

Statement on the FY-1994 Appropriation for the National Endowment for the Humanities

Before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies (Committee on Appropriations), by David H. Stam, University Librarian, Syracuse University, on behalf of the Association of Research Libraries, the Commission on Preservation and Access, and the National Humanities Alliance

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INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. I am David H. Stam, University Librarian at Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. I am pleased to testify today for the Association of Research Libraries, the Commission on Preservation and Access, and the National Humanities Alliance. I want to speak to you today not only as a librarian but also as a scholar concerned, along with thousands of other scholars, about the very survival and dissemination of this country's rich cultural and scholarly resources.

My own involvement in the issues of preservation of the historical record goes back twenty-five years to when I was working at the Newberry Library in Chicago while pursuing a doctorate in history at Northwestern University. The growth since that time in the awareness and attention to problems of preservation has been truly remarkable to watch, and much of the progress can be clearly attributed to the catalytic work of the Endowment over that whole period, but especially over the last five years.

1993 marks the end of the fifth year of a twenty-year expanded preservation program introduced to the Congress by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1988. At that time, witnesses speaking before this Committee on behalf of the higher education and scholarly community emphasized the devastating brittleness of research library collections and the need to preserve on microfilm the intellectual content of those collections which are so essential to humanities research and education. Responding to that need, NEH proposed a twenty-year effort with two long-term goals: (1) to preserve knowledge contained in 3 million threatened titles and other endangered research materials; and (2) to build the infrastructure needed to support preservation programs on the prerequisite scale.

When Congress funded the first year of this 20-year effort, it set in motion a dynamic process which has resulted in the preservation microfilming of approximately 500,000 titles during the past five years. This achievement is far greater than it might seem, for not only have the individual books been preserved for the individual institutions which owned them, but service copies can now be obtained at low cost by any other institutions which have brittle copies of the same titles, thus avoiding the higher initial costs of preservation. They are also now easily accessible to any other libraries or users who have need for those titles. Thus the NEH grants to large research libraries have directly and indirectly benefited all of the nation's libraries and their users.

In addition, NEH programs have also enhanced work on preservation education, training, and planning. We have come to recognize that the variety of printed works and unique archival resources and their differing states of deterioration require a range of innovative preservation strategies. The preservation of the nation's intellectual heritage is and will continue to be of critical importance. During the initial five-year set-up period, the Endowment has successfully worked with libraries throughout the country to develop the necessary preservation infrastructure and institutional support systems required to build permanent and expanding programs. Most

importantly, it has engendered a sense of commitment and priority to preservation, including the commitment of institutional resources, which was largely lacking before this program developed.

The Association of Research Libraries has recently made a detailed assessment of the impact of NEH's preservation programs among its member libraries. Our appraisal demonstrates the strength and breadth of the NEH program, the need for continued support at fully funded levels for the operational phase of the twenty-year program, and the importance of further research to expand the application of electronic technologies to preservation efforts.

IMPACT OF THE NEH PROGRAM

The findings of our evaluation clearly document the success of the NEH program, and particularly its multiplier effect throughout the library community. During the first five years, the program has stimulated enormous activity and widespread participation among ARL libraries, providing significant benefits to research libraries and the scholars they serve. The results indicate that:

- (1) to date, 500,000 titles are being preserved, a significant accomplishment during a start-up phase, and in keeping with the long-term plan;
- (2) 62 libraries have participated in preservation microfilming projects--39 ARL members and 23 other institutions, including independent research libraries;
- (3) 46 states and two territories have implemented U.S. newspaper projects, preserving 193,000 newspaper titles and 49 million pages of regional newspapers;
- (4) the NEH program is a vital catalyst for cooperative, coordinated projects.

Perhaps the best demonstration of this success, Mr. Chairman, relates to a question you asked during the 1988 discussion of the Endowment's plan: "At the end of 1993, how many books would have been microfilmed?" The answer was 583,000. With the current cycle of funding that target will be met before the end of this year, despite some shortfall from the original budget plan.

The NEH preservation program has assisted research libraries in preserving and providing continued access to a rich array of collections, covering all aspects of the humanities, including American history, literature, and music; Western European history, literature, and philosophy; Classical and Medieval civilization; Slavic and Eastern European history; history of art and architecture; history of religion, mathematics, science, and technology; political science and economics; and history and culture of Latin America, the Caribbean Basin, Africa, South Asia, and the Near East. Projects have not focused exclusively on books but have covered materials in a wide range of formats, including manuscripts, sheet music, photographs, and newspapers. The brittle books program is vitally important, but our analyses make it clear that scholarship benefits from all the programs of the Division of Preservation and Access.

One essential hallmark of the program lies in the cooperation and collaboration of research universities with state, public, and special libraries. The NEH preservation program has enabled the nation's research libraries to play a collaborative role in bringing smaller academic and public libraries, and other historical societies, archives, and museums into the national infrastructure for access and preservation. Through the New York State Preservation Program, originally funded in part by the Endowment, my own institution, for example, has coordinated a major preservation needs assessment in Central New York involving a dozen diverse institutions. On a national level, the U.S. Newspaper Program is an outstanding example of cooperative strategy, with federal, state,

and local sponsors joining forces with university, state, public, and local libraries to film these brittle sources. Again, Syracuse University was pleased to host the Central New York segment of the New York State newspaper project at little cost to the program.

In broader terms, federal funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities have served both as stimulus and resource in mounting a broad-based program for addressing the brittle books problem. These grants have advanced our understanding of the issues of selecting materials for preservation microfilming, helped in establishing linked priorities, and provided operational experience with issues inherent in developing large-scale, coordinated projects. Many research libraries, in turn, have made major investments in scaling up to meet the level of production projected in the NEH program.

LEVERAGING THE NEH SUPPORT

NEH grants have had positive effects far beyond the dollars allocated. Through the heightened publicity and visibility they generate they have in several institutions improved the capacity to raise funds for preservation. Many libraries have successfully leveraged NEH funds by featuring preservation as a priority in their capital fundraising campaigns.

The program has also played a vital role in stimulating the growth and maturing of local preservation programs. Preservation activities have expanded during the past five years in most research libraries and in many other institutions, regardless of whether they have received direct NEH funding. For the many libraries that have participated in either brittle books and archives microfilming and/or in US newspaper microfilming, there are direct, operational benefits. Many have established new microfilming capacities for the first time or been able to improve and upgrade existing programs. Some have developed the technical capacity in-house, while others have contracted services with a growing vendor community. New procedures, production standards, policy development, trained staff, and the integration of preservation into library operations are among the tangible benefits. We are also seeing that the high-production methods supported by NEH grants are beginning to reduce the per volume cost of filming.

Cooperative projects have opened the door for smaller or less experienced libraries to participate, and have provided assistance for training, communication, and project management. They have also allowed the preservation of unusual collections in smaller institutions, as New York State's cooperative preservation programs have amply demonstrated.

CREATING THE INFRASTRUCTURE

In addition to supporting individual libraries, the NEH program also contributes toward building the infrastructure for a comprehensive North American preservation program.

One critical component toward that end is NEH's support for systematic preservation planning and regional preservation field services. With a grant from NEH, for example, the Association of Research Libraries developed a systematic preservation planning process together with support materials to be used in the process. A substantial number of institutions, including Syracuse University, have used this program to develop and expand institutional preservation efforts. NEH funding also enables preservation service centers to operate regionally in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Texas. Also noteworthy is NEH support for training preservation administrators and conservators in the library school of the University of Texas at Austin; for regional training for collections conservation in mid-size and smaller libraries through the UC-Berkeley Training the Trainers project, and for the Society of American Archivists' educational

program. NEH also helps fund research and demonstration projects, such as research on storage of photographs at the Image Permanence Institute in Rochester, New York, as well as a number of statewide preservation planning efforts.

Another component is the NEH support for building the bibliographic infrastructure for a nation-wide preservation program. From the beginning we have been concerned that the fruits of our preservation efforts be widely available throughout the nation by including descriptions of the titles preserved in our national bibliographic databases. Funding from NEH has enabled the expansion of those online databases, through the cataloging of titles preserved under this program and through the conversion of 500,000 machine-readable records previously described in the National Register of Microfilm Masters; all are now instantly accessible through networks to thousands of libraries throughout the nation and abroad. These records also help ensure that total national expenditures for preservation and for bibliographic control are as low as possible. Preservation and access remain intimately related, a fact easily demonstrated by the growing collaborative use of our collections.

BUILDING ON THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

The results of the first five years of the NEH preservation program have demonstrated the capacity of the nation's libraries to work with the federal government in the national interest. For the first three years, the President proposed and the Congress appropriated funds very close to the original 1988 funding plan for the program: \$12.5 million in FY-89; \$13.7 million in FY- 90; and \$15.8 million in FY-91. In the past two years, however, allocations have fallen below the original funding plan: FY-92 fell \$1.1 million below the estimated \$17.7 million required, and FY-93 was \$2.3 million below the fifth-year target of \$20.3 million. Nonetheless, both Congress and our libraries have a considerable investment in this program which we must not squander. To protect this investment, it is important that we continue the steady pace of progress outlined in the 20-year plan to accomplish the goal of preserving the 3 million brittle volumes. A fundamental need is steady, sustained funding that underpins the continuation and expansion of the program. We are asking for your support for funding the brittle books program at the original annual capability level of \$12.5 million, while maintaining necessary funding for the other programs of the Division of Preservation and Access.

THE FUTURE

What we call for essentially is endorsement of the successful program which Congress has begun: continuation of the brittle book program, the encouragement of cooperative projects, support of the United States newspaper program, sustained attention to preservation education and training at regional and national levels, and provision for improved environmental storage conditions for library and archives collections within the National Heritage Preservation Program. This requires, and we strongly urge, that the \$2.3 million be restored to the NEH budget to reflect the original sixth-year program target of \$20.3 million for library and archival preservation programs.

We suggest only one modification of the program, occasioned by technological developments in the period since 1988. Funds from the program are needed for further exploration of the preservation potential of digital technology.

During the past five years we have seen extensive developments in research dealing with the utilization of digital technology for preserving retrospective scholarly resources and for providing electronic access to the contents of filmed materials. Research and development projects on the use of digital image technology for preservation and access have been conducted at the National

Library of Medicine, the National Agricultural Library, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives. Current projects, such as those sponsored by the Commission on Preservation and Access, will surely lead to digitization as a viable reformatting tool. The Cornell University/Xerox Joint Study has demonstrated the potential of digital technology to create high quality paper facsimiles at reasonable cost, to produce digital computer output microfilm that meets national preservation microfilming standards, and to enhance access through network availability to digitized information. Yale University's "Open Book" project is studying the means, costs, and benefits of converting large quantities of preserved library materials from microfilm to digital images. There seems no doubt that digital technology has the potential to expand dramatically the rapid availability of information to users everywhere.

While these advances are promising, all our studies show that the nation's investment in microfilming for preservation continues to be well founded. It assures the safety of the information, but does not preclude the imminent advantages of new types of access. Expansion in the types of formats for preserved material through digitization will clearly be beneficial because it will enhance access to information, a primary goal of the NEH program. We are confident that continued research in digital technology, under NEH's sponsorship and leadership, will provide the catalyst for perfecting these new technologies in the ongoing process of preserving the nation's heritage.

CONCLUSION

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today on the importance of the NEH preservation program, though my testimony barely scratches the surface of NEH influence on libraries and the support of scholarship. One example, neglected above, is the role of NEH in assuring the health and survival of national collections in America's independent research libraries. When Alexis de Tocqueville, in Democracy in America, complained in 1835 that Americans cared little about their historical records and archives, seven of those institutions were already busy collecting the records of our civilization, including the New-York Historical Society founded in 1804, and the American Antiquarian Society (1812). Without NEH support, their course over the past 25 years would have been far more difficult, not least in the preservation of their unique collections.

Finally, I would emphasize that the benefits of the NEH program extend far beyond the recipient institutions. Scholarship performed in university and independent research libraries and other educational institutions eventually finds its way into the smallest public libraries throughout the land. For our part, with continued funding from Congress, we assure that we can and will preserve the nation's intellectual heritage for use by tens of millions of people for generations to come.