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News

ARCHIVAL PRODUCTS
A Division of Library Binding Service

Conservation, Preservation, Restoration: Terminology Should Assist Clarity

—by Joseph A. Settanni, CRM, CA, CPC

Unknown to the general public, controversies and arguments surround conservation, preservation and restoration as to their own true definitions, denotations and connotations. The purpose of this article is to help find usable definitions for each of these terms and to suggest proper denotations and related connotations for each term. Useful applicable principles will also be discussed in context.

Many relatively heated debates have taken place among professional conservators concerning the proper and exact meanings of such main terms. For more general purposes most people usually discuss and use these terms interchangeably. The basic movement toward an upward order of priority is from conservation to preservation to, finally, attempted actual restoration.

Conservation

Conservation will be defined as the overall or general attempt to prevent further damage and deterioration to documents, artifacts or entire physical structures such as an entire historical building and internal structure. Amelioration of the broad effects of acidic contamination in paper documents would be an example of a conservation-oriented effort.

For all documents, this includes removal of paper clips, staples, pins, cellophane tape, strings, rubber bands or other destructive fasteners and their proper replacement with chemically inert plastic clips. Some institutions prefer to use stainless steel paper clips, but others remain suspicious of ever leaving any metal in direct contact with paper. At this level of archival work certain degrees of basic care are taken within reasonable limits. The storage of records in acid-free archival folders and boxes and maintenance of those boxes in a temperature and humidity controlled archives room is preferred whenever possible.

Items could also be placed in a vacuum-sealed chamber filled with an inert gas such as argon, since oxygen is such a highly reactive gas. *Preventative maintenance* is the key idea put forward at this level of initial concern, as with the plastic archival encapsulation of documents along with the attempt to remove as much air as possible from inside the created envelope or sealed sleeve. The effort is made to keep the original object, piece of paper, museum artifact and entire building rather than to duplicate or preserve the information or image though various options such as digitization through optical scanning, microfilming or acid-free copying. Acid-free repair tape can be used if needed as well as nonabrasive cleaning pads. Importance is heavily placed upon preserving the original, which is essential for museology, not archival work. For archives the medium is not the message; the information is the archives, regardless of the medium involved. Museums must always retain actual original artifacts for their very reason to exist.

–continued on page 2

Conservation, Preservation Restoration *cont. from page 1*

Theoretically speaking, if all the documentation held by the National Archives were reduced to a single microdot or optical disc, then that information would then become the archives, meaning that all the paper media could be discarded as merely superfluous. However, historical, evidentiary, sentimental, memorial, commemorative and other values would always rule out simply throwing away the actual originals of the Declaration of Independence or Constitution.

Tactile historicity resides in the physical object itself, contrary to all pure archival theory. For library materials, with the exception of the institution's possible collection of rare books, the normally duplicative nature of books and periodicals makes conservation the substantive issue, rarely concerned with preservation, much less restoration. Of course, incunabula can call forth some tremendous efforts at physical restoration, yet another exception to the overall rule regarding library materials.

Major natural disasters, such as the flood in Venice, Italy in 1966, have dramatically advanced the causes of research, experimentation, scholarship and actual application of new and improved techniques and methods of cultural salvage work

For archives, libraries and museums, there are questions of physical need of the object under consideration for repair, salvage or extensive preservation, intent of the work activity, degree of effort expended, full range of the costs involved, available professional or volunteer labor, and many other interrelated factors faced by any public or private institution not possessing an infinite budget.

Preservation

Preservation is the specific effort to not merely stop but reverse the various negative and unwanted effects of destructive chemical and other agents that can destroy documents, artifacts or entire physical structures. The meaning of this term is usually taken to be much more comprehensive than just simple conservation. Advanced conditions of care are thus required such as gaseous and liquid treatments applied to papers for eliminating their acidic content.

Laboratories dedicated to pursuing preservation work and research are involved at this logically higher level of concern regarding full-scale conservation carried to the level of applied science. For paper-based documentation, the preservation of the information is the goal, not the artifact itself, unless there are major historical, celebrational or other reasons to retain the original.

Restoration

Restoration is the ideal goal of attempted reconstruction toward achieving the entire renovation of documents, artifacts or physical structures to their original condition. A virtually limitless level of expertise is called upon to fulfill any theoretical end thought to be necessary for restoring objects. Ambitious, applied restorative science assumes the existence of supposedly unlimited budgets devoted to a maximum understanding of absolute preservation as complete restoration.

Consortiums of laboratories, if needed, are often solely dedicated to small, medium and large-scale restoration projects of many types encompassing whole collections or entire buildings. Once the restored object exists in its renewed form presumably significant efforts will be used to maintain it at whatever cost is deemed appropriate. This is why many experts would logically contend that restoration is more of an ideal to be aimed at than any final result actually achievable in its total sense of continuing perfection. All material things, sooner or later, decay; not even the pyramids of Egypt, as a most famous example, have been able to withstand the continuing assaults of either tourists or air pollution.

Professional Choices to Make

Institutions must decide, based upon their own professional curatorial judgments, whether to apply techniques and means that serve either conservation, preservation or restoration. Many choices cannot be axiomatically made in favor of one versus another when some contingent matters may impinge upon judgment. Such a major decision is never easy to make, especially if historical, cultural, aesthetic and other considerations may enter into what is seemingly a simple objective judgment. Two problematic examples, the first a famous one and the second of local particular interest are chosen to better help illustrate the many difficulties involved.

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), an enthusiastic supporter of the Loyalist side (mainly pro-Communist) in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, had painted his cubist work *Guernica* to commemorate the 1937 incident involving the Basque town of that name. Today, this extremely

–continued on page 4

Customer Focus: Minneapolis Public Library Preservation for Permanent Collections

The Minneapolis Public Library chooses Archival Products preservation products because of the construction qualities and "acid-free" "lignin-free" characteristics. The Library uses preservation products primarily for items that are part of the permanent collection. Bindery staff members noted that products from Archival Products are easy to work with, sturdy and function well for the needs of the collections. The Daige hand gluer, recently purchased by the library, is used in addition to a dry mount press, PVA and glue stick. They are still experimenting with the hand gluer, but have already found it works well for mounting replacement pages, errata, maps and for other basic repairs of the general collection.

"With more than 2.5 million books and non-printed items, over 2,700 magazine subscriptions and 75 different newspapers, the central library in the heart of downtown Minneapolis houses the most extensive collection of any library in Minnesota." http://www.mpls.lib.mn.us

Last year the bindery staff conducted one-day basic repair workshops for community library staff. The sessions consisted of a bindery tour and preservation overview on the care and handling of materials, repair demonstrations, and hands-on repair. Each community library staff member brought damaged books representing examples of common repairs they found in their libraries. Archival Products NEWS and product samples were used in the workshops and have also been used in the library's display case for exhibiting types of treatments performed in the bindery.

Music binders with spine wrap are an integral part of the music collections. These binders make the compositions easy to identify for storage and access purposes as well as for the general maintenance of the collections, often stored in vertical files. The music scores and sheet music are both sewn and stapled into the binders. The clear front binders with spine wrap offered exclusively by Archival Products are preferred for non-music folio items.

The Minneapolis Public Library also uses various thicknesses of Archival Products dark tan archival board. The board is used for phase boxes, wrappers and folders, replacing damaged covers on paperbound books of permanent value, as covers for large spiral bound items, and for oversized pamphlets. Through the Archival Products NEWS articles, the bindery staff has learned different techniques which they have applied for daily operations, specifically, a different technique for phase boxes printed in the newsletter a few years ago.

Mary Rathman is the Collections Maintenance Department Supervisor at the Minneapolis Public Library. She previously worked seven years for Campbell-Logan Bindery, a commercial bindery in Minneapolis and was a Mellon Intern at Johns Hopkins University in 1990. She has been with the Library for twelve years. The Library's in-house bindery, part of the Collections Maintenance Department, consists of three full-time employees, Linda Loven, Conservation Technician, Andrea Markov, Bookbinder and Sheila Elliott, Commercial Binding Clerk. The bindery staff have all been with the Library for over 10 years and demonstrate the highest preservation standards and craftsmanship.

LET OTHERS READ ABOUT YOUR LIBRARY IN ARCHIVAL PRODUCTS NEWS BY SUBMITTING INFORMATION BY PHONE INTERVIEW, FAX OR E-MAIL.

Contact Archival Products to discuss how you use Archival Products preservation enclosures and archival boards. If you haven't tried our products, you can discuss how you can apply these materials in your process with one of our representatives. Contact us at 800-526-5640 or archival@ ix.netcom.com

Conservation, Preservation Restoration *cont. from page 2*

world famous painting resides in the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York City. Picasso had stated his public intention that all contemporary art including his, ought to disintegrate and decay because the 20th Century was a time of disintegration and decay. This was the most explicit artistic sensibility and thesis, the clearly revealed culturally aesthetic pronouncement, favored by him in that era.

MOMA has presumably done its best toward the restoration of the painting, for the appreciation and viewing of many future generations of visitors, art critics and other people, as well as fulfilling what it logically regards as its curatorial responsibility and authority. Has this institution thus severely violated the artistic integrity of the painting? Surely, one creative option would have been to make an exact reproduction of *Guernica* and then just let the original rot away as was originally intended to complement Picasso's determined ideological, political, social, cultural, and aesthetic judgment. When conservation and other such related questions arise apparently these other matters are greatly discounted. The curatorial and institutional decision, instead, was made to save the original painting, regardless of the possibility of any duplication, meaning preservation, of the artistic image itself. This may appear to be the proverbial tempest in a teapot, but appearances can be deceiving. Ironically, MOMA may be said (unintentionally, one assumes) to have dishonored both Picasso's memory and the integral aesthetic sense and internal integrity of a work of art that the museum claims to highly prize and value. It is difficult to entirely separate and negate philosophical questions and issues from any cultural objects, whether celebrated internationally as art works or not.

Philosophical, political and aesthetic considerations can directly enter into considerations involving decisions of proposed conservation, preservation or deliberate restoration. What may appear, on the surface, to be an objective decision, based solely upon the best interest of the object's future existence and physical viability, could yet be the subject of a rational debate as to truly appropriate means and ends.

Restoration, as being a reasonable value to a conservator or museologist-curator, can come into conflict with other values that may be of much greater significance concerning the object under consideration. Does the object possess its own "reasoning" and being that ought not to be wrongly compromised whenever aesthetic purpose and reality is made known? Should an artifact's aesthetic integrity ever be violated in the external interests related to conservation, preservation or restoration? These are serious questions that ought not to be pragmatically evaded and avoided in perhaps saying, with Machiavelli, that the end justifies the means.

What is being currently viewed as Picasso's intended work of art is yet falsely presented in that it will never be allowed to naturally decay into dust, which then forever deliberately defeats, scorns, mocks, and obviously contradicts the artist's intentions. Restoration, or even efforts at simple conservation, are held to be of greater value than the work itself. Some purist critics would denounce this as being philistine and degenerate, as a modernist form of idolatry, making the worship (art as a cultural imperative) greater than the god (the actual work itself).

Regardless, MOMA has made its decision and must live with it. The larger overall point made here is that curatorial decisions are not always straight forward and uncomplicated issues solely dependent upon the cold, objective opinions of conservators. Other questions can intrude upon judgments that may supposedly appear to be simple enough as to how far efforts should go toward halting further deterioration, engaging in degrees of preservation, or making attempts at full-scale restoration.

A much more humble example of restoration versus conservation occurred at the Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest in Whippany, NJ. Five genuine though deteriorating and legally obsolete street signs from the City of Newark were donated to the Society. An offer was made and accepted for a willing volunteer to do conservation work on one of the signs, by removing the rust and then spraying on a plastic coating to halt further damage, due to iron oxide corrosion. Agreement was made that absolutely no restoration or further preservation effort would be attempted leaving it at the obvious level of wear currently existing and empirically observed. Why? It was reasoned that to restore it to what it looked like when it was new was absurd.

The historical, cultural and aesthetic values involved with the object would, therefore, be unnecessarily distorted and perverted. One might as well just make a brand new sign as a duplicate, instead of the added tremendous effort to restore the original. This conservation-oriented decision was a professionally valid curatorial judgment

–continued on page 5

Conservation, Preservation Restoration *cont. from page 4*

because the past aging of the street sign gave it historical authenticity and integrity, which would have been improperly violated by any restoration work, no matter how "well intentioned" such an effort might appear to be. Whatever decisions are made, they still need to be done according to certain defined principles. In archival practice, one basic principle of conservation is that of reversibility. Nothing ought to be done to a document that could not be undone, at least in a theoretical sense. For example, acid-free, water-soluble tape could be used to repair a torn piece of paper because, by soaking the paper in water, the tape could be removed without damaging the document in the process. Such treatment can be reversed with no unwanted and improper change in the physical integrity of the historical record. On the other hand, the digitization, acid-free photocopying or microfilming of it would, basically, accomplish the same purpose of preservation, though concentrating on saving the information, not the medium which would still be a very proper archival effort.

Conclusion

It is professionally suggested, that proper curatorial decisions ought always to be consciously made as to whether the primary goal in mind is one of three basic choices: conservation, preservation or restoration. The reasoning ought to be clear, defensible and prefaced upon an explicit set of known objectives. These can include reversibility, precautions against further damage or unwanted deterioration, saving and reproducing the image as the required (archival) information and making critical distinctions between an original and a duplicate.

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–continued on page 6

ARCHIVAL PRODUCT NEWS COPY DEADLINES

Summer issue: May 31, 1998
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Spring issue: February 28, 1999

Conservation, Preservation Restoration *cont. from page 5*

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Archival Products Research and Development Update

Archival Products, a Division of Library Binding Service [LBS], announced the research and development of new bookbinding fabrics during the Library Binding and Physical Quality and Treatment Joint Discussion Group meeting at the ALA Midwinter Conference in New Orleans. Many conservators who offered to participate in testing various fabrics for color, hand, thickness, folding, gluing, stamping and other attributes have turned in their observations and responses to a questionnaire. The results are being compiled and will be published in an upcoming issue of Archival Products NEWS.

Availability of several types of cloth with various attributes for conservation work is being sought by conservators and hand-binders. The cloths will be similar to vellum and linen-finished B and C cloths, linen-finished E-grade cloth, starch-filled cloth and a natural cloth with backing. Each will meet specifications for the type of utilization for which they are designed such as for binding, liners, special editions and drop spine boxes. Small quantity purchases will be available for conservators and hand-binders.

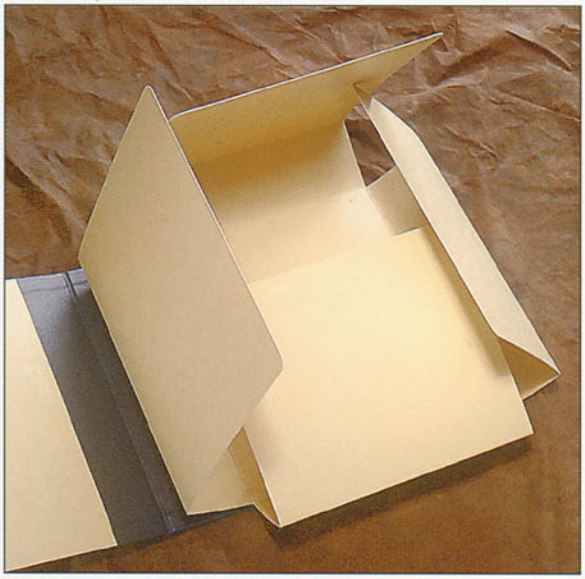
LBS continues to refine these future products and will introduce some of them within the next few months. We thank all who have participated, voiced their desires, given their time, opinions and test results to help make this joint venture possible.

Archival Products Focus

Music Score Enclosure

Archival Products initially fabricated this enclosure specifically to store a conductor's score along with the separate instrumental parts holding multiple scores together in one unit to simplify retrieval of the entire composition for the next performance. Since then, other uses have been discovered for the Music Score Enclosure such as book storage, a comic book series collection, and scripts.

We use a .060 dark tan archival board to construct the outer folder and a .040 dark tan archival board for the interior four flap scoring it at 3 inches to accommodate thick materials. The four flaps surround the score and are secured with Velcro buttons. The navy buckram spine is reinforced with .060 dark tan archival board for stability. This enclosure will safely store your compositions.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS:

- Outer folder is constructed from .060 dark tan archival board that contains a 3% calcium carbonate reserve, has a pH of 8.5, is acid-free and lignin-free.
- Inner enclosure is constructed from .040 dark tan archival board.
- Enclosure is scored for a 3 inch depth.
- All adhesives are acid-neutral polyvinyl acetate.
- Spine is made of navy acrylic coated buckram.
- Corners are rounded to 3/8 inch radius.
- Spine measures 3 1/4 inches wide.

For further information contact:
Millie Knee, Customer Service Representative
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web site: http://www.archival.com

Archival Products Focus

Academy Folders

Archival Products **Academy Folders** are constructed of .040 dark tan archival board, a dark brown C grade book cloth spine, and a 5 mil acid-neutral Mylar® envelope fabricated of transparent polyester and welded on two sides with an opening at the top and spine. This allows placement of photos or other display items without bending and unnecessary handling.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS:

- Outer folder is constructed from .040 dark tan archival board that contains a 3% calcium carbonate reserve, has a pH of 8.5, is acid-free and lignin-free.
- Interior envelope is 5 mil Mylar®.
- Folder is constructed using acid-neutral polyvinyl acetate adhesives.
- Corners are rounded to 3/8 inch radius.
- Hinge measures 1/16 inch with folder closed.

Newspaper & Map Folders

Archival Products **Newspaper and Map Folders** are a modified version of our academy folder. The folder, hand-crafted of .060 dark tan archival board and a dark brown C grade book cloth spine, has a 5 mil acid-neutral Mylar® sleeve mounted on the inside back cover. The Mylar® envelope, polywelded on two sides, stores and allows you to view your large fragile materials safely. The .060 folder provides a sturdy display without bending and unnecessary handling of the item and renders safe, flat storage of your newspapers, maps, prints, posters and other large items.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS:

- Outer folder is constructed from .060 dark tan archival board that contains a 3% calcium carbonate reserve, has a pH of 8.5, is acid-free and lignin-free.
- Interior envelope is 5 mil polyester Mylar®.
- Folder is constructed using acid-neutral polyvinyl acetate adhesives.
- Corners are rounded to 3/8 inch radius.
- Hinge measures 1/16 inch with folder closed.
- Spine is made of brown C grade book cloth.

For further information contact:
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