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A Critical History of Preservation:
A Study of Preservation Practices and Evolutions
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Abstract
Archivists and librarians have a vital position in preserving materials for future generations. This is an important topic for historians, who are constantly needing access to primary sources. With this project, I intend to study the history of preservation in libraries, archives, and museums. I will explore what various methods of preservation have been used over the past few decades. I will study which of these methods have become popular, which ones have become outdated, and what institutions have used which methods. My project will be split into two parts, the first being a literature review of various books written on preservation from its earliest iterations to books written in the “digital age.” After I complete this review, I will write a research paper based on my findings from these readings and interviews I have conducted with directors and workers at museums, libraries, and archives about their practices within their institutions. The goal of this research is to explore the history of preservation and the nature of the field as examined through how it has evolved over time.

Keywords: History, Preservation, Conservation, Libraries, Museums, Archives, Books, Artifacts
Introduction

I still remember when I first became intrigued with historic preservation. I was completing my internship at the Library of Congress in their preservation division. I was talking to my boss, the chief of the binding and collections care division at the time, about some of the moldy books in the conservation lab. She mentioned the Florence Flood of 1966, and I asked her about it because I had never heard of it before. She told me the story of the flood and how it had damaged hundreds of rare books and united preservationists from all over the globe. I was fascinated with this story and did more research about it that evening when I got home. That was, in a way, where this project began.

After this initial dive I was eager to learn more about the history of preservation practices in general. I received help from various mentors to find books and articles to read pertaining to the subject. This is where my research began, and I noticed early on that the literature mainly discussed large institutions and general trends. While this was interesting and useful for my research, I realized that I wanted to get a more full picture of preservation practices. I knew that I had to get more information on smaller, local institutions. I wanted to see how the different institutions varied in practices and facilities. As my research continued, I began to see several trends emerging, some were common no matter the size of the institution, and some dealt with the differences between large and small institutions. I argue that throughout the history of preservation practices and into today, change in technological approaches to preservation is the most important factor shaping how preservation is performed and how historical resources are accessed. Additionally, I argue that all institutions, regardless of size, scope, region, or mission, all share two common goals: these are to preserve their materials using the most up to date
methods that they have access to, and to provide public access to these materials in the most efficient way.

My research has two main parts. First, I researched the history of preservation practices in the United States and completed a literature review summarizing research from various books and articles written on this subject. This research provided the historical context needed for the fieldwork I then completed with local institutions. For the second part of my research, I decided the best way to fill in the scholarly gap regarding smaller institutions was to conduct a series of interviews at nine different museums, archives, and libraries. I created standardized questions and tried to visit different sites that represented the variety of types of institutions that exist, both in size and in intended audience. I then compiled all of this research and compared the various interviews to find common themes.

This essay is broken down into four sections. First, I begin the paper with the Literature Review and a study of historiography that describes the history of preservation practices. After this literature review, I then move into a Methodology section in which I explain my interview process and the sites that I visited. The rest of the paper is devoted to my findings at all of the site visits. I break this down into themes that I found across all nine sites. I end my essay with conclusions based on my findings, and of my own personal outlook on the future of preservation practices in the United States.

**Historiography and Literature Review**

Before launching into a review of the scholarly literature on this subject, it is important first to offer a comment on the scope of this analysis, as well as some definitions to help establish how different terms are used throughout the paper. To begin with, there is a clear distinction between preservation and conservation. This paper uses definitions based on those
offered by Michele Cloonan in her article “Whither Preservation?”. First, she states that “preservation refers to the care of library materials in the aggregate” (Cloonan 232). Preservation is a general term that refers to the preventative measures taken by museums, libraries, and archives to ensure the stability of their collections. It can also refer to the practices done by institutions to maintain their collections. Cloonan defines conservation as “the physical treatment of individual… materials” (232). Conservation is the work done to repair artifacts and paper after they have been damaged. This practice, based on Cloonan’s definition, can even be classified as a sub-practice under the umbrella of preservation more broadly. It is also important to note that in this study I have limited my focus on examining the preservation of books, papers, and objects. Preservation can also refer to historic buildings and landscapes, and conservation is used frequently to refer to the care of artwork specifically, but these are not covered in this essay.

The preservation of books, papers, and objects in the United States formally began in the mid-nineteenth century as librarians began to grow concerned about the longevity of their collections. In September 1853, delegates from twelve states and the District of Columbia met in New York City to discuss the best ways to improve public libraries in order to ensure important documents and books would be “preserved for posterity” (Higginbotham 5). The literature from this time period suggests that the primary concern at the time was what was causing damage to the collections. From the 1850s through the 1870s, several articles were published that focused on preservation topics such as binding, shelving, and storage, which were the most common subdivisions of preservation at the time (Higginbotham 7-8). These subdivisions would be the most explored areas of preservation for the following few decades as preservation evolved and expanded as a field within libraries and into the realm of public history. In 1880 a landmark preservation work was published, William Blades’ *The Enemies of Books*, and is widely
considered to be the first publication on the history of preservation practices. He focuses on ten different destructive forces against books, ranging from natural sources such as fire and water to human sources like negligence and bookbinding practices (Blades). This was an important step in the history of preservation because it demonstrates how people contextualized preservation during what is considered today to be the earliest stages of modern preservation.

Around the turn of the century, librarians began to shift their focus to preservation and maintenance of collections for future generations (Higginbotham 11). They began to recognize that future researchers would use as many sources as they were willing and able to save. By 1909, there were several ideas circulating around having local libraries decide collaboratively which institutions would preserve what documents and sources (Higginbotham 11). Many groups of libraries would be in contact with each other over what items to keep and share, laying the groundwork for what would become a widespread practice later in the twentieth century.

One major development came in 1930 with the development of microfilm (Darling and Ogden 13). This became the local library’s main form of “preservation,” and would remain the most popular way of copying a document until the late twentieth century due to its convenient way to store large collections of popular research titles in the most space-efficient way (Baker 97-98).

In the 1950s, many research and preservation initiatives began to appear. This aligns with the start of the Cold War, which saw a rise in governmental and political emphases on modern science and technology as solutions to diverse problems. Many sectors of the economy became increasingly focused on taking scientific approaches to problems as technology began improving after World War II (Baker 91). Not even the world of libraries was immune to this new mindset, resulting in an increase in laboratory research about preservation methods. First,
and arguably most importantly, William Barrow began research in 1956 investigating the “paper problem” (Darling and Ogden 11). Barrow opened a lab in Richmond, Virginia working within the Virginia State Library, where he developed several experiments that tested the durability and longevity of paper. He ultimately discovered that the poor production quality of books published between 1900 and 1949 was leading to their decay. Barrow’s research led to the development of several more research projects, including studies on adhesives, tapes, call number labels, and library binding performance standards (Darling and Ogden 13). Considering the prominent Cold War mentality, it makes sense that there would be a rise in funding for research to open labs that explore the scientific aspects of preservation.

There were two landmark events in the 1960s that must be noted. First, in 1964, Gordon Williams published a report titled The Preservation of Deteriorating Books: an Examination of the Problem with Recommendations for a Solution, in which he argued that the best way to preserve books and papers was to establish a central federal agency to collect, preserve, and distribute (microfilm) copies of every significant written record (1). This was a responsibility the Library of Congress accepted, and it would become a reoccurring ideal for the next decade. Second, on November 4, 1966, the Florence Flood occurred in Italy and launched the international conservation salvage project (Darling and Ogden 14). There was a worldwide response once people realized how many books, artifacts, and pieces of art were affected by the flood. Preservationists from around the world flew to Florence to help with the conservation of the damaged items. This resulted in many countries and their institutions implementing major preventative preservation measures to ensure that nothing as catastrophic as Florence would happen again. In fact, this preventative mentality lead to The Library of Congress hiring its first head of its new Preservation Department, who expanded their general preservation efforts in
1967 (Darling and Ogden 15). This new position led to two conclusions. First, a national preservation collection that had been proposed two years prior was unfeasible, but a list of best copies may be possible. Second, they determined that questions still remained at the time of the most efficient and economical method of deacidification, best storage conditions, and most secure sites to keep brittle books. The 1970s then saw a rise in library schools adopting preservation curriculum into their programs (Darling and Ogden 19). The movement to heavily fund scientific research in preservation practices lasted until about the mid 1970s.

The 1980s presented an odd transition period. During this time, Ronald Reagan was defunding several federal programs in the name of boosting the economy. As neoliberalism rose in popularity and practice, many public entities were defunded on both federal and state levels, including libraries (Centeno and Cohen 325). Reagan’s administration defunded several “secondary programs” whose resources could be used to make economic progress. “One of these [secondary programs] was historic preservation, whose sin, the right claimed, was that it constrained the ‘free market’ from demolishing the nation’s built inheritance whenever it was profitable to do so” (Wallace 178). While this was an extreme stance even when it was proposed, it spoke to a point that had always been an issue for libraries, archives, and museums. Space was always a primary concern for these institutions, and this was a major theme in the preservation literature of that era.

From the late 1980s into the 1990s people began to realize that microfilm was not lasting as long as they had hoped that it would. The film was deteriorating, text was fading, and librarians realized that they needed to find new ways to preserve information (Baker 171). As technology evolved, the World Wide Web went live in 1991, and personal computers became more common. For museums, archives, and libraries this ushered in the possibility of digitizing
collections. Especially as time has gone on and technology has improved, digitization has become the number one practice in all of these institutions. There are current ongoing debates about whether digitization is the infallible evolution of preservation. Proponents are quick to point out that digitization has increased access in a major way (Smith). Some advocates even say that a digitized version is more important than the original copy, which can be controversial even among other supporters (Weller 7). The critics of this mindset believe that the original should still be preserved, even after it is digitized. Maintaining an original copy is the true aspect for preservation, and while digitization is certainly useful for access, it is not the same as preserving the document or object. A similar debate can be observed with microfilm. Some newspapers were discarded once it was microfilmed. Digitization is certainly more accessible than microfilm, but just as microfilm is now an outdated form of accessing information, there is a similar fear regarding digital formats. One has to wonder if new ways of storing and reading information will emerge and cause digital formats to be obsolete. Currently there has not been such an evolution in digital formats, but it is certainly a possibility seeing that it took sixty years for microfilm’s successor to be developed. Due to this, my conclusion is that digitization does not replace preservation of an item, just as microfilm was not supposed to be a form of replacing preservation. This is the most important modern trend that can be observed. There are also questions about collection ethics that are more important now than ever due to space becoming increasingly scarce as time goes on. In 2020 this is important to consider as technology continues to evolve. Preservationists must maintain a grasp on what is being developed that can aid them but be weary not to view these new measures as replacements. In the last decade there has also been an increased focus on STEM jobs, so this history is important to see what a new
scientific mindset can mean for the world of preservation. We must document current trends so that their evolution over the next several years are able to be studied.

**Methodology**

My purpose in this study is to take the history of preservation practices laid out above and find out how and if the methods discussed above are currently recognized or practiced at various institutions in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States that house and preserve books, historical documents, and/or historical artifacts. My goal is to discover which of the aforementioned preservation methods have become popular, which ones have become outdated, and which institutions have used particular methods. To learn more about each institution, I have conducted a series of interviews at these institutions. In completion of this project, I interviewed archivists, librarians, and museum workers at nine different organizations.

The types of institutions are divided into three categories: museums, libraries, and archives. It is important to get samples from all three types because they each cover the preservation of different types of materials. In general, museums focus on preserving 3-D objects; archives focus on preserving two-dimensional (paper) objects; and libraries focus on preserving books (Lyon, Nix, and Shrum 57). This scope allows for the study of many aspects of preservation. Within each category, I selected three institutions of varying sizes to interview. These span from local, small-scale institutions, to larger statewide or community-wide operations. Within each group, I have selected two places from Virginia and one example from a different state. This is important for the scope of this project, allowing for more information to be collected from various states instead of focusing on one state as a representation of the historical trends studied.
At each institution, I kept the interview questions as similar as possible. It is important to keep the questions and interview style uniform in order to ensure an easy comparison of the data collected within each interview. If each discussion had widely varying questions, and the answers were completely different for each interview, it would be extremely difficult to accurately compare the responses, which could make some information unusable, or lead to false comparisons due to the differences in information provided. There are some questions that are naturally institution specific. For example, I asked the libraries and archives about microfilm, which is not as much of a concern, if one at all, for museums. It should also be noted that each interview also included follow up questions to the narrator’s responses, but these were natural and, while not uniform among all interviews, they are important to getting as much information as possible from the conversations. At the end of each interview, the narrator was given a gift card to thank them for their involvement in the project. When allowed, the collection was also toured, especially in accordance with the information the narrator shared in the interview.

With all of the categories, I visited three institutions, two in Virginia and one out of state. I also tied to have institutions with varying sizes and missions. First, I studied museums: two small, local museums, one in West Virginia and one in Virginia; and a state-level museum. Next, I visited libraries, and I interviewed workers at a public library, a state library, and a university library. The last set of institutions studied were archives. The archives represented were a public archive found in a public library, a corporate archive, and a university archive. It was interesting to see how the audience and size of the institution shape their practices.

**The State of Preservation Practices Today**

I conducted my fieldwork at the aforementioned libraries, archives, and museums over the period of February 5, 2020 to March 18, 2020. Below, I have broken down the cumulative
findings from my research into four sections. I have broken my research into common themes that I found within the interviews. Each section covers a common topic that every interview touched upon. I have done my best to accurately represent what was presented to me at the site visits and use this information for a comparative analysis of the institutions. I begin by discussing how preservation standards are addressed at the various institutions that I visited. I then discuss the amount of access that these institutions had to conservation materials or services. After this I explore how microfilm still plays a role in several institutions today, much to my surprise. Finally, I end with a section on digitization, the most prevalent topic today and in the interviewees’ conversations about the future.

Differing Levels of Functionality.

An important starting point is addressing the differences of the institutions that were visited. I purposefully picked institutions both large and small, from a library that serves an entire state to a small museum that serves a local community in West Virginia. This scope allowed for me to explore the contrast between the different facilities and what they have access to. In general, the larger institutions had not only bigger facilities and collections, but also more resources available to them. The smaller institutions, in turn, had to be more creative with their resources. An example of this disparity can be found in the first site I visited and the largest site I visited. The first site was a small archive, so their humidifier for rolled and folded documents was a plastic tub with a layer of gridded plastic to put the document on and set into the tub. Meanwhile, the largest site, a state-run institution, had two professional grade humidification domes, which is a dome attached to a table that introduces moisture into the dome and humidifies the item placed on the table. This contrast is to be expected, but I wanted to give a clear example of the differences between these various types of institutions.
One difference between the various sizes of institutions were their mission statements and the scopes of their collections. The larger the institution, the broader the subject matter and the types of materials that their collection housed. The same trend was seen in smaller institutions that had more limited space and diversity in their collections. A lack of space was an issue expressed by all of the smaller institutions that I visited. If their operation was limited to one building in a small town, they did not have the option to accept everything that came to them as donations. Many of the sites I visited told me about their donation processes and how they had to be mindful of where and how they would store and preserve an item if they accepted it. While institutions with more space available had clear mission statements that controlled the items that they accessioned, it was not an issue at the forefront of their minds when accepting donations.

Another disparity came in how they are able to preserve their items. Each site visited is doing the most that they possibly can to take care of their collections. Some of the smaller institutions wished that they had the ability to do more. Most sites are making sure that items are kept in the best environment for each specific type of object. Multiple sites had climate-controlled storage or stacks areas and made sure to monitor the conditions the collections were housed in. Others had to make sure the items were in dry condition and sheltered from intense light conditions. All but one of the sites used archival materials to store their items in, such as acid free boxes and tissue paper. The only site that did not was the public library who does not have many historical documents to protect, so their focus was instead on maintaining their stacks. It was encouraging to see how passionate everyone I spoke to was about taking care of their items, even if they were limited in what they could do, and on a very limited budget.

One subject everyone agreed on was the need for more funding. No matter the size or scale of the institution, I heard a unanimous call for more funding. Even the largest institutions
cannot keep up with their collections due to budget constraints. It is costly to pay for archival materials, and to either pay for conservation services or materials. The larger a collection gets, the more that these resources are needed. For smaller institutions they need the funds to gain access to these materials in the first place, then need more funding to pay for maintenance of the collection, as well as more materials as the collection grows. Funding is always going to be needed by these institutions to ensure that they can properly care for their materials and cover any preservation or conservation costs as they are needed.

Conservation Access.

One aspect of the institutions’ practices that I was curious about was their access to conservation care for their collections. In studying the current trends in preservation, I was interested in how much conservation is done on items. The overall answer was that most sites send their conservation needs offsite. Only two of the sites visited had true conservation laboratories on their campuses. One library had equipment in their offices to perform minor repairs to their books, but they had to send most of their damaged items out to a third party. It is interesting to note that most of the third parties that the materials were sent out to were not always close to the sites. One site had to send its materials to a neighboring state to get its repairs done. This speaks to the small sizes of the operations at most of these sites. The localities are very fortunate to have these establishments in their regions, even if the operations were small.

A surprising finding of my interviews was that not one site reported having a regular schedule to check the stacks and/or collections to see if they need conservation work done on them. I was expecting at least a few of them to have a system in place to inspect the stacks or high-use collections at some consistent interval. Instead I found just the opposite. The largest
collection that I visited said that they check their books and manuscripts to see if they need repairs as they are processing the items for cataloguing. Two of the sites that I visited said that the items are checked as they are being looked at for an upcoming exhibit or display. Either when it is being looked at as a potential collection to be used, or as they are unpacking it to be put into the display, this is the main time that items are checked to see if they need any conservation work. Two other sites said that they are checking materials as they are going through circulation. Books and manuscripts are being inspected as they are checked in and out, or as they are being shelved. Unfortunately, these kinds of practices tend to overlook items that are not as frequently used. Sometimes an operation can only do its best with the time and resources they are given, and these are all important steps to ensure that the most used items are getting the care that they need.

*Microfilm: Not Dead Yet.*

A surprising trend I found was that almost every institution I visited was still using, or even depending on, microfilm. Based on the language used in the sources consulted for my literature review, it seemed as though microfilm was an outdated method. In fact, I went into these interviews with the hypothesis that these institutions would be phasing out microfilm and would be using and depending more on digitization methods. While I certainly had plenty of conversations about digitization and its impact on the sites that I visited, this did not immediately rule out the use of microfilm in these operations. This was not what I expected.

A couple of the institutions studied told me that some of their most important records exist solely on microfilm currently. Due to this, they do not anticipate moving away from microfilm any time soon. Two of them specifically said that even in the event that the materials were digitized they would not get rid of the microfilm. They consider this microfilm vital to
their current operation and do not want to dispose of the microfilm in the event that something happened to the digital versions. One institution is going through their microfilm collection and digitizing the images in house. They are doing this in particular for access to the information once it is made digital. Regardless, they intend to keep and maintain their multiple filing cabinets worth of microfilm.

One reason that many of the institutions are still invested in their microfilm collections is the issue of long-term access to digitized items. These sites have been using microfilm for decades. They have the equipment for it, their patrons are used to using it to access information, and they know that it is stable. Digitization does not have this certainty associated with it. The institutions are not as used to working with digital files, and in some cases, neither are their patrons. There is an uncertainty aspect of it, and this makes microfilm more attractive. They see it as dependable, and perhaps as more likely to survive in the long term as compared to current digital files.

It should be noted that these fears are not necessarily unfounded. Some of the professionals interviewed discussed the several file formats that have come and gone in the last few decades. One professional in particular lamented having to change files, for example, from floppy discs to CDs to digital. This was always a time-consuming process and speaks to the issue of access to information once it is converted. Of these three formats just listed, one is no longer widely used today, and it is difficult to find a machine that can read the information. All of these are valid questions about digital files and formats and can certainly make microfilm more appealing.

The other surprising factor in the popularity of microfilm was the quality of the film itself. Again, based on the research done for this paper’s literature review, I expected the
microfilm that was left at these institutions to be crumbling and in desperate need of repair and
digitization. What I actually found could not be further from this preconceived notion. All of
the institutions that I visited, with no exception, have maintained their microfilm collections very
well. This is especially surprising seeing how much it seems to be used, but they have made a
point to preserve their microfilm and have been very successful.

*Digitization is the Future (And the Now!).*

As seen in the literature review above, digitization is the newest trend in preservation and
has been since the 1990s. Unsurprisingly this was a large topic covered at all of the site visits. It
is in the forefront of every professional’s mind and is only growing in importance in the field.

As cited above, there is a great deal of debate around digitization practices and the different ways
to apply digitization. However, many of my findings were unanimously agreed upon by the
sites, or at least most of the sites, that I visited. It should be noted, when I say that the views
were unanimous, I mean everyone spoke to the same points without my prompting. My
questions were very open ended and allowed for various views and points to be made in the
interviewers’ responses. Regardless, they all spoke to the same points and tended to show the
same, or similar, views. This was true regarding a variety of aspects about digitization.

One debate mentioned in the literature review above is the question of whether
digitization is a form of preservation or not. In all of the institutions that I visited, none of them
believed that once a document was digitized that they were finished with preserving it. All of the
institutions inquired believed in the need to maintain the original artifact even after it had been
digitized. Only one archivist that I spoke to mentioned getting rid of any kind of document post-
digitization. This archivist told me about how the previous year they had a massive collection of
a popular academic journal. They digitized all of the issues and did not see a need to continue to
maintain the physical copies. They checked with other institutions in their area and knew that another nearby library had the physical copies that they were still maintaining. Due to this, they felt comfortable getting rid of their physical copies. Their students still had access to the digital files of the journal, but now they had additional shelf space that they could use for future archival acquisitions.

It is important to note that many institutions are regarding digitization as a tool to assist with preservation. Namely, they see digitization as the best way to keep original copies stored for longer periods of time as people are able to interact with the artifact or manuscript in its digital format or a printout of the digital version. This is important because it minimizes human contact with the object. Brittle paper is handled less, and images on these old documents and maps are exposed to far less light. This maintains the object of these papers, books, etc. while still allowing researchers to gain access to the unique information that is recorded onto them. While still maintaining these original documents, the researchers who are looking into the history of the document or object itself is able to interact with them. For the researchers that simply want the information presented on them, however, preservation is a great way for both the general researchers and the institutions to get what they want.

One distinction that each site made is the difference between digitized and born digital materials. Not every institution is dealing with born digital materials, at least on a large scale, and many of the professionals interviewed approached born digital items with an attitude of “not dealing with these items yet.” They recognize that born digital materials will increase in number as time goes on, but they are not accessioning significant collections of born digital items. A major concern, whether they are dealing with these materials or not, is having the storage space available for these materials. Storing these items requires servers and digital storage space. This
then competes with the space that is storing the materials that have already been digitized. This is an important distinction, however, and it was good to see it recognized at all of the various institutions.

Alongside this is the simple fact that the majority of people are now accessing the information they need for research online. This is the biggest draw of digitization to all of the institutions that I met with. All of the professionals placed a major emphasis on the access that is possible with digitized items. For example, from the story above, once the academic archive digitized the journal they had on their shelf, their students were then able to access the digital scans from their own laptops. This was a major talking point of the academic librarian that I spoke with. The general public, and especially college students, enjoy the ease of access that digital formats provide. They no longer need to go into the library, or the archive, or the museum to research a topic. They can do so from the comfort of their home, or dorm room as it were. This was also a major aspect of the work of the corporate archive. They are constantly getting requests from their (self admittedly very niche) customers who are unable to make it to the physical archives. They therefore make the majority of their revenue on selling digitized versions of their documents. It takes a lot of labor and hours at such a small institution to digitize a large book of documents or a logbook, for example. Digitization is a major help with granting access to a wider constituency of people outside of the local people who can come into the physical archives, which is a major incentive for institutions to digitize their collections.

One issue that many institutions have when digitizing their materials is choosing what is most important and therefore deserves priority attention. In smaller collections it can be easier to recognize what is used most often and therefore needs to be digitized so it can be used more often. On the other hand, some collections just have too many items to be able to choose a small
collection or two. For example, the Library of Virginia has a collection of around 159 million items. There is no good way to decide which books within that collection are far more important than the other millions of items. So, institutions of such a large size digitize as they can, but this is not always all-inclusive. Some institutions have a different approach and simply digitize upon request. As mentioned above, the corporate archive digitizes items as researchers contact them to ask about specific items. This is how they are choosing what is taken care of first, depending on customer needs. All of these are viable ways to approach such an issue and it is interesting to compare all of these different methods.

One sentiment that every institution shared was that digitization is the future of preservation, in some form or another. It is important to note that this was in response to an open-ended question about the future of preservation in general. This question unanimously received responses about digitization and its uses. Professionals see it as an amazing tool to grant access to their materials and the information that they hold. A couple of institutions raised concerns about the uncertainty of digitized files and their longevity. We are not yet certain how consistent file formats will remain in the foreseeable future and beyond. Regardless, all of the professionals agreed that digitization is not going away anytime soon, and it will almost certainly continue expanding.

**Conclusion**

One reoccurring theme throughout my research is that preservation is frequently linked to access. Even in the earliest days of preservation there were discussions of how to ensure that patrons of various libraries would have access to different books and documents. As time went on, digitization was introduced and became the best way to duplicate and distribute items. Today digitization is the most popular method of ensuring access, with even the smallest of operations
utilizing this technology. Another theme that can be noted throughout preservation history, from its beginnings until today, is that most preservation efforts have emphasized improving conditions for their collections before doing anything else. The earliest meetings of librarians focused on discovering what was causing damage to the books. Continuing to today, most small operations of museums and archives hold this mentality at their core, and there is an emphasis on rehousing and relocating collections to ensure that they are receiving the best conditions the institution can provide. One final theme from my research is that the influence of changing technologies was, and continues to be, inescapable for the field of preservation. There has always been an emphasis placed on developing new methods as quickly as possible. It is interesting to see how important access, collection conditions, and improving technologies have been to professionals throughout preservation’s history.

Based on my research, I believe that the future of preservation as a field will continue with a focus on the current trend of digitization. Technology is becoming more engrained in our society every day, and the demand for access to digital files will only continue to increase. I do believe, and hope, that we have learned from past mistakes and the days of discarding collections once they are reformatted are behind us. I think institutions recognize the value of the items that they have and the need to maintain that object, regardless if it has been digitized or not. New improvements will help preserve paper and artifacts better, but the key is to ensure the longevity of a new technology before using it for our important collections. As long as we look to the past, we will be able to see the importance of new preservation methods and the ability for the public to access the information found in libraries, archives, and museums.
Works Cited


