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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 Jey 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 committee began with a brainstorming session on the members' vision of Oregon preservation. Out of this session emerged a number of qualities members felt preservation in Oregon should possess. It should be funded, statewide, coordinated, apolitical, planned, and comprehensive. It should also include a broad constituency and have articulated priorities. Essential elements were education, shared resources, long-term continuity and stability, receipt of public acknowledgement, and productivity with measurable accomplishments. The committee speculated that establishing and maintaining such an ambitious effort would require a leader like the Oregon State Historical Records Advisory Board, the Oregon State Library, or the Heritage Commission. Additionally, the committee suggested that it might be useful to have a host entity, such as the University of Oregon Library, funnel resources and manage specific projects and grants.

Finally, the committee considered OLA's role in the development of a statewide preservation effort. Two propositions emerged: the creation of a round table to facilitate the coordinated effort to develop statewide preservation activity, and the advocacy of OLA among state stakeholders, such as the Heritage Commission and members of the library consortia Orbis and Portals.

With this vision articulated, the committee turned its attention back to reality. It was important to determine whether Oregon libraries needed increased preservation activity, what the interest level in preservation was, and whether the state's libraries shared the committee's vision.

The first step was to investigate the state of preservation within Oregon libraries. The committee developed a survey instrument and distributed it in fall 1995, using the mailing list of the State Library's Library Development Office. The survey was also announced on *libs-or*, the state library mailing list, and copies of the survey were made available to libraries and institutions that wished to participate. The committee was aware of non-uniform interest in preservation within institutions, and wanted staff with preservation interests to have the opportunity to respond even if administrators did not consider preservation a priority.

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

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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 underfunded 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

Table 1. Percentage of Libraries Holding Specific Formats, by Type of Library

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Academic</i>	<i>Archive</i>	<i>Corporate</i>	<i>Historic</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>Special</i>
Books	84%	100%	25%	100%	25%	63%	6%
Mss	39%	50%	0%	83%	0%	9%	0%
Archives	39%	100%	0%	83%	0%	8%	0%
Govdocs	53%	50%	0%	67%	0%	32%	0%
Newspapers	74%	50%	25%	33%	0%	54%	6%
Maps	53%	100%	0%	67%	0%	38%	0%
Ephemera	50%	100%	25%	83%	0%	22%	6%
Microforms	66%	100%	25%	67%	13%	34%	6%
Artifacts	26%	50%	0%	83%	0%	5%	0%
Photographs	39%	100%	0%	83%	0%	18%	0%
Sound recordings	68%	100%	0%	100%	0%	43%	0%
Other nonprint	71%	100%	25%	83%	0%	47%	6%
Other media	11%	50%	0%	17%	0%	4%	0%

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 2. Percentage of Libraries Engaged in Specific Preservation Activities, by Type of Library

	<i>Academic</i>	<i>Archive</i>	<i>Corporate</i>	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>Special</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Have holdings in need	66%	100%	0%	83%	0%	29%	50%	41%
Have disaster plan	21%	50%	0%	50%	0%	8%	13%	13%
Have preservation resources, usually unspecified	39%	100%	0%	50%	0%	7%	19%	19%
Perform repair	68%	100%	0%	33%	13%	49%	44%	50%
Perform commercial binding	50%	50%	0%	33%	13%	22%	31%	30%
Perform microfilming	13%	100%	0%	0%	0%	3%	13%	7%
Perform digitization	8%	100%	0%	17%	0%	3%	6%	6%
Perform photocopying for preservation	29%	100%	0%	33%	13%	13%	31%	21%

Table 3. Percentage of Positive Response to Facilities Survey, by Type of Library

	<i>Academic</i>	<i>Archive</i>	<i>Corporate</i>	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>Special</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Leaks	32%	0%	25%	17%	0%	22%	19%	23%
Steady environments	29%	50%	25%	50%	13%	34%	56%	35%
Adequate environment	37%	50%	25%	67%	13%	37%	56%	39%
Adequate lighting	68%	100%	25%	67%	13%	39%	69%	50%
Adequate security	58%	100%	25%	50%	25%	49%	63%	51%
Regular inspection of offsite storage	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	19%	7%
Adequate fire alarm/suppression systems	53%	100%	25%	50%	13%	30%	69%	41%
Natural disaster hazards	26%	50%	0%	33%	0%	13%	19%	17%
In flood zone	13%	0%	0%	33%	13%	13%	0%	12%
Near earthquake fault	42%	50%	0%	50%	0%	18%	38%	27%
Near volcano	21%	50%	25%	50%	0%	8%	6%	13%

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

OLA to hold disaster-response workshops throughout the state. Preservation workshops fit well within the scope of OLA's 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 committee's 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 author's 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 library's conservation lab to be trained by the 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, *libs-or* (www2.osl.state.or.us/archives/libs-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 listserv. 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.wipp.unicomp.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).

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-

See Survey page 17

Table 4. Percentage of Respondents Interested in Cooperative Preservation Efforts, by Type of Library

	<i>Academic</i>	<i>Archive</i>	<i>Corporate</i>	<i>Historical</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>Special</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Cooperative preservation effort	74%	100%	0%	100%	13%	38%	31%	47%

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 Univer-

sity 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.

12. Murray, *Basic Guidelines*, p. 12.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

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.

18. Canadian Council of Archives, *Basic Conservation*, p. 46; Klaus B. Hendricks and Brian Lesser, Disaster Preparedness and Recovery: Photographic Materials, *American Archivist* 46 (Winter 1983): 65-66.

19. Murray, *Basic Guidelines*, pp. 21-22.

20. Murray, *Basic Guidelines*, p. 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.

21. Murray, *Basic Guidelines*, p. 13.

22. OSU Valley Library, "Disaster-Preparedness and Recovery Manual," p. 7.