



CONNECTING TO COLLECTIONS / MINNESOTA!

Project Description

The Heritage Health Index found that our nation's collections are at risk and require immediate attention and care. This project, conducted by the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) in collaboration with the Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC), is an important opportunity for cultural institutions across Minnesota to identify their collections care needs and to develop a statewide plan to meet these needs. The project flows directly from the current work of the two organizations and the state's commitment to the preservation of its cultural heritage. The project formally begins May 1, 2008 and runs for fourteen months.

Purpose and Need

The Heritage Health Index (HHI), a comprehensive survey of the condition and preservation needs of our nation's collections in 2005, found that collections are at serious risk and require immediate attention and care. While there has not been any statewide needs assessment of this sort to date, the overall estimated assessment of the status quo in Minnesota is similar to that profiled for the nation in the HHI. Given this, the general goals of the project are to evaluate Minnesota's needs in a practical framework and to identify available resources, determine priorities, and plot a strategy for implementation.

Most preservation efforts come *ex post facto*: after the damage is done, after the disaster occurs, and after the opportunity for any cost-effective, preventive measure passes. Again, in this, Minnesota fits the national pattern. As in most states, our needs significantly exceed our means, but we can certainly get a much better return on our investments with a targeted approach that carefully fosters planning and collaboration, leading to sustainable ways of sharing both expertise and resources on a routine basis. The MHS and MACC both have solid conservation programs with outreach and education components. These programs provide the foundation for more extensive and comprehensive efforts.

Knowledge gleaned from the two organization's current programs informed this project. The clear sense is that Minnesota repositories need guidelines and methods that emphasize preventive action, to avoid making the costly mistakes that increase the already daunting difficulties of preserving their collections. They need actionable and practical educational tools, things they can do, particularly things that will help them to develop and implement emergency plans. As well, the repositories have already voiced the need for models for the preservation of digital and audio/visual collections, including the specifications and checklists to manage effectively the inevitable migration and conversion to formats and media appropriate for access and long-term storage.

Goals and Process

The specific goals of the project are:

- to confirm and broaden the preliminary assessment of preservation needs;
- to evaluate formally the stakeholders' capacities;
- to determine the process, resources and skills necessary to meet the needs;
- to promote the awareness of preservation needs;
- to form the partnerships to support an implementation grant proposal.

To accomplish these goals the MHS and MACC will work primarily through the following professional organizations and associations: the Minnesota Library Association (MLA); Minnesota's State Historic Records Advisory Board (SHRAB); the Minnesota Digital Library (MDL); the Minnesota Association of Museums (MAM). Together, these groups provide forums to the principal repositories in the state; as well, they provide the foundation for partnerships that can promise ongoing programs for education and support of future preservation efforts. To assess the state of preservation and determine capacities the MHS and MACC will conduct an electronic survey of needs in Minnesota's cultural institutions based on the HHI survey instrument. Finally, MHS and MACC will convene four meetings of focus groups around the state and be guided by an advisory board that will meet twice during the course of the project.

Implementation

The ultimate goal of the project is to inform the preparation of an implementation grant proposal by which the MHS and MACC hope to position themselves:

- to establish a foundation of basic, good preservation practices in repositories across the state;
- to strengthen the existing education and field services programs at MACC and the MHS;
- to develop new areas of preservation expertise; and
- to produce and disseminate tangible products that would support practical preservation programs.