

**TESTIMONY TO THE INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**

ON BEHALF OF

THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES (NEH)

May 2, 2001

Introduction

The Association of Research Libraries, the Council on Library and Information Resources, and the National Humanities Alliance have joined together once again to testify in support of the preservation and access activities of the National Endowment for the Humanities. While the administration's support for the National Endowment for the Humanities in its FY-2002 budget proposal is welcome and shows recognition of the critical role that NEH plays in preserving our historic and cultural record, improving education at all levels, and helping Americans to better understand their lives and the life of their nation, the proposal of \$120.5 million for the agency, including \$18.3 million for preservation and access activities, does not provide enough for the agency to fully play the role for which it was created. Mr. Chairman, we urge you and your colleagues on the Interior and Related Agencies Subcommittee to increase the President's request for FY-2002 to \$150 million, with funding for preservation and access increased proportionately.

We recognize that most, if not all, programs under the subcommittee's purview are in need of improved funding, but we believe that the NEH has suffered a disproportionate decline in its buying power. As the chart below illustrates, the ravages of inflation have worn upon the NEH in a particularly harsh fashion - basically, the NEH is trying to carry out its important mandate with approximately one-third of the funding in constant dollars that it commanded 20 years ago.

Table: Appropriations for NEH in constant FY 2001 dollars (5-Year Intervals, in millions of dollars)

Fiscal Year	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001
Actual	8.9	79.1	150.1	139.5	156.9	172.0	115.3	120.0
Constant	41.3	267.4	343.7	230.2	216.5	199.5	118.8	120.0

Note: Constant dollar values reflect the November CPI-U, AGS - 2000

Brittle Books Program

In 1987, Congress took a significant leadership role in recognizing the importance of library print collections, those resources at the heart of the humanities, to the historical and cultural record. Estimates at the time indicated that over 12 million unique volumes in the research libraries of this country were at risk of decay simply due to the fact that they were printed on an unstable medium – acidic paper, commonly used between 1840

and 1980. Library stacks were lined with thousands of books, journals, and newspapers that were already so brittle that pages broke when they were turned. As a result, Congress allocated resources to the National Endowment for the Humanities to coordinate and support efforts of the library community to preserve these resources through microfilming, the most effective means known at the time to preserve the intellectual content and provide broad access to microfilm copies. The Brittle Books Program, as it has come to be called, was envisioned as a twenty-year effort to preserve 3 million unique volumes.

When the current projects are completed, almost 1 million volumes will have been microfilmed through NEH supported projects since funding was initiated in 1989. Over 82 libraries and library consortia across the nation have participated. The impact of the leadership of Congress and the NEH on library preservation efforts is enormous. The Brittle Books Program:

- ensures through coordination of microfilming efforts that materials preserved are of national significance and that filming does not duplicate work that has already been done elsewhere;
- ensures the accessibility and availability of preserved books to students and scholars throughout the nation by requiring standardized cataloging and distribution through interlibrary lending;
- promotes the use of standards in preservation microfilming by requiring strict adherence to guidelines that ensure the completeness and technical quality of the microfilm and specify the conditions for storage of the negatives; and,
- encourages, through the leveraging of federal funds, additional local investment in microfilming.

Equally important, the federal government took the lead in developing standards for alkaline paper and promoting its use in government publications and scholarly works. The investment in this stable medium has virtually stopped the production of major works on acidic paper in developed countries. The importance of this national leadership and coordination to these successes cannot be overstated.

Recorded Sound

We welcome NEH's Recorded Sound Initiative, which clearly marks the agency's intention to address preservation needs in a broadened context. As fragile as our print heritage is, that of our recorded musical history is even more so. During passage of the National Recording Preservation Act of 2000, the House expressed its concern that some of "the musical heritage of the nation – as represented by early sound recordings – is irrevocably lost with each passing year." In the Act, Congress calls for a study of the current state of sound recording archiving, preservation and restoration activities, the results of which will inform development of a comprehensive national sound recording preservation program. We urge the NEH to collaborate with the Library of Congress on this important study while continuing to support preservation projects in this area.

During FY2000, the NEH made several awards to preserve and provide access to endangered sound recordings about the history and folklife of Ashkenazic Jewry and audio recordings on American political, social, and cultural history in the Midwest. In

FY2002, the NEH plans to mount a national initiative to support a broad range of activities designed to produce national cataloging standards, best practices for reformatting endangered materials, the education and training of persons responsible for the care of recorded sound collections, and the digitization of nationally significant recorded sound collections.

It is hard to overstate the value of our musical heritage to researchers, creative musicians, and music lovers everywhere. Yet, that heritage exists on such fragile media as acetate discs, magnetic tapes in long-obsolete formats, wire recordings, and wax cylinders. Musical recordings are at risk not only because the media on which they are stored are prone to damage and corruption, but also because the playback equipment is often out-of-date, hard to find, and very hard to keep in good working order. We need to stabilize these recordings and to create preservation copies to ensure their longevity. While many libraries and archives have valuable recordings, only a few have the infrastructure and funding to preserve their collections. This is an area where the NEH in collaboration with the Library of Congress can make significant contributions to ensure the preservation and access to these rich resources.

Additional Audio-Visual Formats

In addition to their concern for sound recordings, humanists are also concerned with the historical record of the Twentieth Century captured on other media, such as film, video, and television. These media have given us an unprecedented means by which we can capture the experience of a diverse American culture with a vividness and faithfulness that print often cannot match and give us a rich, multidimensional portrait of ourselves and our times. Regrettably, while widely accessible to Americans of all cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds, like sound recordings these media are hard to preserve. Yet without access to the rich heritage that audio and visual resources document, there are large segments of the American democratic experiment that will not survive to become part of the historical record. Without such audiovisual records, we would not be able to create documentary histories of baseball, slavery, the Civil War, the Jazz era, or the immigrants' odyssey through Ellis Island. Institutions large and small across America are preserving these resources. NEH plays a vital role in funding many of these preservation projects.

Digitization and Access

In the past several years, NEH has funded numerous projects to digitize resources in the humanities for students and scholars. Digital technology provides a wonderful opportunity to extend the reach of the humanities into every classroom, every home, and every library. In FY2002, the NEH hopes to add to the quality educational material on the web by supporting specifically the digitization of historic U.S. newspapers and the creation of online encyclopedias of U.S. states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

While the access afforded by digital technology is indeed wonderful, that access will be short-lived if we do not solve the problems associated with the long-term retention of digital files. Digital technology does not yet meet any minimum standards for longevity. The experience of not being able to read a document created by an earlier version of a word-processing system or not having the hardware to read a 5" floppy disk are just simple examples of the problems that affect our ability to ensure the

preservation of digital documents. We urge NEH to continue to support digitization of historical materials to increase access, while also paying special attention to the preservation of historically significant artifacts. We also encourage more research into the use of digitization as a preservation method.

Looking Ahead

The Brittle Books Program has been the cornerstone of the NEH Preservation and Access Division since its inception. Over time, however, budget cuts and new priorities have eroded the level of funding available for the program. At the same time, librarians have had a decade of experience with microfilming, as well as with other methods of preservation aimed more directly at saving the artifact, such as improving and controlling environmental conditions and mass deacidification.

As noted above, non-paper formats are providing new challenges. Digital technology with its obvious appeal for enhancing access remains problematic for preservation purposes. And the archiving of the ever-increasing body of knowledge available only in digital form must be addressed. In addition, print continues to be an issue as research libraries add more acidic volumes to their collections every year. (Yale recently estimated that it collects over 97,000 acidic volumes a year from developing countries where alkaline paper is unknown.) Microfilming will always be an important preservation strategy, but continued research and multiple approaches are necessary to assure that scholarly resources will be preserved and accessible in the future.

There has been considerable media attention in recent days on libraries' failure to preserve artifactual collections. Congress, through the NEH Brittle Books initiative, took a brave, bold step by developing standards and processes for saving content that was rapidly disappearing. Technology and circumstances have changed dramatically since 1988.

Given this situation, the time may be right for NEH to review the Brittle Books Program and consider expanding the scope of activities and preservation strategies eligible for federal funding. Our organizations stand ready to assist with the evaluation and setting the preservation course for the next decade.

Conclusion

The NEH Division of Preservation and Access has been a critical component in the successes achieved to date in the preservation by libraries of the intellectual and historical record. Of course, as funding eroded, there is much that cannot be saved. Again, we appreciate that the administration has demonstrated an understanding of the value of the NEH and we urge the subcommittee to increase funding for the agency to \$150 million with a proportional increase for the preservation and access activities.