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# Preserving Cultural Heritage: Introduction

MICHÈLE V. CLOONAN AND ROSS HARVEY

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When *Library Trends* devoted its first issue to preservation (Tauber, 1956), the state-of-the-art term was *conservation*, and the articles dealt with binding, treatments, stack maintenance, and “discarding” (weeding). The focus was almost entirely on libraries, except for an article by Hummel and Barrow on treatment for library and archival material (Hummel & Barrow, 1956). The next *Library Trends* issue devoted to preservation was published twenty-five years later (Lundeen, 1981), and although *conservation* was still the preferred term, the range of topics was broader. To binding and treatment were added new areas: administration, education, paper chemistry, disaster preparedness and prevention, microforms, and the conservation and preservation of sound recording and photographic collections. The focus was still squarely on libraries, with little mention of archives. This 1981 issue does, however, show the first signs of an interest in international collaboration and some cross-fertilization of ideas in Buchanan’s article on disaster prevention (Buchanan, 1981).

In the last twenty-five years, “preservation” scholarship has evolved to a dual pursuit: the idea that we need to *preserve* and the theoretical issues concerning preservation—what to save, how to save it, and how such decisions are made. Also, preservation is now equated with history and memory, thus cultural heritage preservation is currently a subject of considerable interest to a wide range of stakeholders. It is increasingly being perceived that the issues of the archives, library, art, and historic preservation fields have much in common, certainly more than was apparent in the past, and each field can learn from the others. Some of these issues emerge from the attempt to define from varying perspectives the concepts of cultural property ownership that were developed in colonial times; from the expropriation of cultural heritage for political and ideological aims; from changing understandings about intellectual property rights in an

increasingly globalized environment; and from the changing techniques now available to cultural heritage preservation, most notably the impacts of digital culture. Even our vocabulary has shifted; until relatively recently we used the term *cultural patrimony*, itself an artifact of colonialist thinking. We are also questioning more closely than ever before the reasons we should preserve cultural heritage, what it is that we are trying to preserve, and what value society places on preservation, issues explored in Abby Smith's paper. Heather MacNeil and Bonnie Mak use lessons from the archives field to describe precisely the concept of *authenticity* and articulate its importance to current preservation activities, especially in a digital context. Annemaree Lloyd explores *significance*, a concept that originates in historic preservation (also referred to as the built heritage field) and is increasingly being applied to other fields. Anna Catalani provides a perspective on *authenticity* from the museum field. Paul Eggert draws comparisons between textual editors and conservators to throw light on concepts of the work that assist preservation thinking.

The ongoing challenge to protecting collections from civil unrest and natural disasters also brings cultural heritage institutions together. Michèle Cloonan considers an expanded definition of preservation, noting how the "custodial storehouse" model is disrupted and assumptions about preservation challenged in periods and at points of stress. András Riedlmayer examines how preservation is redefined in times of war or under regimes where books and other records are intentionally destroyed.

The basis of cultural heritage preservation is a desire to save the past while making the past accessible and usable. With the exception of a small number of "iconic" objects, such as the *Domesday Book*, *The Book of Kells*, or the American *Declaration of Independence*, which only under extraordinary circumstances can be handled, preservationists seek to make original items available to users. (Special collections departments and museums might urge patrons to use surrogates first, to cut down on wear and tear to fragile originals.) In historic preservation, which focuses primarily on the built environment, structures are often lived-in multi-use spaces.

In addition to the preservation of physical objects, we must preserve digital information. Deborah Woodyard-Robinson (Woodyard-Robinson, 2005) recently devoted a *Library Trends* issue to digital preservation, with a particular emphasis on current practices. In this issue the contributors examine digital information more broadly. For example, sometimes we must focus on maintaining the *ability* to reproduce a record that is reliable and authentic over time. This is a different conceptual model from the artifactual model upon which conservation and preservation have been built. Kevin Bradley investigates what is meant by "digital sustainability," saying that it encompasses a range of issues and concerns that contribute to the longevity of digital information. Yola de Lusenet uses the example of the *UNESCO Charter on the Preservation of the Digital*

*Heritage* to raise questions about what digital heritage actually is. Karen Gracy considers the changing landscape of moving image archiving in the light of developments such as YouTube and suggests that a new archetype for moving-image stewardship is emerging. Ingrid Mason examines ideas of permanence in the digital environment, with examples of how preservation practice is changing in a New Zealand research library.

It is often through collaborations and partnerships that we seek ways to address complex preservation problems. Howard Besser explains why collaborative activities are essential for the preservation of digital materials and provides two case studies of collaborative projects in the United States. Paula DeStefano and Tyler Walters note the history of preservation efforts in archives and in libraries and demonstrate that the expertise and resources of archives and preservation departments can be shared in managing the preservation of archival materials. Ross Harvey describes issues surrounding a major international collaborative preservation project, UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme. Using examples from indigenous cultures, Shereyn Ogden emphasizes the importance of an increased understanding of different cultural practices and for collaboration between those who create and use cultural heritage and those who seek to conserve it.

The need for ongoing continuing education is also critical. Ann Russell examines the influence that the Northeast Document Conservation Center's 'School for Scanning' conference has had from 1995 to date in bringing digitization and preservation to the consciousness of libraries and archives and in maintaining awareness of the attendant technical, managerial, and policy issues.

This issue of *Library Trends* describes some of the issues that are common among the archives, library, art, and historic preservation fields, and shows how these issues help us focus on the past and perceive contemporary culture.

In 1956, preservation was narrowly focused on institutional practices. Today, to assess current trends properly, we must take a broader view. The contributions to this *Trends* issue cut a wide swath.

## REFERENCES

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