

News

Beyond Brittle: Preserving Theatre History at the Cleveland Public Library

—by Ann Olszewski

The permanent collections of the Cleveland Public Library include many endearing local publications that were issued without literary or scholarly pretensions. These functional popular documents originated as print expressions of everyday life and popular culture, but their survival for more than a century has added to their stature. Today they are considered important primary sources for the city's history. Newspapers, club bulletins, society papers, and theatre programs have become documentary time machines able to transport the reader with glimpses of the city's past. However, popular documents published after 1850 were printed on cheap wood pulp paper, chosen for low cost rather than longevity. These materials will not survive a second century without preservation intervention.

The Library's historic collection of fragile and frequently brittle local theatrical programs document a thriving vital aspect of the city's cultural history from the 1880's to the 1930's. Before the age of television, and in the early years of the movie industry, live theatre was the principal form of public entertainment in urban centers. More than two dozen professional theatres in Cleveland presented live performances daily from September to June. Outdoor "garden theatres" in taverns continued the season during the summer months. The performances ranged from classic Shakespeare to vaudeville, from Gilbert and Sullivan to *Little Women*. Each week the production changed, and each week a new program booklet was printed, typically eight pages with performance information and general advertisements.

Cast lists included local as well as more renowned performers such as George Cohan and Sarah Bernhardt. The numerous advertisements reflected the city's business history and lifestyle.

The core of the Library's extensive collection includes program runs for fifteen different theatres. They were a gift from the Wertheimer Printing Firm, the principal Cleveland printer for theatres, who had found them in their attic when the business closed in the early 1960's. The programs were sewn together and bound in 72 thick volumes. Indexed by performer and performance, they were frequently used, especially by researchers tracing actors' careers.

The programs continued to deteriorate for another



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thirty years. The Library's first protective intervention was to make buckram portfolios for each volume. This kept the volumes together and clean, but it could not reverse the formation of acids in the paper.

In the late fall of 1994, the head of the Cleveland Public Library Literature Department, Evelyn Ward, prioritized this collection for preservation action. She wanted to have the programs microfilmed for everyday use, but also wished to retain the originals for artifactual and exhibit interest. Many had lovely color covers that would not be fully reproduced in black and white microfilm. The quality of the paper varied; within the same volume there were programs too brittle to touch, along with others that could still be handled. In many cases the sewing and crude binding structures were causing destructive effects on the fragile paper.

The first step in the project was to send a sample volume for each of the fifteen theatres to the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) in Andover, Massachusetts. At NEDCC, the book conservation and the microfilming section staffs evaluated the materials and prepared written cost estimates and treatment proposals so that a budget could be estimated. During this time the Library addressed the problem of bibliographic access. There were no records in the online catalog for these materials, although there were call numbers on the spine. The catalog department needed to establish original bibliographic records for the materials as well as to create the prospective microfilm records in OCLC (Online Computer Library Center).

Then came the slow and tedious collation and preparation of the materials. Curator Evelyn Ward meticulously cross-checked other resources and located loose programs and scrapbook fragments that could fill in gaps in the bound volumes. Photocopies were made from the scrapbooks and sent to the preservation office along with the loose programs. The curator prepared chronological lists of performances that were incorporated in the microfilm targets as a guide to contents. In some cases preservation staff worked directly from the scrapbooks instead of the photocopy. The complete scrapbook page was washed and the fragmented originals removed, improving the legibility of the theatre programs over photocopies. When the fragments were dry, they were hinged onto archival paper and placed in folders for support. A listing for a previously unknown performance was discovered on the back of one of these washed fragments.

For two theatres, the paper was so deteriorated that it was doubtful it could survive shipment to NEDCC. The only solution was to disbind the volumes and wash and encapsulate the programs in the library's preservation lab prior to shipping. A professional paper conservator, Janet English Heller of Oberlin, masterminded a mass washing and encapsulation assembly line. This required care-

ful collation because the programs did not have page numbers, and not all pages had the date. With extra-soft pencils, dates were penciled carefully in the bottom margin. Only the most delicate pressure could be used or the pencil point would puncture the paper. Prior to washing, these papers were so brittle they would fragment at the slightest touch. The bath water darkened slowly to the color of iced tea as the paper degradation products washed out. "Not many people realize what a vast improvement bathing can bring to the strength and handling of brittle paper," noted Conservator Janet Heller. "Perhaps because of the reformation of hydrogen bonds during the immersion. It wouldn't have been possible for us to handle and encapsulate the programs without the bathing step." After bathing, the paper was decidedly improved, although still fragile. It could be handled just enough to lay the pages out on pre-cut mylar sheets, cover them, and carry them to the ultrasonic welder. Once encapsulated, they seemed like knights armored for battle or like lost souls that had been redeemed.

In several volumes, the curator noted that the programs were bound out of order. The preservation staff carefully disbound those volumes and put the individual programs in the correct sequence. This wasn't always obvious or easy, as the dates were frequently in an obscure place. The date of the next performance was usually more prominently displayed.

Because of the variety of sizes, papers, and formats, no one standard treatment could be applied to the collection. Most of the programs will not be rebound because the paper is too fragile to be sewn.

After microfilming and alkalization are completed, most programs will be put into individual archival folders and housed in document cases or clamshell boxes. This treatment provides good support along with relative ease of access. The most embrittled items will be encapsulated and postbound into volumes.

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The Library's historic collection of fragile and frequently brittle local theatrical programs documents a thriving vital aspect of the city's cultural history from the 1880's to the 1930's.

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So you want to do a time capsule?

Tips to Keep in Mind While Trying to Defeat Time

— *by Ivan Hanthorn, Preservation Department Head, Iowa State University Library for the Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium*

The irrepressible urge to create a time capsule commemorating new or renovated buildings or other community activity is still an active social formula despite contrary claims of logic and ample evidence of frequent failure. This "buried treasure syndrome", as it has been termed by one author, overlooks the deterioration effects of time on materials overall and in the extremely adverse conditions of a time capsule in particular. Alternatives to the traditional "entombed" time capsule such as a bank box or sealed archival housing would increase the probability of materials surviving to the intended date of disclosure. However, if a time capsule seems an appropriate and desirable undertaking for your group or community, the following tips are offered to assist you in achieving your objective. There are three principal concerns to address: the physical quality of the materials you select for inclusion in the time capsule, the structure of the time capsule, and documentation of the contents and location.

Tip #1 — Establish a selection preference for books and documentation printed on the highest quality paper. Newspapers and similar low quality paper items are highly acidic and quickly deteriorate as well as contribute to the deterioration of other items in the capsule. Newspapers and similar quality materials should be photocopied onto archival quality paper to insure longevity.

Tip #2 — Photographs are wonderful information carriers across time and culture. Black and white photos are much more stable than color prints. Use black and white if at all possible. To keep photo emulsion surfaces from sticking together, interleave the photos or sleeve them with archival quality photo envelopes.

Tip #3 — Enclose each item in an archival quality envelope, folder, or other appropriate container, or wrap each item in acid-free tissue. Labeling these enclosures in pencil would be useful to the intended future audience.

Tip #4 — If selected paper materials present acidity problems, deacidification may be appropriate. Although easily applied spray deacidification products are available through preservation specialty catalogs (e.g., Wei T'O and Bookkeeper), it would be advisable to consult with a professional conservator.

Tip #5 — Select a container that is non-rusting, leak proof, and durable. Burial vaults have an obvious track record and are the most commonly used containers. Commercial time capsule products are available, but budget and space often drive the decision for local fabrication. Polypropylene, aluminum, and stainless steel are currently considered as acceptable capsule structure materials. Seals are critical; butyl or propylene gaskets are currently favored.

Tip #6 — Include items that do not require any technology or equipment other than the eye and hand to use and interpret. Today's computer discs and similar electronic media will not be playable in the future.

Tip #7 — Document the time capsule. Label the outside of the capsule clearly with a permanent material; create a checklist of the contents in duplicate (one copy for the time capsule enclosure and one file copy); and insure that a record of the time capsule along with the contents list is kept in several places.

Tip #8 — Avoid plastics. Because the aging characteristics of some plastics are not good and others are not truly known, these materials cannot be counted upon to survive in their original form. This problem is compounded if a plastic object is the medium for information (as with CD's or video tapes).

*Send your preservation questions to:
The Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium
c/o State Historical Society of Iowa
402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240
or Fax 319-335-3935*

Helpful tips for preserving your precious documents and memorabilia

Tips on Creating an Archival Scrapbook or Photo Album

—by Nancy Kraft for the Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium

Extend the life of your scrapbook by using archival material. The ideal scrapbook would be constructed with 100% archival materials including a protective cover, a hinge that allows the book to comfortably expand, and a size that is easy to shelf or store.

Tip #1 — Select a scrapbook with a hinge that allows the book to comfortably expand. "D" or "O-type" three-ring, poly post, multi-ring, and strap are popular bindings that allow for expansion.

Tip #2 — Use only the right hand pages or tear out every other sheet if the scrapbook is bound or the hinge does not provide enough room to expand.

Tip #3 — Pages should be white or off-white archival, acid-free 80 lb. weight or better (archival papers include 100% rag, Bainbridge, Lig-Free, Perma/Dur, Permalife, Strathmore, True Core).

Tip #4 — A charcoal or artists pad that is 100% cotton rag with sturdy weight pages can be used as a scrapbook. These pads are bound. To prevent the book from bulging, attach the items to the right-hand side of the page only. Leave the first and last page blank to provide extra protection. You can strengthen the cover by attaching a title sheet with a glue stick.

Tip #5 — A good functioning 3-ring binder, preferably fabric covered, can also be used to create a scrapbook. Check to be certain the rings will not pop open on their own and will close completely (even a small opening will allow pages to slip out).

Tip #6 — Archival paper which is 80 lb. weight or better can be used as well as archival plastic page protectors and photograph pages available in a variety of combinations for scrapbook pages. Leave a blank page at beginning and end of the notebook for added protection against wear and tear.

Tip #7 — If you choose to use plastic page protectors, purchase them from a recognized archival products company. Many "PVC-free" plastics that are available through discount stores are not archival. Archival

plastics include cellulose triacetate, DuPont Mylar polyester, polyethylene, and polypropylene. These pages are often available at a photo shop.

Tip #8 — Resources for archival quality scrapbooks include Creative Memories, Gaylord, Light Impressions, LBS/Archival Products, and other companies that offer archival quality products.

Tip #9 — Attach your photographs, postcards and other items with archival photo corners. Mylar mounting corners are often available from a photographic supply store and are recognized as archival. Avoid using tape as much as possible since it will eventually cause yellowing and may "ooze" and cause items and pages to stick together.

Tip #10 — Attach newspaper clippings to the pages with a water-soluble or washable, non-toxic glue stick. Two brands that may be used are 3M Scotch permanent adhesive glue stick and Loctite Desk set glue stick. Cut your clipping long enough so that you can create a hinge for the glue.

Tip #11 — Make sure to identify the origin of your clippings, photographs, and other memorabilia. Provide the date, the source of the item, names, and places.

Tip #12 — Flowers and other objects can be put into a polyethylene zip-lock bag then attached to the page using white cotton thread.

*Send your preservation questions to:
The Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium
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An archival quality storage box provides a high quality storage enclosure for scrapbooks.

Judging a Book by Its Cover: Academic Institutions vs. Public Libraries

— *A Preservation Viewpoint by Marie Kelzer*

Experience has taken me from working as a Conservation Technician at the University of California at Berkeley to managing the Preservation Program at San Francisco Public Library. The conservation techniques and treatments for circulating collections are the same, but the way books are presented and used by the staff and public is different. These differences intrigued me and caused me to wonder if others in libraries have considered them.

Sometimes it seems that preservation can be a contradiction of terms in the library world, especially in a public library where the desired objective is to preserve old materials only if the final appearance looks the same as the original publisher's bindings or as when new. Purchasing a new copy is viewed preferable to rebinding, although it is not cost effective.

The public library generally serves a public as diverse as the community it represents. Subject matter of the materials varies as much as the publishers' bindings. Popular or best selling titles are purchased in large quantities which are expected to wear out and be withdrawn in a short time leaving a few copies in the collection on a permanent basis. These usually end up in the Preservation Department for repair or binding. Whatever the title, the book's outer look is very important to public libraries. Its appearance is regarded as a marketing tool. The cover needs to look shiny and new and the pages should not have any smudges or much indication of wear. The contention is that people generally browse the collections for a book. If the cover is not colorful, distinguishable from the others on the shelf, readable or visually pleasing to the eye, the public will not pick the book up or check it out.

The academic library attracts people looking for specific areas of study rather than eye-catching material. Marketing is not an issue. The items checked out are dependent upon areas of study. Academic libraries may also be concerned about the outer appearance of a book but it is secondary. Content and availability are the highest priorities.

Dust Jackets

More dust jackets are seen in public libraries than academic libraries. From a preservation standpoint, I have found that dust jackets covered with mylar protect the book's case, however, they create problems in four areas. 1. Loose hinges are found on books with mylar jackets because they act like straight jackets restricting the natural movement of the book and thus straining the joints. 2. If a book is

sent to be rebound at the bindery, time is spent saving the jacket, matching it up with the book when it returns, then discovering the dust jacket does not fit snugly over the new binding. 3. When the dust jacket becomes soiled, time needs to be spent recovering the jacket, over and over, with mylar. 4. Attachment methods for the dust cover to the book is another preservation problem. Tape traditionally has been attached with one end adhered to the book's outer cover and the other end on the dust jacket flap over the paste down inside the cover. This tape, over time, mars the cover of the book. Attaching the tape on the dust jacket flap to the outer cover of the dust jacket allows taping exclusively to the mylar, but makes the tape visible on the outside creating a visual problem. Academic institutions do not as a rule hold onto dust jackets unless they are of archival value. It is what is in the book...the content...that is seen as more important.

Pamphlet Binders

Items bound in archival pamphlet binders are troublesome to the public library because the call number label does not always fit on the spine. Shelving pamphlet binders together creates a shelf of the same spine color making all items appear the same. Having clear spines to view the title may be an answer for some libraries but for others the overall design or look of the pamphlet binder is objectionable. Pamphlet binders do not have the look of a book, are not exactly sized to fit the material housed within and often have large squares (the outer edge of binder to edge of material within). This contrast with the uniformity of a Permabind/mylar bound book with equal 1/8 inch squares.

Academic libraries are more accepting of pamphlet binding treatment because of their initial concern being content. Although they would also like to see smaller squares on the pamphlet binders it would require a wider stock of sizes in the library binderies.

Rebinding

The challenge in a public library from a preservation viewpoint is to provide a binding that is not only structurally sound and cost effective but looks pleasing to the eye. Rebinding entirely satisfies few public libraries. In order to provide a durable, structurally sound cover, the graphics of the dust jacket or paperback cover is lost.

Permabind/mylar covers are an option, but the binding is inferior to a c-cloth or buckram binding due to the nature of the material. The mylar binding is harder to flex and crease at the joint; the adhesive

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Some, but not many, are to be rebound and then boxed.

According to Deborah Wender, Director of Book Conservation at NEDCC, these materials have presented a challenge because the condition and quality of the paper vary so much within each title. "We are used to performing a uniform treatment for a title, but with this project there will be very different treatments within each title."

At every step of the project, those working with the materials have been charmed by the content of the programs. They enjoy the exposure to a bygone era, especially through the advertisements. According to Deborah Wender, the NEDCC staff who performed the alkalization thought the ads were hysterical, and wanted to make photocopies for themselves. A special favorite was Sparrow's splendid shoes, "the \$2.50 shoe that looks as good as a \$5.00 pair." Janet Heller remembers fondly the establishment that advertised its lady barbers, and curator Evelyn Ward cites the full page ads for Omega Oil, which promised a complete cure for all rheumatism pain.

Teamwork and collaboration have been the key to

the success of this project. The curator, motivated by her concern for the unique research value of the collection, has shepherded the flow of information and materials to the catalog and preservation departments.

The staff at NEDCC has continued the collaborative effort, checking back frequently with suggestions and questions, noting discrepancies, and working cooperatively with their different departments to optimize and integrate the treatment and microfilming processes. Some of the treatments were performed prior to filming, and others were completed after filming. Microfilm coordinator Shawne Diaz has been vigilantly inspecting each program to ensure that dates, titles, and targets are accurate and correctly sequenced before they go to the camera. Thanks to this fine collective work, a rich body of recorded history has been preserved.

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does not adhere well to plastic; the mylar wears first around the edges; and if the paperback cover is not completely flat bubbles form under the mylar accelerating the breakup of the cover. Also, if a book is rebound with either the sewing saved or pages fan-adhesive bound, the outside edges may not be trimmed to preserve the margins of the book. Although this may preserve the book, it does not make a new look around the edges.

In Conclusion

Adapting sound preservation principles to public library goals, practices and usage is a continual challenge. The nature of any library is to provide the patron access to the materials. Being accessible means that the items may be used, and therefore,

looks less new after each use. The most cost effective way to preserve materials is to rebound or repair the books before they are too soiled or damaged. Once this is done a book doesn't look new. Money, time, and staff restraints may hinder a book from reaching the binding or repair unit in time to save it from the discard pile, along with the inherent contradiction between what is desired and what is necessary to keep materials in the collection.

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The **Archival Binder Album** is constructed of 100 point 100% recycled binders board and pH neutral adhesives. We offer two options of covering material — Half Linen (cotton/linen) book fabric used extensively in conservation labs for books, archival albums, slipcases and ring binders; and acrylic coated F-grade library buckram which meets the abrasion resistance, tensile and tear specifications of the Library Binding Institute [LBI] standards for library materials. The binder album is lined with acid-free 80 lb. endleaf that is coated with an inert polyester. A pocket for spine labeling accompanies all binder albums.

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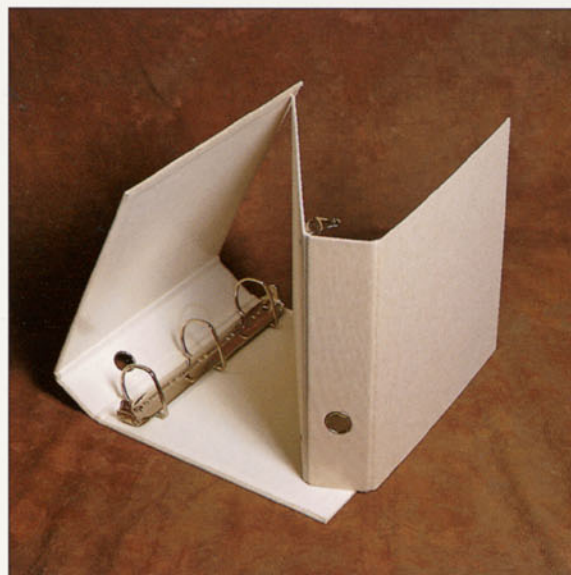
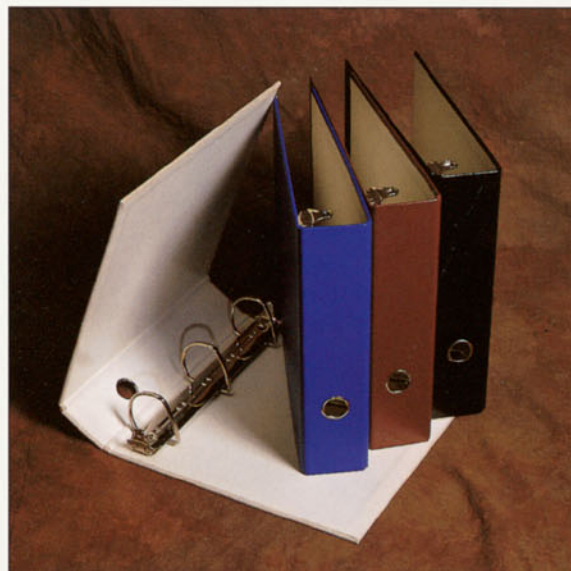
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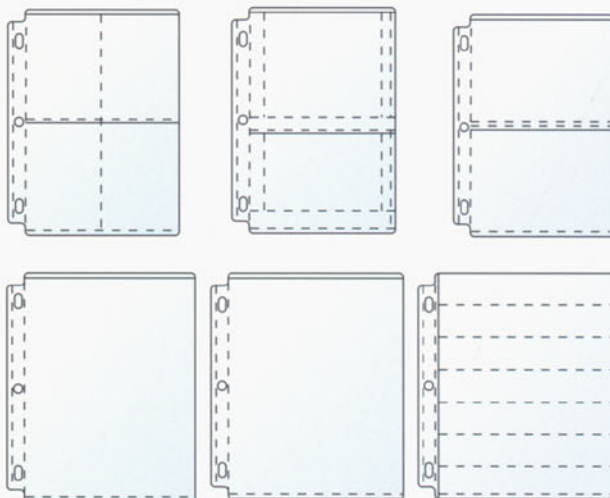
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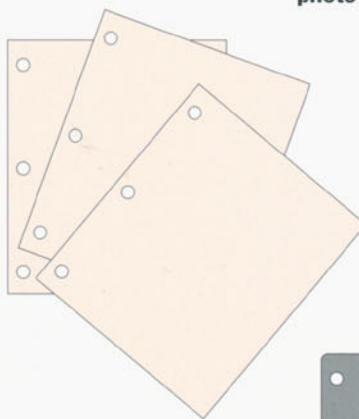
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