

Why Do We Need a Preservation Week for Collections?



The 2004 Heritage Health Index survey

(www.heritagepreservation.org/HHI/summary.html) revealed the following shocking statistics. We know the current economy has severely impacted most institutions' progress in preservation. A key conclusion of the survey was that people at all levels of government and the private sector must take responsibility for the survival of these collections. An essential step is strengthening everyone's awareness of the importance and scope of preservation needs. ALA and partner organizations have responded with Preservation Week.

SHOCKING NUMBERS

The 14,500 institutions surveyed represented a population of 30,827 libraries, archives, and museums. About 450 of the nation's 500 largest institutions (e.g., the Library of Congress) reported. Others included very small through very large institutions.

US cultural heritage institutions hold at least 4.8 billion items. Libraries hold 63% of these—more than 3 billion items of all kinds, including digital items.

An estimated 1.3 billion items are at risk—in need of treatment to be stable enough for use, or in need of improved enclosures or environment to reduce the risk and rate of damage. 190 million artifacts need conservation treatment to address damage.

80% of U.S. libraries, museums, and archives have no paid staff for collections care; 22% have no staff at all for this important function. 71% of institutions say they need additional training and expertise to care for their collections—11% report urgent need.

Approximately 80% have no plan for, or staff trained to respond to collections emergencies of any kind.

40% of surveyed institutions have no funds allocated for preservation; only 13% have access to permanent (e.g. endowment) funds for preservation. 68% allocated less than \$3,000 for preservation in the previous budget year.

Only 2% of total budgets of US collecting institutions was spent on preservation of any kind in the previous budget year.

Across almost every type of collection, the condition of approximately 30% is unknown to its institution due to lack of resources for assessment.

Among collections whose condition is known, 78% of unbound items, 28% of historic objects, and 20% of digital and online files were at risk in 2004.

In 2005 a small pilot survey to assess the needs of digital materials was carried out

(<http://www.nedcc.org/resources/digital/downloads/surveyexploreadicetetc.pdf>). The volume of electronic collections was not estimated, but:

- 92% of respondents created digital assets from physical source materials—significant amounts from on paper items, books, audio and video recordings, microfilm, and objects. Nearly 40% said the majority of items in their digital collections are unique, single-copy items. 88% were acquiring digital assets.
- Of these, 71% had no written plans or procedures for creating and preserving digital resources. 60% had no specific staff person responsible for digital preservation activities. 30% of surveyed institutions allocate no funds to digital preservation. Future funds for this purpose were projected to come from regular budget or grants.

HOW DO YOUR COLLECTIONS' PRESERVATION NEEDS FIT THIS ASSESSMENT?

This document was developed courtesy of the Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/preserv/) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (www.ims.gov/collections/index.htm). It may be reproduced without limitation.

ABOUT PRESERVATION WEEK

Memories and treasures should last a lifetime and be passed on to future generations. Sponsored by the ALA's Association of Library Collections and Services and partner organizations, Preservation Week inspires actions to preserve personal, family, and community collections in addition to library, museum, and archive collections. It also raises awareness of the role libraries and other cultural institutions play in providing ongoing preservation education and information. *Note:* revised April 2015.

