Conservation Comes of Age

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MODERN RESEARCH LIBRARIES are what they are today because of the programs of conservation and preservation which librarians have followed through the past centuries. Although much remains to be done in this area of librarianship, as the following papers show, it would be unfair to describe librarians as a group which has been delinquent in its stewardship. Most research librarians have recognized the importance of adequate binding programs, of the need of special care of non-book materials, and of the applications and potential uses of microreproductions and other photographic media in the general problem of preservation.

Conservation and preservation, however, are terms which are not to be restricted to the curatorship of research collections and rare materials, either in public or university libraries. They represent areas of immediate interest to school and children's librarians, who must get as many uses as possible out of current publications in order to meet budgetary limitations; to the college and junior college librarians, who are concerned with this and other problems of mass use; and to the governmental and other special librarians, who must handle and care for all kinds of documents and reports as well as bound books.

In a recent report on the Harvard University Library, K. D. Metcalf wrote: "Care of the collections has been neglected so seriously that $265,000 is now needed for relabeling, repair, and rebinding of materials in the Widener stack alone; an additional $5,000 per year is needed for cleaning these stacks adequately." [1] Any of the many general surveys of public and academic libraries conducted during the past few years reveal conditions which are similar to those described at Harvard. Although budgetary support for the acquisition of materials has sometimes been generous in libraries, it has not always been easy for librarians to obtain the necessary funds for the proper

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care of collections. How to remove this paradox is a question faced by the profession generally.

This issue is really a companion piece to "Special Materials and Services," the October, 1955, issue of *Library Trends,* edited by A. H. Horn. Problems in the care of maps, newspapers, prints, pictures, photographs, musical scores and recordings, films, microfilms and microfacsimile publications, pamphlets, broadsides, clippings, posters, and manuscripts were discussed by the contributors to the October number. In some ways, the present issue is a continuation of this discussion, although in its general structure it is quite different. For example, lamination and other restorative practices are mentioned by W. W. Ristow and Neal Harlow in the October issue; here they are given detailed treatment by Ray O. Hummel and W. J. Barrow, and noted by Sten Lindberg. The present issue, however, does not purport to give a complete set of formulae for conserving, preserving, and restoring all types of library materials.

Many questions are raised by the contributors. What trends in publications affect the binding programs of libraries? How is the paperback to be fitted into the program? What is the library problem in regard to titles that are published originally as paperbacks? What are the current problems in the care of rare books, or, as Roland Baughman asks, what is a rare book? To what extent have librarians considered the consequences of their practices in the binding of periodicals and other serials? What are the ingredients of a binding program for serials? How is the preservation of materials aided by proper stack construction and control? Should libraries attempt to keep all materials they acquire? What are the elements in a discarding program? Should a library operate its own bindery? If so, under what conditions? What is the status of the relations between librarians and commercial binderies? In what ways may these relations be improved? Have the binding developments in European countries any contribution to make to the solution of American problems? What kinds of training should individuals in charge of binding programs and operations have?

These questions provide a general outline of the nature of the problems discussed in the papers included in this issue. In a number of situations, the authors have been able to suggest answers to questions on the basis of available data. Frank Schick's review reveals the development of new problems arising from changes in publications. There remain many fundamental problems which are still in need of solution. Not the least is the question of binding policies for li-

braries. The literature has frequently referred to acquisition policies, cataloging policies, and reference policies of libraries. Less attention has been given to binding policies, probably because libraries have never really had enough funds for handling all their binding needs. Inadequate funds actually make a policy essential, but what and when to bind are still unsettled problems in many libraries. Moreover, the intrusion of cooperative enterprises has a direct effect upon the preservation and binding problems of institutions which are part of the enterprises. Microreproduction, too, has a still undetermined relation to binding programs. The use of plastics and adhesives for inexpensive conservation has barely made an impression on the library field.

Experimentation in restorative processes continues at a lively pace. In both America and Europe the search for improved methods may help librarians to overcome the deteriorating effects of age and other threats to library materials. The Institute of the Pathology of the Book, located in Rome, only last June moved into its new $150,000 headquarters for further study of the reasons for the decay of books and documents.[2] The Institute's biological, microbiological, chemical, and physical departments investigate the preservation and restoration of materials endangered by insects, mold, germs, fire, and water. In the United States, the National Archives and the Bureau of Standards have provided information to librarians on questions concerning the care of manuscript materials, documents, and photographic materials.[3] A few libraries, such as Harvard, Huntington, the Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library, have had staff members work on problems in preserving books and papers. Barrow, a professional document restorer at Richmond, Virginia, has made special studies of paper.[4] If librarians are going to replace paper records with photographic reproductions, "norms for durability, fineness of grain, and fireproof and moistproof properties of microcopies and photocopies are needed especially."[5]

The American Library Association and other library organizations might well work cooperatively in supporting studies of the problems on a national basis. The Association of Research Libraries, working with the Council of National Library Associations, has been cognizant of the problem of national preservation of library resources, not only from the point of view of natural deterioration but also from the standpoint of protection from possible military damage. The Committee on National Needs of the A.R.L. discussed in 1954 a plan for preservation prepared by Scott Adams.[6] The plan for the preservation of library resources, according to the program, should have the following

characteristics: "(a) It should be based on coordinated long-term development, rather than on emergency protection measures; (b) It should pay dividends of current service while providing an ultimate hedge against disaster; (c) It should have sufficient motivation to overcome narrow self-interest; (d) Its costs should be distributed among those who stand to profit by it; (e) Its basic purpose should be the preservation not of individual libraries, but of the materials of scholarship, of science, of technology. It should preserve in usable form the information which we might need to continue our defense under attack, to restore the country after attack, or, if need be, to rebuild our civilization." [7] The plan further suggests the development of "shadow" collections in relatively secure locations. Also in 1954, the C.N.L.A. Committee for the Protection of Cultural and Scientific Resources presented to the A.R.L. Committee on National Needs for consideration various proposals for protecting library materials. The major aspects of these proposals include: (1) dispersal of library resources by definite plan in terms of unique library materials; (2) coordination of programs of reproduction of materials; and (3) development of a strong network of library services between libraries located in non-strategic centers.[8] There appears to be no question, as was pointed out by R. H. Logsdon, that "individual institutions will have to take primary responsibility for protection of unique materials and 'treasure' items, perhaps by storage in safe places and microfilming, but not necessarily integrated into a regional or national plan." [9] The essential value of these discussions is that a problem of national significance is receiving earnest attention from library leaders.

The responsibility for preservation of materials is basically one borne by individual librarians. But cooperation is part of this responsibility. Governmental librarians, for example, have in recent years advanced their efforts to develop cooperative projects. These efforts have included binding. Recently, Ruth Hooker observed: "Another cooperative project under consideration by the same committee [Professional Activities Committee of the Washington, D.C., chapter of the Special Libraries Association] has to do with the circumstances affecting the binding of books and periodicals in federal libraries, such as cost, specifications, and speed of delivery. Federal librarians have known for years that something should be done in this matter, and many have tried individually, but this is the first time it has been attacked cooperatively." [10]

The development of cooperative storage centers and interlibrary centers has also a direct effect upon the problems of conservation and

preservation of library resources. The acquisition of newspapers by the Midwest Inter-Library Center for the use of member libraries is an example of the effort being made to reduce the storage and binding load on individual institutions. The acquisition of other marginal materials, or little-used resources, is part of the program of the Center. The discussions of the A.R.L. Committee on Cooperative Access to Newspapers and Other Serials are also worthy of mention in connection with the growth of cooperative plans. In essence, the idea is to initiate a national pool of current foreign newspapers in microfilm form to be made available to subscribing institutions.

Although national and regional problems of conservation warrant all the attention that librarians and other interested groups can give to them, there is a current concern for individual library problems. For example, a question that recurs is, "Should we operate our own bindery?" Most librarians have answered this question a long time ago—in the negative—and push it aside without further thought. Why be bothered with a technical problem that can be handled by experts? "Commercial binderies can do the job more economically" is the usual answer. However, there are both public and academic libraries which operate binderies. R. E. Kingery has summarized the literature, which is remarkably meager in regard to cost data. His estimate as to the work load, annual charges for supplies and salaries, and personnel required for the operation is likely to discourage the most venturesome. The profession could use to advantage careful studies of all types of library binderies in terms of costs and service, as well as studies of binding done by press binderies in universities.

Librarians owe much to commercial binders. The binding craft has aided librarians in the care of their books, periodicals, and other materials. J. B. Stratton has reviewed the present relations of librarians to library binders. The development of so-called "Class A Specifications" by the American Library Association and the Library Binding Institute has had some beneficial results for libraries in the past, but whether library binders do anything about it or not, librarians have come to the conclusion that there must be various kinds of bindings to meet their different problems of conservation and preservation.[11] Every book does not need a "Class A" binding. Various types of bindings [12] may be used to handle little-used periodicals and other serials. This does not mean that the libraries will cut their budgets for binding; it means making usually inadequate funds go further. Costs of binding have increased greatly; budgets have not grown proportionately. The library binders have much to gain by working closer with

librarians in solving the problems the latter face in conservation. As a matter of fact, a number of libraries have already introduced "budget" bindings, usually involving plastics and adhesives, for certain materials. It might be well for some librarians to study carefully the use and durability of such bindings.

Binding is closely related to discarding. H. F. McGaw's review of discarding policies and practices serves to remind librarians that every item a library acquires does not have to be kept. Discarding programs in public, special, and school libraries have been rather comprehensive, primarily because of space problems. College and university librarians have not always engaged in systematic programs. Storage libraries undoubtedly will have a larger part to play in the program of discarding obsolete or little-used items, but individual libraries must approach this procedure positively. A more serious consideration of content, especially of serial literature, should dissuade some librarians from binding marginal materials. Sidney Ditzion and Leverett Norman discuss in provocative terms the urgency of policies in the binding of periodicals and other serials.

The problems of stack care of library materials are discussed by R. J. Schunk. The development of rare-book collections in libraries has been accompanied by the construction of separate libraries, such as at Harvard and Michigan, or separate quarters in the library, which are found in many institutions. With the manufacture of compact shelving, a number of libraries are beginning to sort their collections on the basis of use. Proper shelving, lighting, and ventilation are essential for the care of materials; dust prevention and systematic cleaning must be parts of any efficient stack organization. With more open stacks in libraries, the role of the user becomes more and more important. He should be instructed in the proper care of library materials, if the library budget for binding is to be kept minimal.

Various contributors have referred to personnel in the library who supervise and work with the binding program. The wide range of knowledge needed to administer a binding department of a large library, which acquires all types of materials, is clearly pointed out by E. C. Lathem. The handling of books for current use represents little difficulty. Satisfactory conservation of rare books, serial publications, music, archival materials, and the mass of items known as "fugitive materials" requires a professional approach that most librarians do not easily attain. But the professional approach is essential, as Baughman, Kingery, and Lathem emphasize. Undoubtedly, more training of librarians is necessary if librarians are going to participate

actively in preserving their collections. The library schools have underplayed this type of instruction, and the penalty for this is the lack of "know-how" in critical situations.

The reader may not find in these papers as many guide-posts for a conservation theory as he might like. Certainly there are abundant facts. The major usefulness of the papers, however, is in pointing up the many areas which are still in need of basic investigation. Libraries are coming of age in their acquisition programs, and librarians are compelled to pay heed to the future disposition of their collections. The individual librarian must be concerned with his own collections, of course, but he would gain considerably by taking an active interest in regional, national, and international efforts in developing conservation and preservation programs.

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