



ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

**Art Libraries Society of North America, 34th Annual Conference
Fairmont Banff Springs, Banff, Alberta, Canada, May 5-9, 2006**

**Session 2: Planning for Posterity: The Preservation of Art and Architecture
Materials
Saturday, May 6 9-10:30**

Moderators: Jane Devine Mejia and Marilyn Berger, McGill University

Speakers: Amanda Bowen, Harvard for Nancy Schrock; Ann Marie Holland, McGill University, David Grattan, Canadian Conservation Institute and Tony White, Pratt Institute

Jane opened the session, discussing the need for a basic knowledge of preservation issues for art librarians. To directly address portions of the Core Competencies, and also as a response to situations she experienced as a fine arts librarian at Notre Dame, she put together this panel.

Amanda Bowen gave the paper "Preservation: Continuum of Change" for Nancy Schrock. She began by stating that Art/Architecture book and paper materials had further value than the text, with images on covers, endpapers and other places. Conservators make decisions that concern the lifespan of a book, better known as "collections care." She outlined some of the day-to-day problems and concerns of book preservation, including where to place labels on books and which adhesive to use; barcode labels and date due stamps; special collection items versus circulating and how to deal with edge stamping; bookplates that are in themselves a work of art, yet must still be affixed to the books with water soluble glues that will not disrupt the longevity of the item; a no-trim binding policy at Harvard; cover copying on library binding for popular paperbacks; box enclosures for items that play a large part in protecting them from vandalism and environmental factors; elephant folios that are at risk for damage because they project from shelves; normal wear and tear to books from use. Some solutions to the problems include proper training of staff in packing and wrapping materials that must be moved, using Polyethylene book jackets for fragile materials. Binding and illustrated bindings can be integral to the book content. She showed us an example of a 19th century binding that illustrated the book content on feminine beauty that was lavishly decorated. Her discussion turned to facilities, and we were shown images of the Widener at Harvard, with large scale facilities, and the MFA Boston, where a preservation space was carved out of two stacks, including a paper cutter. She pointed out that preservation in museums often falls to the librarians and there are not dedicated staff members. In the case of embrittled items, she discussed the differences between facsimile copies and digitization and what decisions are best for both the book and the institution. For the future of art libraries, digitization will assist in retention, and new challenges will arise, as paper quality is more and more variable.

The second speaker was Ann Marie Holland, Preservation Librarian from McGill University and her paper was entitled "An Environmental Approach to Preservation."

She addressed the challenges of instituting the first overall preservation program at McGill through floor-by-floor climate control to slow deterioration, and controlling light exposure and storage. After McGill hired a consultant in 2000, a preservation librarian was also hired and efforts were started on a small scale, concentrating on one floor and collection at a time. Challenges included unifying the workflow of two different reading rooms that had developed divergent processing practices through the years. This program competed with other priorities in the library such as digital and diminished resources for preservation activities. By defining a mission statement and scope of project, she was able to add value to the project. She selected the rare book division as the first collection to stabilize the environment around.

Environmental controls on temperature, humidity, air circulation, particulates filtration were considered, as was the retrofit of an old building to meet standards for these controls. In the end, a dedicated HVAC system was created for this floor, with alarms to keep the system at its set points. Movable shelving maximized space. Over a two-year period, the project required the librarians to deal with engineers, move collections off-site, estimate space needs, and pack and label materials carefully. In the end, there were additional achievements beyond climate including light source protection, high efficiency particulate filtration and a cleaner environment overall.

The third speaker was David Grattan from the Canadian Conservation Institute. He stated that archives and museums are more involved in conservation efforts than libraries, and advocated fixing this relationship. Two major preservation issues for the institute are electronic media and records and acidity in paper. The institute has done multiple studies on the deacidification process, and found in a 1994 study that processes did damage to books, but are no longer available. Currently, there are three commercial processes available, the Book keeper, papersave and thermal acceleration. Grattan spoke on another project, known as the Canadian Iron Gall project, that dealt with stabilizing an ink type used in very early historical Canadian documents. The Longevity Carriers project determined that the worst piece of paper has a longer life than the best CD. For electronic records, preservation is a matter of buying time, limited by equipment and software, migration and compatibility. While paper standards exist, there are no standards for CDs, DVDs and other storage media. There is one CD type that is the most stable at this point. The Institute places its findings on the web in technical bulletins, to make them as accessible as possible.

The fourth and final speaker was Tony White from the Pratt Institute Library. He showed the audience pictures and reviewed the history of the 1896 library building as a historic landmark and ensuing renovations. White comes to preservation through his appointment to the disaster committee, rather than as a preservation librarian and added that improvements to the building often occurred after years of neglect. He looked at factors of environment, such as temperature, shelving, handling and HVAC as potentially damaging to book materials. An HVAC is much needed in controlling environment. At Pratt, challenges included storage where users were not trained to use materials properly, wood shelves that could hasten deterioration, artist books housed in file cabinets and lack of space as a detriment to renovation. The archives have no place for oversized items. Due to the lack of HVAC controls, the multimedia collection had humidity/temperature fluctuations that brought about vinegar syndrome. He pointed out that it is critical for a library to monitor its own building and work closely with facilities. At Pratt, the board and director are dedicated to preservation through environmental control, drafting a disaster plan, staff planning that includes fire drills. Their upcoming priorities include HVAC repairs to develop balanced air quality, building repairs to seal windows and control light levels, environmental monitors put in place for rare books, cleaner

environments through scheduling, UV shades on windows, work with cleaners and exterminators to monitor chemicals used in stacks, book stack repairs, improved security and collections care, emergency preparedness through fire drills for staff and priority of what materials would be saved first.

Questions that followed:

-Curiosity about labeling on spine for oversized volumes, should they be stored vertically or horizontally?

Tony White: For things that are spine side down, colleagues advocate putting label where it is visible for decreased handling.

Others: Shelving should be according to size, acid free slips can be used in books holding call numbers for visibility.

-Question for David Grattan on Acid free—is there a brand? How is indoor pollution measured?

David Grattan: There are lots of unknowns. Libraries in polluted areas have books in worse conditions because the lignin in paper soaks up pollutants more quickly, but this has not been thoroughly researched. Prevention is easy, but expensive.

-Question for David Grattan—How does the paper standard from CCI compare to that of NISO's?

D.G.: CCI is the first to look at lignin in paper. There are differences in optical vs. mechanical deterioration in paper, where paper may yellow but not break down.

-Question for Ann Marie Holland—Could she or another recommend how to find a preservation consultant particularly for a renovation?

A.M.H.: It is crucial to have someone check plan early in process, someone to put set points on targets. CCI helped McGill. The preservation consultant for general needs was outside the library from the University of Toronto.

T.W.: In the U.S., seek out regional institutions, NEDCC, American Organization for Conservation maintains a list on its website.

-Question for David Grattan—what is the impact of dust on materials?

D.G. I haven't studied that.

-Question for Ann Marie Holland—What were the criteria for selecting materials for transfer to rare books?

A.M.H.: The division already existed, collections chosen first that existed in poorest environmental conditions. This can be political when dealing with faculty members.

-Question for Ann Marie Holland—Who responds to alarms?

A.M.H.: There is a person who has monitors the environment, with a back up person. There are pagers, etc.

-Question for Tony White—Does your evacuation plan include materials?

T.W.: People go first and the building is cleared. The 2nd and 3rd floors can evacuate onto the roof for physically impaired.

-Question for David Grattan—With gradual transitions, why do materials adjust to gradual rather than quicker transitions?

D.G.: Materials that have weaknesses and crack will suffer less stress the more gradual the change.

-Question— When we do blast freezing to kill insects, does it damage materials?

D.G.: It depends on the moisture content. There are risks in everything you do, insects are far more destructive than the effects of freezing, and there are collateral risks in everything you do.

-Question for Tony White—I have architectural drawings that we view on a wooden table. Should we put something on the surface?

T.W. It probably isn't that bad for short term use, maybe use a sheet of Mylar.

D.G. Old wooden shelving ceases off gassing with age and wood could be an exaggerated risk since it is the same material in paper. A barrier is probably a good idea.