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ARCHIVAL PRESERVATION: CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR THE WORKING ARCHIVIST

Michael Holland

A recent exchange of letters in the American Archivist highlights the conflicts between the two schools promoting preservation education in the archival world today.¹ Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler speaks for the commonsense school, which has also been represented most ably by George Cunha and Robert Patterson. They are dedicated to 'action now', because, to quote Patterson, "the library and archives professions cannot afford to wait for the professional conservator to appear before taking up the battle against decay: we must organize to take action ourselves."² Ritzenthaler was responding to Christine Young's contention that a highly trained, highly skilled conservator is the key person in the physical preservation of historical documents.

In the archival world, that first, commonsense school has received more support, on the theory that something is better than nothing. The availability of opportunities to learn about simple preservation techniques is another matter. Ritzenthaler has observed that

conservation principles and techniques have not been accorded much attention in either academic archival and library training programs, or in actual practice within repositories. While this omission is now generally acknowledged, difficulties persist because there are few qualified instructors in this field, and there is often little opportunity for working archivists to pursue continuing

education.³

Similarly, a casual survey of library and archival literature leaves the irrefutable impression that awareness and concern have not led to the development of adequate educational and informational support.

Ritzenthaler's assessment of the situation is clearly that, even after fifteen years of preservation awareness among archival and library professionals, there are still obstacles to acquiring training and education in the field of material preservation.⁴ The literature dealing with preservation is complicated and confusing, and there is a paucity of academic programs that train practicing archivists and students of archives in the science, art, and managerial principles of preservation. It is the purpose of this article to discuss some of the avenues for continuing education available to the preservation conscious archivist and to outline a few of the strategic concerns that the employed archivist must take into account in improving skills and knowledge in the field.

The Professional Literature

While the archival literature is relatively clear and straightforward regarding the archival functions of accessioning, arrangement, and description, the literature of archival preservation is varied in the technical sophistication that it demands of its readers. There are articles and monographs available that aim at succinct explanations of the causes of and simple remedies for document deterioration, but this literature is repetitive and frequently fulfills more of an advocacy role than an instructional one. Advocacy pieces were extremely useful in an earlier time; their continued appearance is less useful to the preservation conscious archivist than works such as Ritzenthaler's Archives and Manuscripts: Conservation.

Another problem with the preservation literature is its bias towards library and book materials and against the documentary materials that predominate in

archival and manuscript repositories. Such dominance ranges from the actual technical aspects of preservation (i.e., simple book repair and book boxing) to preservation management (i.e., the training of preservation librarians and the placement of conservation officers in library administration). While library and archival preservation share a number of similar concerns, such as deacidification and the quality and repair of paper, there are concerns that are dissimilar. The volume, which is the primary item of treatment in library preservation, is not equivalent to most items found in archival collections. The administration of an archival preservation program has much less in common with the administration of a library preservation program than is frequently assumed in the literature. These differences--in both techniques and management principles--must be fully understood by the archivist relying upon the literature for preservation information.

The literature is also extremely difficult to assess and apply without some type of formal introduction to the subject of archival preservation. The author's assumptions regarding the necessary level of preservation education for an informed archivist are often reflected in the articles' levels of difficulty. The commonsense literature frequently takes the form of articles that not only tell how to institute an in-house conservation and restoration program, but advocate defined systems for handling problems by cost-effective methods. This approach assumes that the archivist and curator are capable of doing much more toward the preservation and conservation of the documents in his charge, than selecting items for the attention of an overworked or nonexistent conservator.

The other school of thought, found prevalently in the literature, is characterized by a concern with the highly technical aspects involved in conserving the original, physical form of information. Many contributors to this variety of literature believe that the primary, if not sole, duty of the archivist

in preserving his documentary collection is one of appraising and isolating important materials for the services of a highly trained conservator. This school of thought has culminated in the establishment of extensive academic programs to train conservators of the highest caliber and technical expertise.⁵

These two different approaches to the preservation of documentary resources are equally well intentioned and both have points in their favor. They simply place a different level of confidence in the ability of archivists and librarians to carry on the physical conservation of their collections and the ability of these professionals to manage the preservation challenge. Similarly, much of the conflicting information and recommendations found in the literature reflect the new and experimental nature of the conservation and preservation fields. Only the time necessary to conduct research and test scientific hypotheses in document preservation will resolve some of the disagreements and conflicts found within the literature of preservation.⁶ Testing and experimentation over time will tend to make treatments and preservation recommendations more standard. Thus, they simplify the conflicts within the literature that prove to be substantial blocks to the traditional means of continuing education in the archival field: self-directed study.

Academic Opportunities in Archival Preservation

Within the last fifteen years, thought regarding the training education of archivists has been in transition. In the United States, the traditional means of training archivists for their specialized professional duties has been by a process similar to craft apprenticeship. The traditional tasks of the archivist can best be learned through practice under the direction of a more experienced archival practitioner. However, the nature and texture of archival work has rapidly changed with the advance of technology. The technical expertise which the individual must command in order to perform some of the tasks required to appraise and preserve

historical documentation stored in machine-readable form is no longer a matter of commonsense and on-the-job training.

The same degree of technical expertise and prerequisite theoretical knowledge necessary for proper administration of machine-readable records is critical to the proper conservation and preservation of historical records, archives, and manuscripts. The new technology of records creation and the technology of records preservation combined with the movement within the archival profession that favors accreditation and formalization of archival education have had a profound⁷ influence on the training of archivists in general.

These trends have had an even more significant effect upon the education and training of archivists in the more technical and recently appreciated aspects of archival administration such as preservation and conservation. In 1973, only one institution offered specialized courses in conservation and preservation of archival materials. Wayne State University offered Introduction to Archival Conservation and Principles and Practice of Archival Conservation available through either the Department of Library Science or the Department of History. Nine other colleges and universities scheduled courses in 1973 which included preservation or conservation as part of the course descriptions, as printed in the Society of American Archivists (SAA) Education Directory of 1973.⁸ In the next Education Directory issued by the SAA in 1975, five more courses used preservation or conservation terminology in their class descriptions.⁹ In the 1983 Education Directory, ten courses had some aspect of archival or manuscript preservation in their course titles and were offered by nine academic institutions.

These ten courses were in addition to the courses on archival and library preservation presented by the School of Library Service at Columbia University as part of their recently established preservation-administrator and conservator

certification programs.¹⁰ These courses were evenly divided between the administration of the library schools and history departments. These academic opportunities for practicing archivists and students of archives were geographically diversified; two institutions were located in New England, three in the mid-Atlantic states, two in the South, and two in the Midwest. Only the far western states lacked academic opportunities in archival preservation.¹¹

The fourfold increase in the number of academic courses in general archival practice offered by American colleges and universities during the ten-year period, 1973 to 1983, reflects the concern among many archivists and curators that archival education should be more than a craft taught through doing. The fivefold increase in the archival preservation and conservation courses offered by colleges and universities reflects several related beliefs.

One trend leading to this impressive increase in formal classes in archival conservation is the realization that archival preservation is a critical concern for responsible curators and that the recognition of the importance of this concern is late in its development. It also reflects the trend that archival preservation has finally found a natural place among the other archival tasks or skills that must be performed as a routine part of record and manuscript administration. The preservation and conservation of documents is currently and widely recognized as a concern of the archival administrator and ¹²not the sole responsibility of a conservator.

Most importantly, however, the quadrupling of academic offerings in general archival topics and the dramatic multiplication of archival preservation courses is indicative of the realization that for topics such as conservation and preservation, on-the-job training alone is not adequate. These topics require a thorough and technical understanding of material structure, destructive forces, and the complex techniques of repairing documents and

arresting degradation. However, structured academic training in archival preservation will be difficult to obtain, due to the complexity of the subject matter and the dearth of skilled preservation practitioners within the profession. One option open to the archivist is an internship which provides on-the-job training.

Internships

For institutions employing adequate personnel, internships are a viable alternative to expensive, and frequently geographically distant academic programs. However, due to the rather extended duration of most internships in a technically complex endeavor such as archival preservation, a staff internship is not practical for smaller and inadequately staffed organizations or institutions. Very few opportunities, however, offer the completeness and practical experience with archival preservation that an internship can provide. Internships are based upon the European craft tradition of apprenticeships and teach, generally, not only the technically and theoretically correct means of achieving archival preservation goals, but also the practical considerations which are the basis for informed administrative decisions.

Internships in preservation and conservation are offered by a variety of institutions for greatly differing time periods. In selecting the internship as a continuing education option, an institution or an individual must be cognizant of several factors. Many internships offer training at a level of complexity and sophistication exceeding what is needed or useful to practicing archivists and, thus, are not good investments of time and other institutional resources. Similarly, in selecting an internship an institution or individual should know up front the purpose of the internship: Is the internship aimed at producing professionals for the advancement of the field or is the primary purpose the acquisition of labor for the completion of an institutional project? In most good internships the

rationale behind offering an internship is a mixture of motives related to both institutional needs and the needs of the profession for practical specialized education.

Most internships available are offered by institutions with the aid of grants from foundations or endowments. Internships, more than academic class work and workshops, tend to be oriented toward either the professional conservator or the administrative librarian; however, internship opportunities for archivists on leave from their positions are available. In 1979, Yale University received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to accomplish a number of tasks. One purpose was to train interns to satisfy the great need for trained preservation officers; another intention was to conduct a conditional materials survey for the collections within the libraries of Yale University. This project trained six groups of four interns during a three-year period. During the five-month periods that interns spent working in the Yale University Library, they divided their time between working on the conditional survey for the Yale libraries and receiving instruction and practice in conservation techniques and training in preservation administration.¹³

This type of internship arrangement is not exceptional. Related, but variant, internships were offered in programs by the Library of Congress's Preservation Office, the Johns Hopkins University Library, and the New York Public Library from 1982 through 1986, all with the aid of Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Grants.¹⁴ The search for similar national internships can most profitably be found by reading publications such as CAN: Conservation Administration News and The Abbey Newsletter.

Regional conservation centers and programs occasionally provide internships by contract that are tailored to the needs of the participant's employing institution.¹⁵ Regional centers are certainly excellent institutions to contact for information regarding preservation education opportunities.

Another possibility for individuals in search of an internship arrangement in archival preservation is the local conservation and preservation programs of state libraries and archives and universities repositories. Many conservators working for state governments or college or university preservation departments would welcome the labor of a willing intern and the opportunity of improving the level of collection preservation within their geographical area.

While internships offer some unique educational advantages in a technically complex field such as archival preservation, these opportunities must be thoroughly understood before being undertaken. The amount of work that will be useful to the participant must be balanced against the amount of work required of the participant in the satisfaction of the institution's needs. The cost of internships also must be taken into consideration, for without grant support and stipends, internships can be extremely expensive, especially when the site of the internship is far removed from the institution sponsoring the intern. In the selection and initiation of an internship, caveat emptor is not an empty legal concept.

Workshops and Institutes

Undoubtedly, the most common form of continuing education for professionals concerned with archival preservation is the workshop or seminar. The variety and number of such offerings is large. This is due to the economy and convenience of this type of opportunity, the efficiency in terms of time expenditure, and the willingness of local, state, regional, and national organizations and institutions to provide training and funding for these types of programs in archival preservation.

Depending upon the region in which the archivist resides, the variety and opportunity to partake of a preservation workshop varies from extremely rich to desolate. There is no single best way of maintaining currency with the workshop opportunities available

nationally or locally. Therefore, the archivist in search of workshop or institute opportunities must glean notices and announcements for such programs from the pages of several professional periodicals.

The Abbey Newsletter, edited by Ellen McCrady, preservation librarian at Brigham Young University, contains announcements of educational programs available for the preservation conscious archivist in the column, "Coming Events." This column lists chronologically the available educational opportunities, usually workshops and institutes. While The Abbey Newsletter is frequently useful to professionals in archives and manuscripts, the publication focuses primarily upon hand bookbinding, book restoration, and paper conservation for the professional book and paper conservators.

Slightly more valuable to the archivist searching for introductory or intermediate level workshops or institutes is CAN: Conservation Administration News. This bimonthly publication from the University of Tulsa does an excellent job of reporting the available preservation education opportunities, both nationally and internationally. In addition to maintaining currency on regional library and archival cooperative programs in columns such as "Preservation News," CAN also contains a column of interest to workshop shoppers, "Calendar," a chronological listing and description of upcoming programs and workshops. Certainly, the SAA Newsletter cannot be overlooked as a rich source of information about impending educational opportunities. The SAA Newsletter frequently has notes on funding sources as well as information on upcoming programs. This publication, however, is more directed to the educational offerings of the Society of American Archivists than other equally valuable programs sponsored by other organizations.

The last and, possibly, the most valuable source of information on workshops for the archivist is the newsletter or journal issued by local or state archival or library organizations. An exemplary publication in this category is the journal of the

Society of Mississippi Archivists, The Primary Source . It not only contains a conservation information leaflet, but also educational offerings available in the region and the state of Mississippi.

The frequency and length of workshops and institutes depends largely upon the region, its wealth, and the number of professionals with archival preservation interest employed therein. A number of states in the West have developed self-sustaining conservation organizations that frequently sponsor workshops and educational programs for archival and library professionals. The state-based organizations are generally the product of the Western States Conservation Project. Oklahoma, Arizona, Nebraska, and Mississippi all have active chapters of the Western Conservation Congress.

These state-based organizations issue periodic newsletters and can be contacted for their publications and information about their sponsorship of educational programs through either the state library, archives, or historical society for the respective states. Oklahoma's chapter of the Western Conservation Congress, that publishes Conservation Oklahoma Now, has sponsored approximately a dozen workshops within the last several years, ranging from hands-on disaster recovery workshops and a seminar on textile conservation to programs allowing participants to make a variety of book, pamphlet, and document enclosures under the direction of experienced conservators. The workshops presented by these state conservation organizations are often sponsored with other organizations or institutions concerned with the preservation of documents and cultural artifacts, and their costs are usually nominal.

Other locally sponsored workshops are presented by agencies of state government with special interest in document preservation. The New York State Archives and the State Library of New York jointly sponsor a series of Conservation Administration Workshops for administrators, managers, and planners employed in libraries, archives, and historical

societies.¹⁸ Such arrangements are not uncommon in many other states. Therefore, archival professionals should maintain close contact with their state archival, library, educational, and historical agencies for information on workshops and regional organizations offering preservation educational services.

Another type of locally sponsored workshop or institute is exemplified by the preservation and conservation workshops sponsored by the University of Texas. These workshops are frequently but irregularly offered and range in scope from leather bookbinding to simple document preservation and photographic restoration. Universities with well-respected archival and manuscript collections and repositories and universities with archival course offerings are frequent locations for workshop presentations.¹⁹

Increasingly, continuing education for archival and manuscript professionals is falling to regional cooperative programs. Regional cooperative organizations started in the late 1960s when the administrators of the New England Library Compact resolved to establish a regional conservation facility for member institutions and the region in general.²⁰ Since that time the New England Document Conservation Center (New England was later changed to Northeast to convey the wider service commitment) and the regional cooperative centers and programs that followed in the 1970s and 1980s have played an important role in continuing education for conservation conscious librarians and archivists.²¹ Other cooperative projects such as the Ohio Cooperative Conservation Information Office, the Illinois Cooperative Conservation Program, and the Midwest Cooperative Conservation Program are all engaged in the dissemination of information and the education²² of archives and library professionals.

The preservation of documentary heritage has even become a concern for several regional consortia, whose original purposes were quite different from

library and archival preservation. Library management organizations such as the Greater Cincinnati/Dayton-Miami Valley Library Consortium or the Appalachian Consortium, an association dedicated to the preservation of Appalachian culture, have both offered workshops and educational programs on conservation of documentary materials for professionals, paraprofessionals, and administrators.²³ The number of regional conservation efforts and program descriptions that are omitted in this brief overview is greater in number than those mentioned.

Similarly, regional library networks are finally realizing the importance of preservation education for archivists and librarians. SOLINET (Southeastern Library Network) initiated a recent preservation program that will offer information and workshops to professionals seeking help with their deteriorating collections and records. METRONET (Metropolitan Library Network) of St. Paul is also studying the concept of a conservation program to benefit its regional members in a variety of forms.²⁴ AMIGOS (AMIGOS Bibliographic Control, Inc.), the library network serving the states of the American Southwest, is also studying the impact it could have upon conservation education in its constituent region.²⁵

Certainly in discussing preservation workshops for archivists one cannot ignore those programs offered by national professional organizations. One of the most valuable preservation workshops for archivists has been repeatedly offered by the Society of American Archivists since 1979. In addition to archival preservation workshops, the SAA, with a \$157,929 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), also provided preservation consultant services to institutions, on a cost sharing basis, and produced a manual on archival conservation as part of the SAA's Basic Manual Series. The SAA, in initiating a large scale preservation education effort for working archivists, was responding directly to the results of the NEH/SAA

conference on setting priorities for historical records conducted in 1977. Participants of the conference ranked conservation and preservation of historical records as the most deserving of funding efforts of seven funding topics discussed at the meeting.²⁶

The society's Basic Archival Conservation Project with its two and one-half day workshops, offered at a reasonable fee of fifty dollars per session, was so successful and popular with archivists that when the original twenty-seven-month grant expired, it was renewed by a Phase II grant from the NEH. The second phase of the Archival Conservation Project incorporated workshops and consultant services for the preservation of photographic collections and the use of microforms as preservation tools. The Administration of Photographic Collections and Archival Conservation Management grant expired on 1 January 1985. While the future of SAA workshops and continuing education programs in archival and photographic conservation is uncertain, both the archival conservation and photographic collection administration are the subject of recently published contributions to the Basic Manual Series.²⁷ These worthy and practical contributions to the field will go far in simplifying the continuing education of archivists and students interested in archival preservation.

Continuing education in archival preservation made a quick start and has progressed unsteadily during the past fifteen years. There are a number of options which the archivist can pursue. These range from self-directed study through the literature to intensive and structured academic programs. Whether the archivist in pursuit of preservation information and training acquires this education through workshops or an internship, the professional cannot fail to notice that educational opportunities are primarily dependent upon geographical location. Archivists must seek not only more training in the complex but vital archival function, preservation,

but must also work toward the establishment of more and better ongoing educational and training opportunities for archivists and students of archives. Ideally, archival training in preservation will develop to include widely available and regularly scheduled academic and practical training.

NOTES

1 "The Forum," American Archivist 48 (Winter 1985): 7-10.

2 Robert H. Patterson, Foreword to Library and Archives Conservation: 1980s and Beyond, by George Martin Cunha and Dorothy Grant Cunha (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983), xiii.

3 Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, Archives & Manuscripts: Conservation, A Manual on Physical Care and Management, SAA Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1983), 7.

4 For the purpose of literary style, preservation will be used as a general term encompassing both the restorative functions of document conservation and the preventative practices of preservation. The term preservation will normally be used in place of conservation and preservation. The term conservation will only be used when there is a need to express specifically the restorative aspects of archival preservation.

5 Paul N. Banks, "Education for Conservators," Library Journal 104 (May 1979): 1013-1014.

6 Ritzenthaler, Conservation, 125.

7 An interesting discussion of the institutionalization and accreditation of archival education is found in Nancy E. Peace and Nancy Fisher Chudacoff, "Archivists and Librarians: A Common

Mission, A Common Education," American Archivist 42 (October 1979): 456-462.

8 Society of American Archivists, Education Directory: Careers and Courses in Archival Administration (Ann Arbor, MI: Society of American Archivists, 1973), passim.

9 Dolores C. Renze and Kathleen C. Hayes, comps., Education Directory: 1975 Supplement (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1975), passim.

10 Society of American Archivists, Education Directory, 1983 (Chicago: SAA, 1983), passim.

11 For further information about the 1983 course offerings in the field of archival preservation see Ibid.

12 Ritzenthaler, Conservation, 7,9.

13 Gay Walker and Jane Greenfield, "Preservation at Yale, 1979-1980," The Abbey Newsletter 4 (September 1980): 48-49.

14 "Mellon Grant for Preservation Internships Awarded to LC," CAN 16 (January 1984): 13; Myra Jo Moon, "A Preservation Internship at Johns Hopkins," CAN 17 (April 1984): 5; and "Preservation Intern: The New York Public Library, Conservation Division," CAN 18 (July 1984): 12.

15 Ritzenthaler, Conservation, 140.

16 Ellen McCrady, "Training in Paper Conservation," The Abbey Newsletter 7 Supplement (May 1983): 1-2. McCrady observes that while workshops enjoy great popularity in many fields there is some controversy over their use as some commercial enterprises have made hefty profits by exploiting these concerns. However, she concedes that, in

technical fields such as paper and archival conservation where many of the finest teachers practice rather than teach, workshops may be the best and only way to acquire quality instruction.

17 Karen Day, "The Western Conservation Congress: Recent State Chapter Activities," CAN 11 (October 1982): 1-2; H.T. Holmes and Linda Overman, "Update on Conservation Work in Mississippi," CAN 13 (April 1983): 4-5.

18 "Archival Education: A Challenge for New York State," For the Record 2 (Summer 1984): 20.

19 In addition to the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, another academic institution, the Rochester Institute of Technology, frequently offers intensive workshops in various types of document and book preservation. Both institutions have extremely strong programs in photographic conservation as well as the conservation of textual materials.

20 George Martin Cunha and Dorothy Grant Cunha, Library and Archives Conservation: 1980s and Beyond (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983), 7-9.

21 Ritzenthaler, Conservation, 140.

22 Rebecca H. Winkle, "The Ohio Cooperative Conservation Information Office," CAN 19 (October 1984): 7; Carolyn Clark Morrow, "Illinois Cooperative Conservation Program," CAN 16 (January 1984): 1-4; and "MCCP Workshop," CAN 19 (October 1984): 14.

23 Cunha, Library and Archives Conservation, 35.

24 "Library Networks Get into Conservation," The Abbey Newsletter 8 (July 1984): 51-52.

25 "AMIGOS and Preservation," CAN 19

(October 1984): 24.

26 "SAA Conservation Program Announced:
Workshops, Manual Planned," SAA Newsletter (July
1980): 1.

27 Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, Gerald J. Munoff,
and Margery S. Long, Archives & Manuscripts:
Administration of Photographic Collections, Basic
Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American
Archivists, 1984).