

## *Book Reviews*

**Preserving America's Performing Arts. Papers from the Conference on Preservation Management for Performing Arts Collection, April 28-May 1, 1982, Washington, D.C.** BARBARA COHEN-STRATYNER and BRIGITTE KUEPPERS, eds. New York: Theatre Library Association, 1985. ix, 167 p. ISBN 0-932610-07-02.

The Theatre Library Association is a fifty-year old organization designed to advance the interests of those involved in collecting the artifacts of American theatre and in the scholarship of this field. In addition to publishing a quarterly newsletter and annual journal, the association sponsors an annual meeting, symposia, and conferences. The 1982 Conference on Preservation Management, from which this book derives, appears to have been the first occasion at which the association has concentrated on what archivists increasingly are accepting as the fundamental issue in heritage preservation: the inexorable degradation of all artifacts over time and our ability to arrest, slow, or manage such change.

Thirty-two papers are included in the volume, as well as a bibliography and reproductions of five technical pamphlets issued by the Library of Congress, the North East Document Conservation Centre, and the Conservation Centre for Art and Historic Artifacts. More than half the presentations are of the traditional, how-to approach, with little new information. Focusing on a particular type of record or artifact, they consist mainly of a brief overview of its physical characteristics, an outline of ideal storage facilities and conditions, and a discussion of restoration techniques. Textual records, playbills, posters, photographs, costume and set drawings, film, videotape, and sound recordings are dealt with in this manner, as well as less common items such as music and movement notation scores, costumes, and amusement park artifacts ranging from banners to carousel animals. The ubiquitous scrapbook is given far more attention (three presentations) than it deserves, as are vertical files. Other topics include the new National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property, regional conservation centres in the United States, disaster control, and the benefits of archival programmes for arts organizations.

The most interesting papers address some of the philosophical, theoretical, and management issues in preservation. Peter Waters, Restoration Officer at the Library of Congress, opened the Conference with a strong statement about the inevitability of deterioration and the myth that some "preservation miracle will occur down the road to cure pervasive ills." He calls for the development of policies to distinguish preservation on

a large scale, by way of a “sophisticated maintenance programme” incorporating such means as optimum storage conditions, proper handling, and substitution of copies, from collection monitoring, and conservation of selected intrinsically valuable items which should be preserved in their original form. He maintains that a preservation philosophy must underpin each repository and that responsibility for the care of records must be borne by custodians and users, as well as conservators. Speaking from the perspective of a funding administrator, Margaret Child of the National Endowment for the Humanities emphasizes institutional responsibility for the preservation of its holdings and the necessity of allocating ongoing core funding, rather than relying on project grants. To maximize scarce resources, she advocates more informed appraisal of potential acquisitions and reevaluation of current holdings. She also urges resource sharing and rationalization between institutions in everything from acquisitions to microfilm projects. Marilyn Kemp Weidner, Chief Conservator and Director of the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia, and inventor of the suction table used in paper restoration, outlines the steps in the design of a phased preservation programme.

The papers reveal substantial differences in understanding and opinion among conference participants. Most of the members of the Theatre Library Association work in reference libraries and special collections of one type or another. Their objectives, programmes, and techniques seem akin to those of traditional librarianship or museum collecting. In putting the case for prioritization and economy, Margaret Child feels compelled to advocate adoption of archival methodology and termination of thematic collecting and arrangement. Some of the conservators also seem to accept traditional assumptions and practices, turning blinkered eyes to the technology and political economy of late twentieth-century heritage preservation. Lawrence McCrank, then with the University of Maryland College of Library and Information Services, is most pointed in his criticism of this outmoded thinking:

The item vs. aggregate nature of collection management and conservation has not been adequately addressed — certainly not in this conference.... Nor has traditional conservation thinking understood the wholesale [sic] impact of new forms of document surrogation, information storage and retrieval, and delivery systems on the place of conservation in a modern information environment.

Thus while some participants heralded the conference as a landmark for bringing conservators face to face with custodians and introducing concepts such as phased preservation, McCrank claims that “the level of concern dominant here is akin to the clipping file.” He calls for recognition of the interdependence of collection management, access, and phased preservation and the development of strategies that build upon this relationship. Increasingly, he predicts, physical restoration may be sacrificed for protection of the information, through modernization of information systems stressing intellectual access and surrogation. McCrank, like Child, appeals for an end to the proliferation of special collections and uncontrolled acquisition programmes without realistic plans for document preservation and accessibility. To incorporate the latter as natural ingredients in all institutional processes, he emphasizes the need to educate and train all staff in preservation management.

Patrick Loughney’s case study of the Library of Congress’s “Paper Prints Collection” provides a fascinating example of technological evolution in preservation. Before 1912, film producers seeking copyright protection for their motion pictures had to resort to

extraordinary means because the Copyright Act of the time did not extend to photographic negatives or film. The companies, therefore, had to make positive print copies by contact printing the original nitrate camera negatives onto bromide paper rolls cut to the same length and width as 35mm film stock. Between 1894 and 1912, some three thousand complete motion pictures were reproduced in this manner and deposited with the Copyright Office, from which they were transferred to the Library of Congress. As most of the original nitrate film did not survive, the paper prints are an unparalleled resource for the study of early American film. However, in paper print form, the films cannot be fully used or appreciated. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Library attempted to reclaim the documents by filming the paper prints. The process required advancing, aligning, focusing, and filming every frame in the two million feet of film at a cost of \$500,000. Unfortunately, 16mm film was used. Recent tests indicate that 35mm would have given much improved image recovery. And, as happens so often when a reference copy is produced, too little attention was paid to the physical condition of the paper prints. The Library is now investigating the feasibility of reproducing the whole collection of complete and incomplete films on optical disk which might provide compact storage, rapid search, and indexing of the images.

Is optical disk the final answer to the preservation crisis, as Lawrence McCrank suggests? I doubt it.

**Nancy Stunden**  
Provincial Archives of Manitoba

**Whaling Logbooks and Journals 1613-1927: An Inventory of Manuscript Records in Public Collections.** Originally compiled by STUART C. SHERMAN; revised and edited by JUDITH M. DOWNEY and VIRGINIA M. ADAMS with HOWARD PASTERNAK. New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1986, xiv, 469 p. ISBN 0-8240-9328-3 \$80.00 (US).

Eighty-two libraries, museums, and archives collaborated to produce this list of 5,018 whaling logs and journals, unpublished documents which researchers may consult in public repositories. The result is an extensive list of sources on a colourful and controversial world-wide industry. It is also an indispensable reference work for students of the Canadian North in the nineteenth century and an instructive example of a kind of archival work which is not often undertaken.

For the history of Canada north of the tree-line, whalers' private journals and official logs have the same importance that fur traders' journals have for the sub-Arctic. Whalers established contact with the Inuit before fur traders or missionaries arrived, and they profoundly influenced the natives' lives. The quality of information in whaling logs varies, but more than two hundred of the documents listed in this volume can make important contributions to the early history of Arctic Canada.

The *Inventory* begins with lucid explanations of the project's origin and the organization of the volume. A key to repository symbols is followed by 377 pages of the inventory itself. Vessels are listed alphabetically by name, by rig, and by home port. Logs and journals are then arranged in chronological order. The remainder of each entry names the vessel's master and the log-keeper (if known), notes the whaling grounds the vessel