
North Carolina and Paper Preservation: Ninety Years of Leadership

by David Olson

For a variety of historical and cultural reasons, the first state archival and records programs in the nation were in the southeastern United States. North Carolina's program, initiated in 1903, was the third such effort, after Alabama's and Mississippi's. This is most impressive, considering that the National Archives was not established until 1934, and then President Roosevelt appointed North Carolinian R.D.W. Connor as the first Archivist of the United States. Conner had been a founder of the North Carolina program and, in 1907, its first employee and archivist for the North Carolina Historical Commission.

Over the years North Carolina led the way in the development of programs for the management and care of public records. In spite of the two major wars fought on its soil, few public records were lost or destroyed. Many northern states lost far more records to winter fires, when furnaces and fireplaces wreaked havoc on buildings and their contents. By contrast, the North Carolina program began with most of the state's records intact.

Several milestones marked North Carolina's leadership in preservation of and access to its records. North Carolina established the first state records center in 1953, just four years after the founding of its federal counterpart. Then, in 1959, the state developed the nation's first comprehensive program for county records. Since that time, the Archives and Records Section (since the seventies, the Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources) has been able to transfer or microfilm many county records of historical significance. All one hundred counties have participated in this effort. While much must still be done, North Carolina's county records have received more archival attention than most states.

Microfilming began as early as 1941, under a contract between the North Carolina State Archives and the Genealogical Society of Utah. The Society has microfilmed county records in Raleigh for most of the past fifty-two years, saving North Carolina taxpayers millions of dollars. The state began its own microfilming program in the early fifties as a way of helping to reduce the bulk associated with increasingly voluminous records. With the establishment of the county records program in 1959, the state began microfilming those with a preservation goal in mind. Budget cuts in the 1980s made it difficult for the Archives and Records Section to maintain a program outside Raleigh. Currently, local governments are either helping to fund their own filming or sending the records to Raleigh; limited field filming is still being done in the western part of the state.

From its earliest days, the North Carolina State Archives has attempted to preserve original copies of its records according to the highest technical standards. Archival supplies such as acid-free boxes and folders have been used for years and, since 1949, the Archives has had a conservation lab that has provided the latest in records conservation techniques. Currently, this preservation entails a variety of deacidification methods and an ultrasonic encapsulation service.

Such preservation measures are critical, not only because of the acid in paper and the long-term effects of environment, but also because of public use of the records. North Carolina has consistently attained some of the highest public use statistics for state records. Each year between fifteen and twenty thousand researchers visit the Archives, and a like number send mail requests. Most are undertaking family history, and the county records transferred since the 1950s are of prime interest for this kind of study. Such use takes its toll on paper, but also justifies the commitment to preservation made by the State Archives.

North Carolina Newspapers

Newspapers are among the state's most fragile and most valuable resources, and their preservation received early attention. In 1959, a state appropriation supported the preparation of a statewide inventory of surviving newspapers published before 1900; a microfilming program followed. Now the North Carolina Newspaper Project, a comprehensive, cooperative effort supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, is well under way.

Following a statewide survey by Perkins Library at Duke University, the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources received a three-year grant (1991-93) to identify and catalog every surviving newspaper published in the state (5,000) and to preserve on microfilm newspapers that meet selection criteria. Preservation microfilming activities built on the earlier filming project. Since 1991, newspaper project staff have cataloged over 2,500 North Carolina titles, and input 6,000 local data records in the OCLC database, and completed preservation microfilming of over one million newspaper pages. In December 1993, NEH awarded a further three years of support.

Acid-Free Paper Legislation

North Carolina followed national and international leadership in establishing permanent paper legislation. In May 1989, the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Science, Research and Technology heard testimony from

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printers, interested citizens, and librarians addressing the deterioration of library collections printed primarily on acidic papers since 1850. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) passed a resolution favoring the use of permanent paper at its annual meeting in Paris on August 25, 1989. The State Librarian and the University Librarian of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill took up the challenge in the fall of 1989 by appointing a committee of documents librarians and historians to determine which publications issued by the state should be printed on permanent paper. The Committee's recommendations, presented to the Legislature in a report from the State Librarian, emphasized historical, legal, and statistical publications, and noted that requiring the use of permanent paper would not increase printing costs significantly.

North Carolina became the second state to mandate the use of permanent paper for some state documents. On June 5, 1991, the General Assembly ratified House Bill 186 amending the General Statutes, which added a new section, 125-11.3, requiring that certain government publications be issued on alkaline paper and that there be a statement within the publication indicating the use of permanent paper. The North Carolina State Publications Clearinghouse, which receives state government publications for depository libraries across the state, monitors compliance with the statute by testing each title on the list with a pH pen as the title is received, and reports the results annually to the State Librarian.

University Preservation Projects

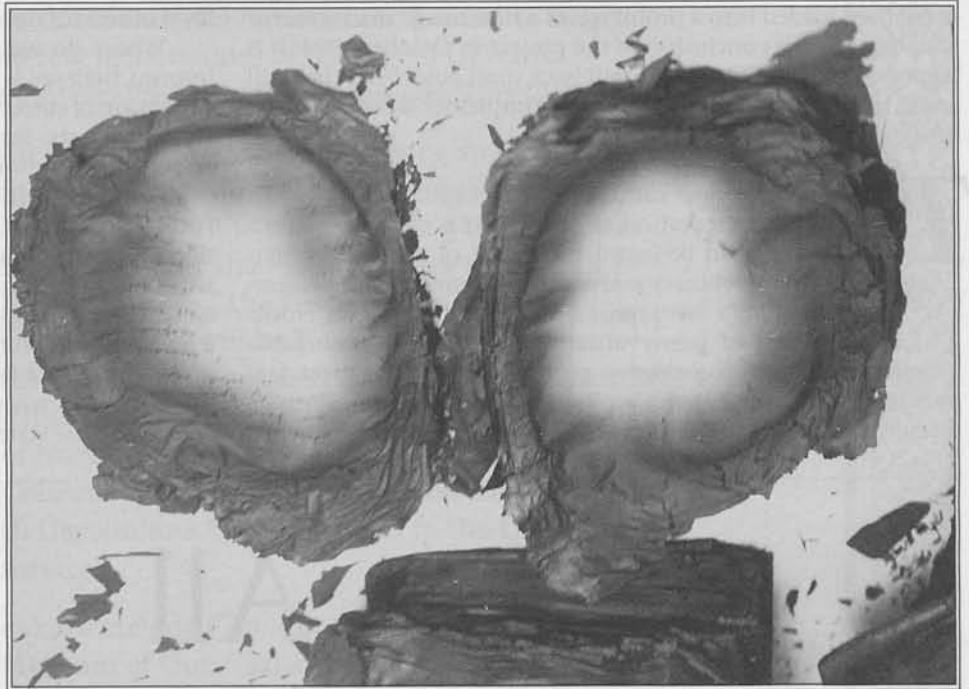
In recent years, UNC-Chapel Hill has launched major preservation efforts on behalf of its paper holdings of North Caroliniana and the South. The most ambitious and far-reaching endeavor has been the recently completed three-year project by the Manuscripts Department to rehouse, selectively microfilm, and create online records for its pre-1980 accessions. An NEH grant of \$203,000 preserved 3,200 manuscript collections (5,300 linear feet). Beginning in 1990, staff used NEH funds to purchase alkaline folders and boxes and to pay the professional and student staff to undertake the work. Staff also selectively removed fasteners and conducted a preservation survey whose data serve as the basis for a long-range preservation plan for paper-based records. NEH monies also continue to fund the preservation microfilming of several significant collections.

In a parallel effort, a 1990 two-year contract with University Publications of America (UPA) supported on-site filming of embrittled materials of great scholarly interest from the Southern Historical Collection. The manuscripts document Southern women and their families in the nineteenth century as well as ante-bellum Southern plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War. Royalties from sales support further preservation efforts on behalf of the manuscripts collection. Ambitious as these filming efforts are, they do not fully meet the

preservation needs of material too fragile to be used in the original. Almost 4 percent of the SHC has been filmed. Because embrittled collections continue to arrive, a substantial filming program only accommodates material at the most fragile end of the spectrum, and the collection's percentage of filmed materials grows very slowly.

Private funding has made possible the rehousing of oversized documents and photographs, the wrapping or boxing of bound materials, and the preservation treatment as well as copying of manuscript maps. Other private and federal grants are funding the processing and proper housing of almost three thousand linear feet of backlogged collections.

Premier printed research materials on North Carolina from UNC-Chapel Hill are being preserved as part of a \$2.4 million dollar grant to film brittle imprints in fifteen libraries in the Southeast. The program is funded by the National Endowment



Fire is one of the many disasters library preservationists must face. Photos courtesy of Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources.



for the Humanities and administered by the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET). UNC is preserving fourteen hundred deteriorated pamphlets on African Americans, transportation history, social conditions, and travel from its renowned North Carolina Collection in Wilson Library.

At Duke University Library, three thousand unique pamphlets dating from the ante-bellum period forward also are being filmed under the SOLINET grant. Like the UNC-CH holdings, the pamphlets are an indispensable source for the history of the state and region. In an effort to assess the usefulness of digital technology for preservation, Duke's Special Collections Library is engaged in a digital preservation project sponsored by the Photo Preservation Task Force of the Research Libraries Group. With seven other libraries, Duke is exploring preservation and access issues in digitized collections of historical photographs. Stokes Imaging, Inc., of Austin, Texas has digitized approximately one thousand photographs from each participant. Digitized images were then loaded into a prototype of a new image management database. At the conclusion of the project in October 1994, it is expected that the Task Force will issue draft guidelines that will assist in the design, development, and implementation of digital image access systems.

This brief overview cannot hope to capture all of North Carolina's preservation efforts, but it is clear that North Carolinians can be justifiably proud of the accomplishments of their library and archival community in preserving the state's heritage. Few states can match North Carolina's record of preservation awareness and remarkable implementation of preservation projects. However, a great deal remains to be done. North Carolina has just begun to address its preservation needs. The state's largest manuscript repositories

are mounting major preservation efforts, and many other institutions have preservation programs. Embrittled materials continue to arrive in ever-increasing quantities, so that the problem is never solved. Much remains to be done for non-textual records. Tapes, films, videos, photographs, and computer records all have specialized requirements for preservation, and these materials also are arriving in ever-increasing quantities in our repositories.

Electronic formats are currently the subject of intense planning and implementation by the Division of Archives and History. Its Advisory Committee on Electronic Records (ACER) brings together representatives from state and local government, the private sector, and the academic community to approve draft standards and serve as a forum for advising on issues such as optical imaging. The Division itself is planning a system (State Public Record Cataloging Service, or SPRCS) which will inventory and eventually provide management and preservation for data of enduring value. The goal is to provide for electronic records the level of service now available for paper records.

Where do we go now? Preservation of North Carolina's imprint heritage is an urgent priority, as are maintenance and expansion of current manuscript, records, and newspaper preservation projects. Statewide organizations like the North Carolina Preservation Consortium offer a planning framework that complements the leadership exercised by the Division of Archives and History. The recent General Assembly's million dollar appropriation for interpretation and preservation of state historical assets, which elicited fourteen million dollars worth of support requests, is an excellent first step that deserves to be made permanent, with a portion of the funding reserved for historical records. Such a program would enable institutions large and small to go beyond planning and wishing, and allow them to play a real role in preserving the state's historical heritage.

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North Carolina Collection Sesquicentennial to Be Celebrated

"For History's Sake: State Historical Collections in the Early Republic" is the theme of a national conference to help commemorate the sesquicentennial of the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina on May 20 and 21.

States with substantial historical activity during the first seven decades of the new republic will be treated individually during the daytime sessions, while those showing less progress will be discussed regionally. At the Friday dinner there will be a "Salute to Massachusetts," the first state to charter a historical society; the speaker will be Louis Leonard Tucker, director of the Massachusetts Historical Society. At the Saturday night banquet, Willis P. Whichard, associate justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina, will detail the history of the North Carolina Collection; and President William Friday will present the North Caroliniana Society Award to the Collection for its 150 years of service.

Other speakers include Clement M. Silvestro, director emeritus of the Museum of Our National Heritage, James J. Heslin, director emeritus of the New-York Historical Society; Susan Stitt, president of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Charles F. Bryan, director of the Virginia Historical Society; Richard J. Cox, editor of *The American Archivist*; Philip P. Mason, director of the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs; Leslie H. Fishel, president emeritus of Heidelberg College; and Alfred Lemmon, Curator of Manuscripts in the Historic New Orleans Collection.

Registration is required, and an informational and registration folder can be requested from the North Carolina Collection, UNC Campus Box 3930, Chapel Hill, NC 27514-8890 (telephone 919-962-1172).