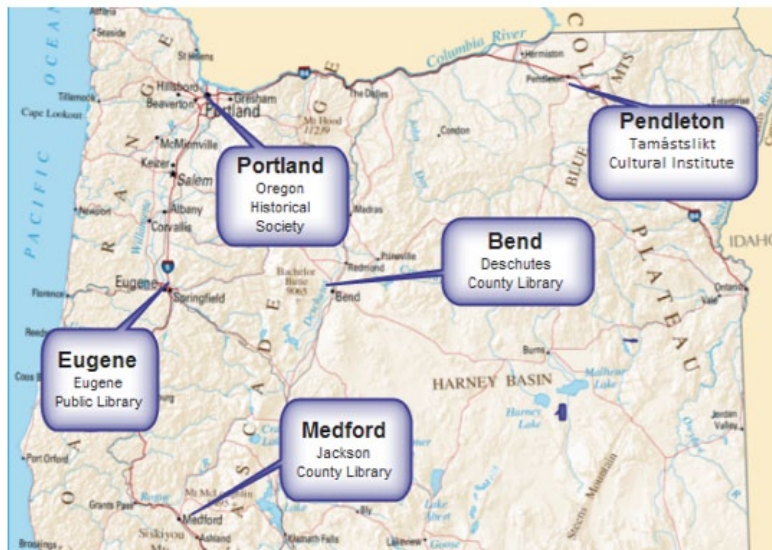
—Thomas Jefferson

In 2009, the Institute of Museum and Library Services awarded Oregon a Connecting to Collections Planning Grant (also known as OR C2C). Under the umbrella of the Oregon Museums Association, seven other institutions came together to plan for preserving Oregon’s cultural heritage. This collaborative initiative was the necessary first step in securing funding for future implementation. (See Kyle Janson’s article in this issue for more about the IMLS Connecting to Collections Statewide Implementation Grant.)

The grant steering committee named our project the “The Oregon Preservation Assessment and Education Planning Project,” and submitted this description to IMLS:

The Oregon Museums Association will partner with seven organizations to identify the preservation needs of the state’s libraries, museums, and archives. After conducting a survey, evaluating the information, and staging regional forums, leaders of the state’s cultural organizations will collaboratively create a statewide preservation plan addressing the recommendations of the Heritage Health Index. This plan will address the need for more workers trained in collections care and emergency preparedness, outline steps to improve the quality of collections care throughout the state, and raise awareness of and generate support for the preservation needs of the state’s cultural collections among the public and decision makers.

OR C2C Forum Locations



Once the grant was awarded, we decided to launch the planning process by holding forums in Eugene, Portland, Medford, Bend and Pendleton in order to solicit input about preservation needs and practices. Feedback gathered from the forums would be used inform



the subsequent survey. The grant’s consultant, Ruth Metz, facilitated the forums with assistance from the steering committee (look for her article on the final assessment in this issue). Members of the steering committee developed eight broad questions for the forum:

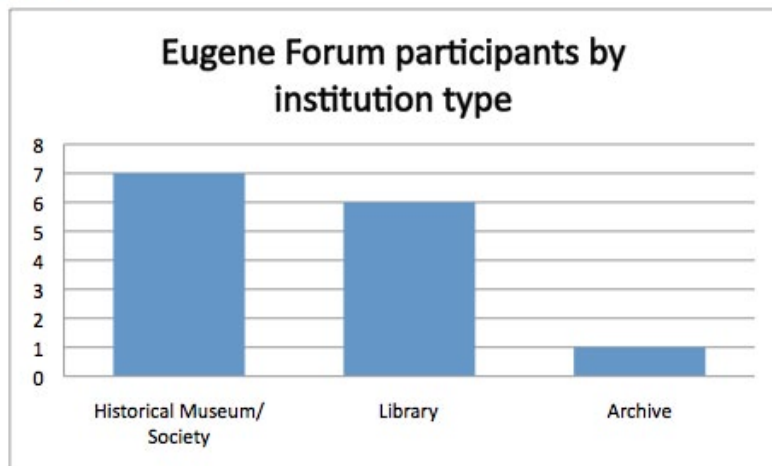
- What do you think puts your heritage collections at risk?
- What do you think will remedy those risks?
- What training do you and people in your institutions need to help preserve and promote its collections?
- How do you get these needs met now?
- What form must the training take in order to be of benefit to those who work in your institution?
- In what “state” is your institution’s disaster preparedness?
- We are going to be conducting a statewide survey of Oregon’s heritage collection in the fall. What do you think are the most important questions to ask?
- What else needs to be said?

With questions identified, presentations ready, posters and easels in hand, and our experienced consultant as our guide, we were ready to embark on the OR C2C Road Trip!

**Day 1
July 15, 2010: Eugene**

Our first forum was held at the downtown branch of the Eugene Public Library. The lovely art and inspirational quotes scattered throughout the library created a special place to gather and discuss how we could ensure these - as well as other - treasures would be preserved for future generations. The participants represented a balanced mix among historical societies, museums and libraries, and ranged from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde to the Willamette Heritage Center to the University of Oregon’s Special Collections and Archives. Their input set the foundation for subsequent forums. Participants identified collections care, assessment, disaster response, and training as their primary concerns.

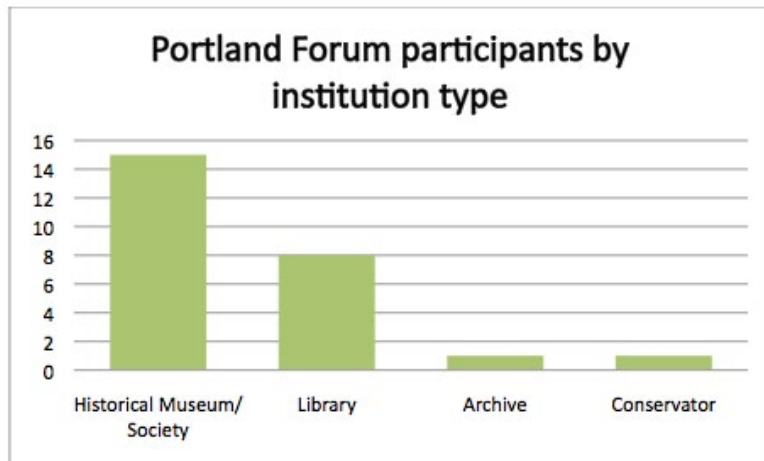
Graph 1



Day 2
July 16, 2010: Portland

The Oregon Historical Society opened one of their elegant meeting rooms for the second forum. Compared to Eugene, attendance represented a much higher percentage of historic societies and museums, along with more paid professional staff. The forum discussion reflected this. Participants had the highest interest in strategic planning, grant writing and volunteer and donor relations, although the major concerns identified at the Eugene forum were also raised. It was exciting to see such an interesting variety of museums represented, including the Oregon Jewish Museum, the Architectural Heritage Center, the Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center and numerous local historical societies. Libraries had a robust presence as well, including Tigard Public Library, George Fox University, Concordia University, and Portland State University.

Graph 2

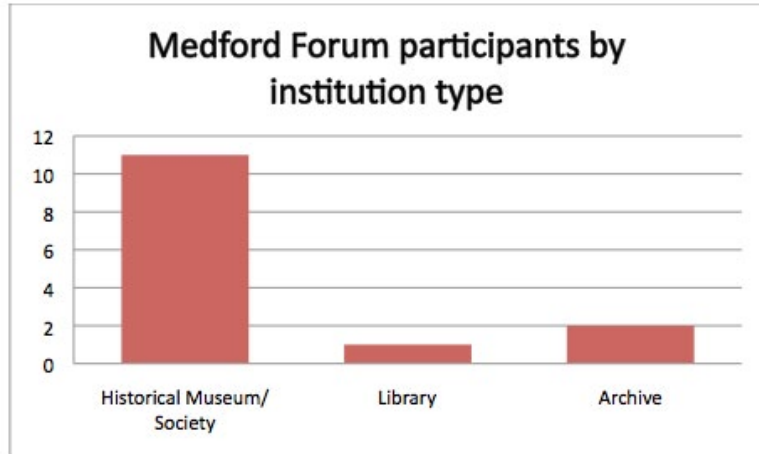


Day 3
September 13, 2010: Medford

On an exquisitely sunny late summer day, thirteen dedicated staff and volunteers met in the beautiful Medford Public Library to share their challenges concerning their collections. The participants at this forum were the most diverse among Oregon historical societies and museums compared with the other forums. Imagine this variety in one room: the Oregon Shakespeare Festival; the Collier Memorial State Park Logging Museum; the Crater Rock Museum; the Southern Oregon Historical Society; and the Coos Historical and Maritime Museum! This is just a representational snapshot of the attendees. With such a mix, it follows that their concerns ranged from conducting a basic inventory to more complex conservation of rare materials and objects.



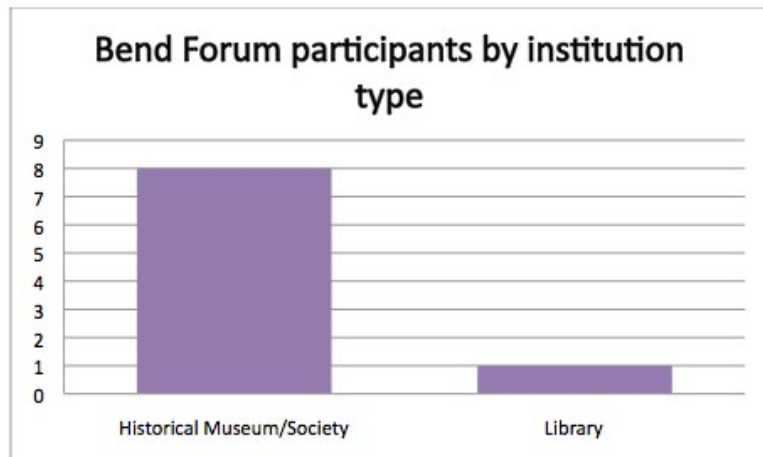
Graph 3



**Day 4
September 14, 2010: Bend**

With the smallest number of participants, the Bend forum was the most intimate. The Deschutes Public Library provided a small, sunny room in their administration building, enhancing the cozy feeling of the forum. This informality allowed participants to move beyond just sharing their challenges and start discussing how they could develop their own support network in their region. Some of the institutions represented included the Museum at Warm Springs, the Crook County Historical Society, the High Desert Museum and the Jefferson County Library.

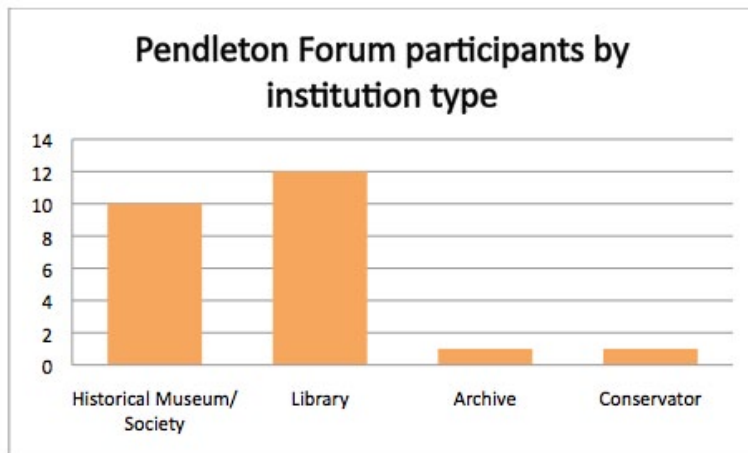
Graph 4



**Day 5
September 28, 2010: Pendleton**

Our sunny weather held on for a stunning visit to the Tamástslíkt Cultural Institute, overlooking the high plains of the Columbia Plateau. The large group included representatives from Blue Mountain Community College, the Round-up and Happy Canyon Hall of Fame, Arlington Public Library, and the Union County Historical Society. Attendance was fairly split between historical societies and museums and libraries. Given the rural nature of this forum, many of the organizations are small and depend on volunteer staff. Funding and training for basic information technologies is a major challenge. Some still rely on dial-up access, and many participants indicated that on-site training and consultations would help bridge this “digital divide.”

Graph 5



Home Again, Home Again

All together, fifty-two historical societies and museums, twenty-nine libraries, five archives and two private conservators (for a total of eighty-eight participants) gave their time and expertise to help identify priorities for their collections. Primary threads from the forums were: training in collection care, collection management, disaster response, and support for planning and advocacy. Most participants also shared that, due to time and funding, they often face many challenges when it comes to taking advantage of training opportunities. While online training was attractive to most, many would also like on-site consultations.

What I found so inspiring was hearing staff from a diverse variety of organizations discussing their mutual challenges. While needs differed depending on location, financial resources, and staffing levels, many common threads were identified. These collective concerns were incorporated into the state-wide survey sent out to all of Oregon’s cultural heritage institutions in October 2010.



It also became clear that the OR C2C initiative provided benefits that went beyond a needs assessment. It has provided an opportunity for diverse types of organizations to break down traditional silos, come together, and support each other in the critical mission we all share in common: ensuring that our rich cultural heritage is passed on to our next generations. There is much work to be done, but we are on the way! 🌿

Graph 6

