

Statement on the FY-1993 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 Merrily Taylor, University Librarian, Brown University (Providence, Rhode Island), Speaking on behalf of the Association of Research Libraries, the Commission on Preservation and Access, and the National Humanities Alliance

9 April 1992

Good Morning. I am Merrily Taylor, Librarian at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. I am pleased to testify today for the National Humanities Alliance, the Association of Research Libraries, and the Commission on Preservation and Access. I am speaking as the representative of one of the thousands of academic and research libraries across this nation benefiting from the National Endowment for the Humanities' program to preserve and provide access to deteriorated cultural and scholarly resources.

Mr. Chairman, although there are many accomplishments and new directions for the NEH program that I describe in my statement, there are three that I would like to highlight this morning:

- * the program's success as evident by the growing numbers and high quality of materials resulting from project grants;
- * the need for the NEH to develop a revised capability statement to be submitted with the FY 1994 budget request with funding targets for the second five-year cycle; and
- * the growing use of technologies to explore new preservation opportunities.

My library is middle-sized among North American research libraries, holding slightly in excess of two million volumes. Counting microforms, maps, manuscripts and other non-book materials, we are stewards of a total of six million items. Although Brown is a private institution, my library participates actively in resource-sharing both nationally and within our own region. Last year, we lent more than 10,000 items to libraries around the nation, nearly twice what we borrowed. Our John Hay Library, one of the major libraries in the United States devoted to rare books and special collections, is home to a number of collections we have preserved through NEH funding. By University policy, the John Hay Library is open to all researchers on a non-fee basis. Last year, over 1,130 individuals unaffiliated with Brown visited Providence to make use of the John Hay Library collections.

It is from this perspective that I wish to speak about the value of the programs developed by the Division of Preservation and Access of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Division provides the nation's libraries and archives with an absolutely vital mix of financial support, advice, and leadership that enables us to contribute to and participate in collaborative preservation and access programs. NEH's well-designed program allows us to make the most of our limited financial and human resources by fostering cooperative, non-duplicative solutions to our most pressing preservation problems. NEH programs include state-by-state newspaper preservation, regional field services and workshops, research and demonstration projects, education and training, and statewide planning for preservation. NEH's "Brittle Books" program was first funded by the U.S. Congress in 1988, with a projected operating span of twenty years. Over those years, we expect that hundreds of this country's academic libraries and arches will be participating in this program to

save the intellectual contents of three million of our most valuable printed resources. Already, in the first four years, nearly 50 institutions are contributing to the effort.

Congress's continued support for NEH's preservation and access activities is heralded as a workable model literally around the world. The keys to its success are simple:

- * A well-developed initial plan;
- * Cooperation and collaboration by all those concerned, including research universities that have committed people, ideas, materials, and significant financial resources to make this national program a success;
- * Superior management by the Division of Preservation and Access and strong support for the program by the top NEH leadership; and most importantly --
- * Sustained funding to underpin the continuation and expansion of the program.

For the past three years, witnesses speaking on behalf of ARL, NEH, and the Commission have highlighted the devastating brittleness of the materials we are rescuing in our requests for support. This year, however, we will focus not on the horrendous condition of what needs saving, but instead on the growing numbers and the high quality of materials emerging from the program.

NEH recently reported that 450,000 volumes are either already filmed or undergoing filming as part of the Brittle Books program. Nearly half a million of the nation's most valuable scholarly resources are being saved for future generations, and they are being saved on stable, high-quality microfilm that will allow for transfer to any type of developing electronic format.

Permit me to illustrate the value of these saved materials with some examples from Brown. Like many libraries of its size, Brown contributes to the national scholarly enterprise not by supporting an enormous collection with great scope and depth in every area, but by maintaining several special, focused collections without peer in their subject area. Among these are the Harris Collection of American Poetry and Plays, the largest and most comprehensive literary collection of its kind in existence, and the History of Mathematics Collection, widely acknowledged to be one of the two best such collections in the country (the other being at the University of Michigan). Brown also is the repository of a number of fine manuscript collections and holds, among others, the papers of John Hay, Lincoln's private secretary during the Civil War and Secretary of State from 1898 to 1905. We like to think that his finest distinction is as a member of the Brown Class of 1858! It is from these collections that Brown has select items for preservation filming through the generous and indeed essential support of NEH.

Because of the leadership of NEH in designing this program, Brown can participate collaboratively in preservation projects that help us avoid costly duplicative filming. Brown was one of seven institutions that conducted the first "Great Collections" microfilming project developed by the Research Libraries Group, Inc. (RLG). This project, funded by both NEH and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, served as a model for cooperative preservation microfilming. From 1983 to 1986, Brown filmed 10,000 titles from its Harris collection and entered their records into national databases so that our work would be known to scholars throughout the country. Much of the material in the Harris collection is scarce; in many cases, Brown holds the only known copy. The value of preserving such information for future generations can hardly be adequately articulated, much less quantified.

Once was not enough for Brown! In October 1989, again with six colleague institutions, we began work on another "Great Collections" filming project. This time, the participating libraries and NEH are providing the funding, with no private foundation support. When this project ends in October of this year, we anticipate that the seven libraries collectively will have filmed over 27,000 scholarly books in the areas of: histories of science and economics; German literature; and histories of South Asia, America, China, and the Near East. About 6,000 of these resources are from Brown, including mathematics teaching manuals and textbooks; historical works in pure math; materials in English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Sanskrit, Swedish, Czech, Hungarian, and Russian; and again, American poetry.

As I stated earlier, Brown University is pleased to be contributing to these current efforts, along with nearly fifty other libraries and archives. Quite selfishly, we are even more pleased with the new core of until now unavailable resources that this program has provided for our faculty, students, independent scholars and researchers. These resources cover a broad range of subject areas including American history, literature, and music; Western European history, literature and philosophy; Medieval and classical 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, Caribbean Basin, Africa, South Asia, and Near East. Often, these materials were unavailable for research and scholarship, except in very limited circumstances, because of their highly fragile state. Libraries that served as custodians of these materials stored them safely in carefully controlled climates that protected them from further damage, but that essentially rendered them off-limits to most users.

It is now a simple process for us to obtain high-quality microfilm copies of these materials for permanent retention and easy, fast use within our own library walls. Today's students, unlike previous generations, seem to have no aversion to using microfilm and, indeed, appreciate its convenience and utility as a storage medium for large quantities of information. The existence of these films also has facilitated cooperation among libraries in our interlibrary loan process, thus expanding the "reach" and impact of our local collections.

It is worth noting at this point that preservation and access remain intimately related. Since NEH and other federal funding permits not only the filming but the online cataloging of titles, the use of our collections has increased dramatically. Between 1990 and 1991, interlibrary loan photocopies generated by Brown's Special Collections increased by 179 percent, from 2073 to 5778. Requests for materials doubled. Once scholars are aware that an item exists, and know where to find it, they need no special urging to use it!

Also under the direction of NEH's Division of Preservation and Access are other complementary programs that deserve mention: In the area of unique manuscripts, documents, archives, and non-print formats, the Division is funding preservation projects for 94 special collections. In this program, Brown is filming and cataloging its Lester Frank Ward and John Hay papers, which are unique and particularly endangered, involving every problem from fading ink to brittle paper to deteriorating personal scrapbooks. NEH funding, through the Research Libraries Group, will permit Brown's library to disbind, remount, refolder, and film the items, as well as to provide online database records that will enable us to share the microfilm more widely than is now possible.

NEH also supports the U.S. Newspaper Project, which is completing 200,000 new cataloging records and filming 39 million pages of newsprint. Again, I can attest to the usefulness of this effort from the perspective of my home state. Since early in the Colonial period, when the Rhode Island Gazette was issued in Newport in 1732, Rhode Island has had a distinguished history of newspaper publishing. The voices of those who promoted the causes of independence, temperance, anti-

slavery, women's concerns, labor, and many religious sects have all found expression in the state's newspapers. Foreign voices have served the information needs and preserved the ethnic heritage of many state residents in papers such as Svea (Scandinavian), L'Union (French), and Nuevos Horizontes (Hispanic). As a Rhode Island Historical Society staff member wrote, "From the state's largest city, Providence, with hundreds of newspaper titles, to small villages such as Pascoag, whose Burrillville Gazette was published from 1880-1893, Rhode Islanders' political, cultural, economic and religious history is held in newspaper, past and present. The U.S. Newspaper Project is a remarkable opportunity to retrieve and save our vanishing heritage, not only for my state, but for the nation.

NEH also supports regional preservation field services, which assist institutions with specialized advice, training sessions, and workshops. Currently, preservation service centers are operating in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Texas. Training and education is taking place at Columbia University, the University of Texas, and the Society of American Archivists supported by NEH funds. NEH also helps fund research and demonstrations projects, such as research on storage of photographs at the Image Permanence Institute in Rochester, New York, and statewide preservation planning efforts. To return to Rhode Island one more time, the state currently is planning for preservation under an NEH grant. This planning will eventually benefit every repository in Rhode Island, from academic libraries to public libraries to local historical societies to the collections of town clerks. The planning grant has already resulted in a statewide disaster plan to be distributed to institutions throughout Rhode Island, as well as in several well-attended preservation workshops and training sessions.

The crucial thing to remember in reviewing the impact of NEH's preservation leadership upon our country's scholarly resources is that the story told by Brown and Rhode Island is by no means unique or idiosyncratic. We are not one of the nation's ten greatest library collections; we will never equal some of our ARL colleagues in terms of scope or depth across our entire holdings. We are, however, a fine academic library with a handful of collections that are national treasures and deserve to be preserved for use by the nation. In this time of rising materials costs and shrinking educational budgets, our university would simply not have the resources to do large scale preservation microfilming or conservation treatment on its own.

The results in the first four years of the Brittle Books program demonstrate the capacity of the nation's libraries to cooperate with the federal government in the national interest. We have gained invaluable experience and knowledge during this time, but we have only begun. To protect this considerable investment, it is important that we strengthen our effort with an expanded program over the next several years.

Mr. Chairman, in the Spring of 1988 you asked the NEH to provide a capability statement for the agency to assist libraries to save on film the contents of three million books endangered because they were printed on acid paper -- a bold plan to save the most valuable of our threatened cultural and historical resources. NEH responded with a carefully calibrated plan that called for a steady increase in funding for what is now called the "libraries and archives program" of the Division of Preservation and Access. The increases were staged as follows: \$12.5 million in F Y-89; \$13.7 million in FY-90; \$15.8 million in FY-91; \$17.7 million in F Y-92; and \$20.3 million in F Y-93. For the first three years, the President proposed and the Congress appropriated sums very close to the plan. In F Y-92, the final allocation for the activity is \$1.1 million below the estimates. The F Y-93 proposal of \$18 million for libraries and archives is \$2.3 million below the fifth-year target. We are concerned that a continuing falling away from the carefully developed targets will (a) decrease the momentum of the program that has truly become a national effort to save these irreplaceable materials, and (b) threaten the overall goal of saving three million volumes.

At the same time, I am pleased to note that savings and efficiencies are emerging from the project that may permit new preservation opportunities. Given the clear success of the first few years, we recommend, Mr. Chairman, that you request the NEH to develop a revised capability statement with funding targets for the second five-year cycle (i.e., FY-94 through FY-98). We suggest that a reasonable schedule for the revised capability statement would be for delivery at the time of the President's FY-94 budget requests.

I'd like to point out two examples of our progress, beyond the impressive bottom line statistic of 450,000 saved volumes. First, we are seeing that the high-production methods developed by libraries and vendors are beginning to reduce the per-volume cost of the filming. We are quite certain that we can film more books at less cost per volume in the coming years. This increased productivity is critically important as more libraries are discovering through sampling studies that the level and extent of deterioration in their collections is more severe than we had expected. Second, we are seeing extensive progress in taking advantage of emerging technologies to provide the contents of these filmed books in different formats geared to the individualized needs of the users. For example, several research and demonstration projects have shown the viability of converting microfilmed materials into machine-readable files. Other libraries have successfully created both digital files and print-on-demand versions of previously filmed books that are more readable than the original brittle versions. This expansion in the types of formats for the saved materials is highly beneficial because it enhances access to the information -- a primary goal of the NEH program. For this reason, we request that the new five-year plan developed in 1994 include a research and development component for exploring the preservation possibilities of digital technology.

Libraries like Brown are experiencing "spinoff" benefits from NEH's program as well. From an operational point of view, we have a much broader choice of vendors to use for microfilming and other preservation services because of the expanded market for these services. We are being offered better products by suppliers, who are following tighter standards and guidelines for materials. Intellectually, we are benefiting in our quest for scholarly materials from other nations. Throughout the world, a growing number of countries are developing programs drawing on NEH's experience: They are adhering more closely to established guidelines for bibliographic citations; they are paying attention to the paper on which their materials are printed in the first place; and they are mounting efforts to save their own materials from crumbling to dust. Because NEH's program has four years of operational experience, it has become a model for other nations as we have entered a global perspective of information sharing.

Technologists have assured us that the nation's investment in microfilming for preservation continues to be a wise investment: It assures the safety of the information, and it does not preclude exploiting the advantages of new types of technical access, including digital, now and any time in the future. Scholars have assured us that-- together -- we are making sound decisions about which resources to save, since we are identifying the most useful and the most badly deteriorated. Vendors have assured us that they can handle the expanded scope of work, and that they can maintain the standards established by NEH and the library community. Our library patrons have assured us that they need and use these restored materials for their studies, research and intellectual pursuits.

We are on the right track. What we need now is one more assurance -- assurance that the leadership of NEH will be there to guide us for the duration of this program. With continued funding from Congress, we assure you that we can and will rescue millions of at-risk printed resources for use by tens of millions of people for generations to come.