

Statement on the FY-1992 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 Betty Bengtson, Director of Libraries, University of Washington at Seattle, Speaking on behalf of the Association of Research Libraries, the Commission on Preservation and Access, and the National Humanities Alliance

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Introduction

My name is Betty Bengtson, and I am the Director of Libraries at the University of Washington at Seattle. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the National Endowment for the Humanities' Fiscal Year 1992 appropriations, on behalf of the Association of Research Libraries, the Commission on Preservation and Access, and the National Humanities Alliance.

As the university's recently-appointed library director and a relative newcomer to the nationwide preservation effort, I am delighted to have the opportunity to testify to the critical importance of continued federal funding for the broad and comprehensive program administered by the National Endowment for the Humanities. During the past few years, you have heard testimony from representatives of Harvard, Columbia, and the University of North Carolina, institutions on the East Coast with older, deteriorating collections. I speak to you from a major West Coast university, where the library collections, instead of being older and consequently embrittled, are newer but nonetheless endangered. The benefits to us and our peer institutions reflect the truly national scope of the comprehensive plan set into motion by the Congress and ably managed by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Statement of Support for NEH's Budget Request

The National Endowment for the Humanities and the library and scholarly community have made a significant investment in a carefully constructed cooperative program to advance the preservation of scholarly materials. The range of funded activities includes the preservation of brittle books, of newspapers in all fifty states, and of archival and special collections. An essential component of the NEH program is strengthening and improving the capacities of libraries and archives nationwide to preserve their collections. Also of great value is NEH support for training preservation specialists, for developing regional preservation services, and for assisting individual states in establishing coordinated preservation projects. As a consequence, the needed infrastructure to support a collaborative program for the preservation of cultural holdings is now in place.

As one of many concerned stewards of unique national resources, I strongly advocate the continuation of full funding for the five-year preservation plan presented to the Congress by the National Endowment for the Humanities. That plan proposed a steady increase of funds over a period of five years to build momentum and strengthen the national infrastructure.

That momentum continues to build as we witness the success of the first three years. But we must consolidate that success and justify the initial investment by staying the course. In 1988, Lynne Cheney's "Detailed Analysis of the Office of Preservation Capability Budget (1989 -1993)" called for \$17.7 million in the year 1992. The NEH request for FY-1992 proposes a modest increase of

\$200,000 over FY-1991, to \$16.6 million, rather than the \$1.1 million increase projected in the five-year plan. We strongly urge the restoration of the full \$17.7 million.

[Note: The President's request for the Office of Preservation for FY-1992 totals \$20.8 million. Although the administration's budget contains no further breakdown of that total, NEH staff indicate that for planning purposes, \$4.2 million has been "reserved" for the National Heritage Preservation (NHP) Program to assist museums and libraries in preserving endangered material cultures collections and \$16.6 million has been "reserved" for brittle books, U.S. Newspapers program, and all other preservation activities that may be supported during FY-1992. The budgetary recommendations, including program totals, offered in this testimony are limited to activities other than the NHP program (i.e., increases suggested assume a \$16.6 million base).]

We also request continued funding to offset expenses for the stabilization of illustrated materials and repair of damage incurred in microfilming. The significant costs of participation in the national effort borne by many of our large university libraries, currently beleaguered by rising materials prices and decreasing budgets, have been ameliorated by the 1990 appropriation of \$900,000, or 10% of the microfilming budget, for this purpose. We urge that this item be included each year as an amount equivalent to 10% of the microfilming budget.

In addition, we propose a supplement of \$1.5 million to the original plan to respond to the expanding momentum in the U.S. Newspaper program and the efforts to preserve special collections of historical records, documents, and manuscripts. Such a supplement would enable the NEH to allocate its funds to maximum effect without diverting funds from one program component to cover an increased response from the field in another.

To summarize our key points, we urge first and foremost that the \$1.1 million be restored to the NEH budget to reflect the original five-year plan of \$17.7 million for 1992. Second, we urge that funds in the amount of 10 percent of the microfilming budget, or \$1.1 million, be added to the 1992 appropriation for the stabilization of illustrated materials and the repair of materials damaged in filming. And third, we request an additional \$1.5 million for the U.S. Newspaper program and conservation of special collections.

Request Summary

NEH Request: \$16.6 million

Restoration: \$1.1 million

Original Five-Year Plan: \$17.7 million

Supplements:

* For repair: \$1.1 million

* For U.S. newspapers: \$1.5 million

Supplements: \$2.6 million

TOTAL REQUESTED: \$20.3 MILLION

The Strength of NEH Leadership

I would like to underscore the remarkable success of the NEH preservation program and to commend the Endowment for developing a true national strategy to preserve the nation's intellectual heritage. Much has been accomplished since 1988 when Dr. Cheney presented a plan before this Committee "to increase substantially the Federal Government's role in dealing with the brittle books crisis in our nation's libraries and archives."

The first three years of this program have dramatically illustrated the catalytic effects of federal funding and NEH leadership in stimulating action by local, state, and regional organizations and political jurisdictions. It is essential that we do not falter now. Indeed, the combined effects of Congressional action, NEH administration, and the response of the library, archival and scholarly communities to this remarkable opportunity to save our patrimony have been unprecedented.

With its 20-year brittle books initiative, Congress has addressed a problem of daunting magnitude for research libraries and archives. The leadership of NEH has provided the critical cohesion in support for a cause common to many disparate groups. NEH's competent and knowledgeable staff has been able to build the needed infrastructure of cooperation and commitment among diverse constituencies to mount a phased program for saving a minimum of 3 million volumes over 20 years.

The NEH Preservation Program as a Catalyst for New Partnerships

The brittle books program is an outstanding example of a collaborative, coordinated effort of scholars, librarians, archivists, and many organizations. There are now 47 libraries and library consortia participating in an effort where we initially envisioned perhaps a total of 20. One example is the Southeastern Library Network, which has received a grant to support the microfilming of 18,000 brittle volumes held by 12 institutions in six southeastern states.

Also significant is the growing international collaboration in preservation. The preservation program is stimulating similar efforts overseas and becoming a role model for cooperation in many countries. The Endowment's program is constantly put forth as a successful paradigm for government action by our colleagues throughout the world. Equally important, the program is assisting research libraries to preserve significant parts of collections in various foreign languages. At a time when international research materials are becoming increasingly important to research and economic development, access to and preservation of the "universe of knowledge" is essential. Although many research materials remain accessible only in the country of origin itself, the vicissitudes of history and the longstanding patterns of collecting make American research libraries' holdings in materials from overseas countries unique. Cooperative projects in U.S. libraries that can be linked to similar efforts abroad will be of great benefit to research and scholarship on an international scale.

The Impact of the NEH Preservation Program

The value to the nation, its scholars, and its research libraries and archives of the NEH preservation program is evident on many levels.

The program has accelerated the fundamental restructuring of preservation capabilities in research libraries and has spurred the institutionalization of preservation throughout the nation. The number of preservation administrators in our largest research libraries has grown from 35 in 1987 to 78 in 1990. The number of individuals employed in these libraries for preservation activities now number 1790, up from 1621 in 1989.

Another dramatic impact of the NEH program is the transformation of the "cottage industry approach" in conservation microfilming to one of large-scale production. The NEH program has helped significantly to build an expanded base of preservation service providers, in both private and not-for-profit sectors, to increase productivity and cost effectiveness, and to promote technological improvements in preservation microfilming equipment.

One of the visible benefits of the NEH program this year is the growing critical mass of saved materials. With only about 10 percent of the proposed target of deteriorating materials now being filmed (342,000 of 3 million), we already can see the breadth and value of the brittle books initiative. Through planned, nonduplicative filming, we have begun to save a rich array of materials of value to scholars and to the broader American public. From a growing list of filmed materials, I've selected a few to be mentioned in this testimony, to reflect the variety and uniqueness of rescued collections:

- A History of Technology Collection from the University of Chicago Library; 10,150 brittle volumes.
- Louisiana Supreme Court case files that date from 1846 to 1861 from the University of New Orleans.
- Soviet government documents at Stanford University that date from the period 1917 to 1940.
- 40,000 embrittled volumes from the American history and culture collections of The New York Public Library.

Beyond the immediate value of preserving the nation's scholarly resources, enhanced access to information and service to the national and international scholarly communities provide the program's broadest benefits. The effective use of technologies and the substantial investments in shared cataloging networks make possible online automated access to information about preserved materials. Scholars from diverse institutions and locations can now locate preserved titles on the nation's two major library databases, RLIN and OCLC, and request copies of previously unavailable resources -- resources that were too brittle to use before they were microfilmed. Grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation have supported the addition of bibliographic records of preserved materials in the British Library and the Bibliotheque Nationale to the American databases.

I want to emphasize that it is the steady, sustained level of funding for the NEH program that enables library directors such as myself to plan for the preservation or and access to unique materials We are able to do such planning in collaboration with our university officers, scholarly colleagues, and the publishing and technology communities that have joined this effort. It is critical that NEH's program, with its powerful success and demonstrated progress, be funded at the originally-proposed levels.

Concluding Remark

The NEH preservation program has stimulated a response across this nation and throughout the world far beyond our initial expectations. Because of the sustained and steady forward movement of this program, we are able to share the richness of this nation's research resources on a broad scale never before possible. On behalf of my colleagues in libraries and archives and the scholars and students we serve, I urge continued, full-level support for the National Endowment for the Humanities' preservation program.