

Statement on the FY-1995 Appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities

Presented to the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies (Committee on Appropriations), by Jerry D. Campbell, University Librarian, Duke University (Durham, North Carolina), on behalf of the Association of Research Libraries, the Commission of Preservation and Access, and the National Humanities Alliance

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I am Dr. Jerry Dean Campbell, University Librarian, Duke University, a member of the Triangle Research Libraries Network that includes the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University. I also will be serving as president of the Association of Research Libraries next year. I am testifying today for the Association of Research Libraries, Commission on Preservation and Access, and National Humanities Alliance in support of fiscal year 1995 appropriations for the National Endowment for the Humanities. I want to emphasize, as have testimonies in previous years, the substantial accomplishments of the Endowment's Division of Preservation and Access as it has assumed a predominant position in the nationwide effort to preserve and provide access to endangered humanities resources. We believe that sustained Congressional support of NEH's 20-year plan to preserve three million brittle books, as crafted in 1988, is essential. Your continued appropriations for this program enable the Endowment not only to preserve cultural materials, but to provide millions of citizens with broadened access to them.

The organizations I represent want to raise a critical concern. We strongly advocate that the humanities be well represented within the new National Information Infrastructure (NII). As vast federal investments are made on the NII, it is critical that there be sufficient funding to provide the American public and its educational system with the humanities documents and images that comprise their cultural heritage.

We support the National Endowment for the Humanities as a national leader for preserving and providing access to endangered materials, alongside science, social science, medical, and commercial enterprises. With six years of managing a nationwide effort involving 70 libraries, archives, and other institutions that is saving over 550,000 valuable humanities resources, NEH understands the complexities of converting severely endangered materials using preservation and access technologies. The Division of Preservation and Access has put into place a collaborative, multi-institutional program that is experienced and expert at selecting resources, adhering to standards, preparing resources for conversion, converting resources to usable formats, and subsequently maintaining and providing broad access to the resources. Each of these components is done with an eye to the needs of end users. As we move our education and information services onto an electronic superhighway, the humanities preservation-and-access program is providing a perfect platform for conversion that considers not only the technologies, but the needs of the American public and the content of the materials.

Earlier this year, NEH awarded grants to two Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members -- Yale and Cornell Universities -- for research and demonstration projects involving digital technologies for preservation. Other collaborative projects involving 11 ARL members and the Commission on Preservation and Access also are reformatting endangered materials for NII access. Federal funding is needed to enable NEH to provide leadership for these activities for full-scale, cooperative preservation and access, but not at the expense of other Endowment programs.

NEH Leadership in Preserving Humanities Resources

Humanities resources provide citizens with the key textual and photographic materials that document our national and cultural heritage. These materials reflect many voices, many views, many vantage points from which to examine and learn from our past. They reflect the diverse ethnic and social groups that have contributed to the makeup of this country.

Materials in the humanities form the backbone of our nation's educational system. They span the accumulated knowledge of literature, history, art, music, and the interpretation of social sciences. Historical documents, photographs, manuscripts, and archives provide the written and pictorial record of the lives of both the famous and commonplace; they are content-rich teaching tools for K-12 schools, as well as study materials for undergraduate and graduate level research and scholarship. Examples of such materials, drawn from the most recent grants awarded by NEH, include:

- Manuscripts and illustrations of American and British children's books held by the University of Minnesota Libraries,
- Materials held by the New York Public Library that document the history of dance, as a part of a project of the Dance Heritage Coalition to preserve the creative contributions of American dance across diverse cultures and geographical areas,
- Travellers' first-hand accounts of the impact of rail transportation on the American West written in the 19th-century, held by Yale University.

As noted earlier, with NEH leadership, we are making substantial progress in our microfilming of brittle books. Research libraries are adept stewards and guardians of humanities resources, devoting millions of dollars yearly to their housing, environment, repair, and reformatting. However, hundreds of thousands more unique books, archives, papers, and photographs that form the foundation of humanities study are moving into high risk each year due to their age, storage conditions, and their very physical nature. We still are faced with large collections of one-of-a-kind documents continuing to crumble, and photographs continuing to chemically deteriorate.

As these resources turn to dust, they are lost forever. Unlike materials produced in more modern times, there are no computer back-up files for original manuscripts, letters, drawings, and photographs. Continued -- indeed strengthened -- federal leadership in advocating the importance and rescue of these resources becomes even more necessary in our increasingly technological environment, where these vulnerable, valuable materials could easily be pushed to the back shelves as colorful, electronic multi-media move to front and center stage.

The Challenges of New Technologies

With leadership of the Endowment, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Coalition for Networked Information, the Getty Art History Information Program and others, the NII will become a vehicle for carrying forward our reformatting efforts into the future using a combination of preservation and access technologies. The texts and images will be inexpensively and widely distributed without restraint due to geography, income or educational level. They will become universally accessible treasures, invaluable for insight and study by persons of all ages, and at all locations -- the home, the public library, and the workplace. The publication, *What It Takes to Make*

It Happen: Key Issues for Applications of the National Information Infrastructure, by the Committee on Applications and Technology, Information Infrastructure Task Force, (page 10) states:

"...conversion of information from 'old' storage media (books, drawings, and pictures, for example) to NII electronic storage media will be an important issue in all applications areas possessing a large legacy of pre-NII information. This area includes libraries (everything that has been written since the dawn of recorded history), health care ... and government services...."

It is striking -- even amusing -- that this committee equates libraries with "everything that has been written since the dawn of recorded history." The plain truth is that the world has lost much of its written heritage, and will continue to lose much more, including information recorded on new technologies. Librarians and archivists are experts -- not at safeguarding every piece of paper or film that has been produced -- but at weighing options, setting priorities, making decisions, and determining how the growing mass of our recorded history shall be managed, organized, safeguarded, and made available to the public. As in the medical profession, this process involves some loss of life, yet the library and archives community is in a key position to meet this challenge. We know we cannot save it all, but we have developed sound methods of selecting and managing what we save.

The new technology presents us with additional preservation challenges. Looking back in history to the traditional ways of recording our humanities heritage, we find primarily paper and film. As noted earlier, libraries have developed effective safeguarding techniques. However, the new digital age presents a entirely new set of preservation management problems that come with electronic digital formats. We now must pay attention to hardware, software, and the multiple formats in which humanities materials are created and stored. Leadership from the NEH Division of Preservation and Access is essential to coordinate efforts of this nation's libraries and archives to manage the migration, updating, and conversion processes necessary to assure the preservation of humanities resources being produced in this complex electronic environment.

The images that you see here (The testimony is here supplemented with a Photo-CD demonstration of photographic images.) are examples of how a few institutions have taken on the challenge of using new technologies to preserve and provide access to deteriorating humanities resources. Cooperative projects involving the Regional History Collections and Department of Special Collections of the University of Southern California Libraries; Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; the Commission on Preservation and Access; and Eastman Kodak have employed both film and digitization technologies to reclaim deteriorating photographs and to provide them to the American public in inexpensive, high-quality formats. This small sub-set illustrates the range of value and interest in humanities materials:

- ancient dead-sea scrolls [4Q Testimonia (4Q 175)] found in Jordan
- a 1930s Hollywood movie still of Marlene Dietrich
- a 1905 photo of miners crossing three miles of Rusamond Dry Lake, Antelope Valley, California
- a 1905 photogravue of "Okuwa-tse (Cloud Yellow) - San Ildefonso" from Edward S. Curtis The North American Indian
- an 1895 watercolor of robins by Louis Agassis Fuertes, recognized by ornithologists as this country's greatest painter of birds, superior even to Audubon.
- an 1948 AP photo of president Harry S. Truman and Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan
- a miniature of Saint Peter and Assembled Saints from an Italian illuminated manuscript, cat 1500.

Progress and Future Funding

The progress in our reformatting effort is remarkably on-target with estimates provided to Congress in 1988. Over the past six years, federal support for the Endowment has enabled it to award grants to over 70 institutions to reformat onto preservation microfilm over 550,000 fragile documents, newspapers and photographs toward our goal of three million volumes in 20 years. This support for preservation has stimulated additional preservation activities in hundreds of institutions at local, regional, and national levels.

The Endowment's Division of Preservation and Access has become the focal point for nationwide preservation activity. There is now widespread acceptance of this Division "as a critically important program to ensure the preservation of and access to important research materials that are vital to our nation's ability to function as a democracy." [ARL Marks Accomplishments of NEH Preservation Program, July 1993].

The research libraries, archives, museums, and reformatting facilities that are salvaging humanities resources are now up to top operating speed, working with the confidence and knowledge that comes from experience, and within an infrastructure of higher education and user communities that has built up a solid understanding and support for the continuance of this work. We are into full production mode, and have begun to explore how we can improve our operations further.

Because of NEH foresightedness, research libraries are moving into planning for new reformatting in a digital technology environment. With NEH management, our nationwide program can take full advantage of new digital technologies, CD-ROMs, Internet transmission, and multi-media computers. In addition, the Endowment's Division of Preservation and Access funds programs that support intellectual access to collections, stabilization of material culture, education and training, regional preservation services, statewide preservation planning, and research and demonstration projects. We find all of these programs of the highest value and productivity, and we advocate full funding at levels that were originally determined in 1988.

The President's pending request for preservation and access in FY-1995 is \$22.981 million -- \$18.005 million for programs exclusive of the National Heritage Program (NHP) and \$4.976 million for NHP. If this appropriation is enacted without change, FY-1995 will be the fourth consecutive year with virtually no growth. According to the 1988 plan for preservation filming, that part of the overall Division of Preservation and Access budget would be \$20.3 million annually after the fifth year. However, when Access programs were transferred to the Division of Preservation and Access from the Research Division, the exchange was \$2 million short. Therefore, the additional funds needed to bring the FY-1995 budget for the Division up to the level called for in the 1988 initiative, and to bring the Access programs up to their level at transfer are:

Preservation: \$2.295 million

Access: \$2.000 million

TOTAL: \$4.295 million

This appropriation will provide the Division of Preservation and Access with the necessary support to provide leadership in meeting the multiple preservation and access challenges we have described and in assuring the fullest possible representation of humanities in the new infrastructure, a component we believe is essential to the nation's educational system and to all its citizens. The strong presence of the NEH and of federal support for preservation and access of humanities resources assures that all Americans will be provided with free and equal opportunities to obtain these resources.

