

The strategic stewardship of cultural resources: To preserve and protect. Papers from the Library of Congress Symposium 'To reserve and protect: the strategic stewardship of cultural resources'.

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This book has been co-published simultaneously as the *Journal of Library Administration*, Volume 38, numbers 1/2 and 3/4 2003. The *Journal* and its monograph 'separates' have for many years been providing library professionals from all kinds of institutions with insightful and trenchant discussions on topics of importance to the profession. The title presently under review is no exception.

The chapters that make up this book with references, notes on contributors and an index, were presented as papers at a symposium held as part of the Library of Congress's bicentennial celebrations in 2000, at which leading library, museum and archival professionals spoke on a wide range of security and preservation matters. The papers were published for limited distribution in 2002, and have been re-published under this title to make them more accessible to a wider readership.

This symposium took place in the period following the publication of Nicholson Barker's attack on the destruction of library card catalogues, newspaper collections and on the diminished emphasis of paper-based materials in the light of the microfilming of newspaper collections' becoming a common practice, and also in the wake of some notorious thefts from renowned libraries across the United States and of the devastating flooding of at least one US college library. Just as the symposium brought together a range of participants from a variety of backgrounds and countries of origin (including South Africa), so will its proceedings be of interest to many practitioners who are described repeatedly as 'the stewards of [a country's] cultural heritage.'

Although many developments towards the establishment of the electronic library and the digitisation of library materials have taken place since the holding of the symposium and the publication of its proceedings, this book contains many acute observations of relevance to those 'stewards' who fulfil their mandate with innovation and responsibility.

The need for collaboration - that of conservator with library staff and library director, library staff and library director with the security infrastructure, and library director with library staff - and for consensual decision-making at all levels, runs like a mantra throughout the book. Such collective action and collaboration must extend extramurally, so that the expertise learnt in one institution can be passed on and benefit others. Adequate preservation and protection requires a large budget, so assistance from donors should be sought. In fact, it is suggested that preservation laboratories themselves could become major beneficiaries of donor funds because the work that is done in them is highly thought of and considered fascinating (p.109) - potential donors and other members of the public can be taken on tours of them. Also of importance is the principle that all interventions must be aimed at adding value and improving access: the prime motive being that of maintaining the difficult balancing act between the need to preserve and protect materials and to serve the needs of the user. The human element in the engine that drives the preservation and security machine of cultural institutions must be well oiled with an understanding of procedures and policies, as well as why they are needed and how they are to be implemented.

Also stressed repeatedly is that, although modern technology brings many benefits, such as the ability to create an accurate record of library, archival and museum holdings, it also brings with it problems, such as concerns about network security, the protection of digital content, and the 'permanence' of any new technology. . One of the contributors, director *emeritus* of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Werner Gundersheimer, (p. 27) asserts that despite the critical role played by microform and digital preservation, 'print may well turn out to be the most stable of the technologies available to us'.

Perhaps the most important point made by many of the contributors is that it is on the smallest of details that the most successful security and preservation programmes are built. Commonsense prevails when the provenance of materials is properly identified and when good housekeeping practices and correct environmental conditions are put into place. A maxim of Benjamin Franklin, one of the authors of the American Declaration of Independence, the most important of the cultural treasures found in the Library of Congress, comes to mind, namely: 'A little neglect may breed great mischief....For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for want of a horse the rider was lost, being overtaken and slain by the enemy, all for want of care about a horse-shoe nail.'

The new technology should, of course, be embraced, but it must become the servant of curators and users alike, not their master. The words of Carl Fleishhauer of the Library of Congress' National Digital Library Programs need to be quoted at some length. On page 161 he writes as follows: ' Future scholars may look back at the early years of the twenty-first century as a dark age, where we find that we have irrecoverably lost much of our cultural memory because libraries and other cultural heritage organizations could no longer function effectively, and indeed even individual collectors of intellectual and cultural works, who have often historically served as a safety net for libraries, had lost much of their ability to build and keep collections. And these future scholars may also recognize a society in the early twenty-first century as deeply troubled by a loss of accountability and of intellectual and artistic continuity and haunted by recurrent bouts of amnesia about the basis and nature of its own activities and actions. A systemic failure of our cultural

heritage institutions is likely to exact a real price on the society overall, not just on our commitment to the importance of scholarly inquiry.'

The strategic stewardship of cultural resources is a compilation of excellent papers dealing with issues of crucial importance to the management and staff of libraries and other 'cultural heritage organisations'.

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