

Conserve them all my days

by Karl G. Schmude *

An awareness of conservation issues is important for all librarians — and in all types of libraries. It is not only desirable for those working in large institutions containing notable collections of rare books or manuscripts: it is also essential for small libraries, since their service objectives can just as easily be undermined by a neglect of conservation needs.

Access

Most libraries, however small or select their clientele, hold materials of special value — related, for example, to the history of their institution or local region — which should be preserved. In addition, there are materials which may not be unique but whose continued availability the library needs to safeguard; for instance, a municipal library's collection of classical novels or basic reference sets in a special library.

Preservation is finally about access — ensuring that the collection of knowledge which the library constitutes remains available for future generations.

Common sense

A considerable part of library conservation does not involve technical skills or great expense. Even a small library with limited funds and facilities at its disposal can do much to

prolong the life of its collection. Common sense and care are the critical components of a preservation program, and they are first manifested in attention to the library's physical facilities and handling procedures.

An initial step is to examine the library's storage conditions. Temperature, relative humidity, lighting and air quality are among the main factors to be assessed. Not only should these conditions be set at desired levels but it is also important to prevent sudden or severe fluctuations, especially of temperature and relative humidity, which impose strain on paper fibres.

Another area on which to focus is the type of containers and furniture best suited to the conservation of library materials. Boxes and folders should be acid-free, and furniture, made of baked enamel steel as it does not pose problems of acid migration or contamination from rust.

The planning of a new library building or extension is a crucial time for environmental conditions and storage facilities to be considered. Ideally the planning team needs to include a professional conservator to advise on appropriate conservation standards and the avoidance of hazards.

Handling procedures

Apart from regulating the library's physical facilities, another priority is to attend to handling procedures. Library staff in particular need to know proper ways of handling and moving materials, and to give a lead to users.

Characteristic actions in a library such as removing bound volumes from shelves without pulling them at the top of the spine, or handling books during photocopying without inflicting damage deserve special emphasis. A simply produced handout, perhaps a bookmark, can be of value in alerting users to the

tricks of the trade. The workshop covered storage of photographs, folder making, box-making and encapsulation all using acid-free preservation materials. Participants also discussed their own specific conservation problems.

Other seminar/workshops have covered dry cleaning of materials, mould treatment and disaster planning. Helen will be visiting the Riverina area soon, and details of this visit appear in 'Happenings.' For further information please contact Helen Price (02) 697 3447.

Conservation on the move — a hands on experience

The hands-on experience pictured below occurred on 4 March at St Marys Public Library in NSW. A group of ten local librarians attended the workshop conducted by Helen Price, the LAA's 'Conservation on the move' roving conservator.

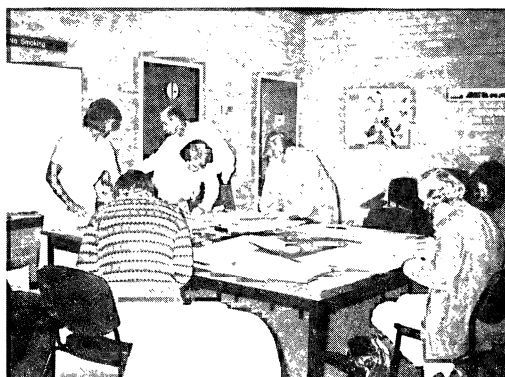
During the workshop librarians were able to learn about conservation techniques, to further their own skills and pick up a few



Above: Helen Price demonstrates folder making for small photographs. Below: box making for the storage of newspapers.



Above and below: encapsulation in progress.



need for care when handling library materials.

The opportunity for librarians to obtain clear and accurate advice on conservation matters is not yet readily available in Australia. The provision of such advice would be one of the advantages of having a national preservation office or centre established, possibly in conjunction with the National Library, as has occurred in Britain, America and elsewhere.

In the meantime, there is the self-help method of consulting authoritative writings on the subject. The following articles on conservation in small libraries are of value:

- Boomgaarden, Wesley L. 'Preservation Planning for the Small Special Library,' *Special Libraries* 76:204-11 (Summer 1985).
- Farber, Evan I. 'Preservation and the Small Library,' *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 7:167, 179 (July 1981).
- Fortsom-Jones, Judith. 'Developing a Paper Conservation Program in a Small Institution,' *Conservation Administration News* No 9: 12-14 (April 1982).

* Karl G. Schmude is University Librarian at the University of New England, Armidale, NSW.

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