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Archival Conservation In Canada



Peter Bower, Provincial Archivist (left), had good reason to be delighted as he watched his Chief Conservator, Charles A.E. Brandt, assist Joy Cohnstadt, Deputy Minister of the Department of Cultural and Historic Affairs, when she cut the ceremonial ribbon to celebrate the opening of the new conservation laboratory for the Manitoba Archives.

The child is truly the father of the man. One cannot examine the present state of the conservation art in Canada without a glimpse at the past, however brief. The Ursaline Convent in Quebec City housed the earliest collection of paintings and artifacts in 1639. A few of the nuns who had received art training before they left France carried out some restoration work on their collec-

tions. The Montreal Art Association was founded in 1860. The first museum in Canada was opened in 1857 in the new Normal School in Toronto. In 1913 the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto came into being but no provision existed for the preservation treatment or restoration of the collections. From the early 1920s there were itinerant restorers passing through, but the first insti-

tution in Canada to have a full time in-house conservator was the National Gallery in Ottawa. It was started in 1932 by Eric Brown, the director, and George Harbour. In 1966 Parks Canada began their conservation laboratory in the Keyes Building on Kent Street, Ottawa. And in 1972 the Canadian Conservation Institute had its birth in the National Gallery. Nathan Stolow was

the first director, and indeed its founder. In 1975, C.C.I. and Parks Canada moved to their new greatly expanded laboratories on Innes Road and Liverpool Court, Ottawa.

I was studying at the Academy in Vienna in 1974 when I received a telephone call from C.C.I. inviting me for an interview for one of several positions open in paper conservation at one of the existing C.C.I. regional centers. I commenced work at the Atlantic Conservation Center in Moncton, New Brunswick in 1975. Another small laboratory was established in Vancouver and a third pilot project in Quebec in 1977.

These regional centers were closed on 31 March, 1979 due to severe federal government cutbacks on the National Museums of Canada, which includes C.C.I. as one of its programs. Staff were given the option of being transferred to Ottawa. I worked for C.C.I. in Ottawa until 1981 when I accepted the position of chief conservator at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. I was hired to design and establish a paper conservation laboratory in that institution. We are now planning a Manitoba Heritage Conservation Institute together with the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Museum of Man and Nature which will in time reach out to all of the small institutes in the province. We hope this will be partially funded by the Museum Assistance Programmes of the National Museums of Canada, which will provide financial assistance in support of in-house conservation facilities and staff as well. Unfortunately this program does not assist archival institutions, since they are neither museums nor art galleries, and hence

not part of the original mandate.

Conservation Activities Proliferate

There is tremendous conservation activity taking place across Canada today, since 1932 when Mervin Ruggles was hired as the first in-house conservator working in Canada at the National Gallery in Ottawa.

In the spring of 1974 the Peel bibliography on microfiche project was begun by the National Library of Canada. This was completed in 1979. The Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproduction was established in March of 1978 by the Canada Council. The first phase of the Institute's program entails the filming of the monographic Canadiana published prior to 1901. Future programs will cover twentieth century materials.

This type of project will protect thousands of books from repeated handling, but it will not halt acid decay in the papers of the items filmed. There is a need for mass deacidification. Records Conservation, an in-house facility shared by the Public Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada, has a nearly operational in-house mass deacidification system. It is called the Wei T'o Nonaqueous Book Deacidification System, and is designed to treat 5,000 books in seven days about 25,000 books annual. Still a pilot project, it is presently treating about 500 books weekly, at a cost of \$3 to \$4 per book. Dr. Richard Smith, inventor of Wei T'o, is developing this project. Records Conservation also has on-going restoration programs for the treatment of rare and scarce materials in their collections. It is the largest

in-house conservation facility in Canada with a staff of 24. Recently a training program for binder/conservators has been introduced with five people presently undergoing training.

The Picture Conservation Division of the Public Archives of Canada is doing a study on the salvage of photographic materials. The results of this study have been described in a paper entitled *Disaster Preparedness And Recovery: Photographic Materials*, which has been offered for publication by the authors, Klaus Hendriks and Brian Lesser.

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Other federal government agencies which have fine conservation facilities include the National Historic Parks and Sites Branch of the Parks Canada Program and the National Museums of Canada, including the Restoration and Conservation Laboratory at the National Gallery of Canada and the Canadian Conservation Institute (C.C.I.).

C.C.I. has enjoyed a successful mobile laboratory program, working with five mobile labs and covering all of Canada. In the past three years the mobile labs have visited 324 institutions. Emphasis is placed on preventive conservation. At present this program is being re-evaluated.

Representing some 300 government libraries, the Council of Federal Libraries established the Committee on the Conservation/Preservation of Library Materials in 1979 to assist federal government librarians in the conservation of their collections. The Committee has published a pamphlet, *Guidelines For Preventive Conservation*.

Decentralization, an Important Trend

The past several years have seen tremendous activity in the development and planning of conservation facilities across Canada. There has been a decided movement away from Ottawa into the larger cities across the nation. Provincial governments and other institutions are now active in conserving our literary and archival heritage.

The Atlantic Provinces established the Committee on Conservation of Library Materials in 1978. The committee has sponsored numerous projects such as conservation surveys, organized workshops to train library staff in conservation techniques, and been involved in disaster recovery. Dalhousie University through its School of Library Science in Halifax, Nova Scotia is offering a course in conservation management and techniques.

Although not yet operative due to the lack of a conservator, the Public Archives of Nova Scotia has set up a paper laboratory in its new Public Archives Building.

The Provincial Archives of New Brunswick has devoted funds to a conservation program. In 1977 an in-house conservation laboratory was opened. The province is planning a cooperative conservation program under which each of the five major institutions of the province will provide conservation service to the other institutions, each within its own specialization.

La Bibliotheque Naitonale du Quebec in the Province of Quebec has both a developing preventive conservation program and a restoration program. Ten years ago Les Archives Nationales du Quebec established a conservation laboratory which has the responsibility for conservation treatments of materials in all archival institutions in the province. In the Province of Ontario most major institutions have sound conservation programs and several have in-house conservation laboratories, mostly in the greater Toronto area. Of note are the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto, the Provincial Archives of Ontario, the Toronto City Archives, the Metropolitan Toronto Central Library, the Mills Memorial Library at the McMaster University in Hamilton, the School of Library and Information Science at the University of Western Ontario in London, and Queen's University in Kingston.

The University of Western Ontario offers a conservation management course. This course provides the opportunity for practical experience in the conservation shop under the supervision of a qualified conservator. Queens University offers a conservation course through the School of Graduate Studies and Research leading to the degree of Master of Art Conservation. The emphasis is on fine art and museum artifacts. In addition, three community colleges in the province provide some training in paper conservation as part of a three year course for museum technicians.

The Toronto Area Archivists' Group is very active, and includes librarians as well. The group sponsors conservation workshops and workshops on disaster prevention and preparedness. One of their publications which has been of great use across Canada is *Museum and Archival Supplies Handbook*.

The Prairies Provinces have been the last to develop conservation facilities. Indeed, before 1981, there were only two labs in operation: the in-house conservation laboratory at the Glenbow-Alberta Institute which serves the Glenbow Historical Library and Archives as well as other divisions within Glenbow, and a small paper conservation shop in Regina run by the Saskatchewan Archives Board. In Regina, with the planning of the new Provincial Archives, there is a provision for a really first rate conservation facility.

The Provincial Archives Manitoba

On 12 August of 1982 the Deputy Minister of Cultural Affairs and Historical Resources, Joy Cohnstadt, officially opened the newly constructed conservation laboratory at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, which includes the Hudson Bay Company Archives. This is one of the finest paper laboratories in North America. The laboratory occupies an area of 2,000 square feet and contains some of the most sophisticated equipment available: light table (6' x 10'); various stainless steel washing sinks, one being 6' x 10'; paper conservation table; a high quality water supply that calcifies the water as well; and more. In addition, nearing completion is the new fumigation chamber that has the capacity to vacuum freeze-dry documents and will have a catalytic destructor so that no gas passes into the atmosphere. A photographic conservation laboratory is planned as part of the overall conservation division. Presently there is a staff of three conservators. The staff of this laboratory is cooperating in the planning of the Manitoba Heritage Conservation Center which will have a program similar to that being developed in New Brunswick. Conservation work will be undertaken for sister institutions by the conservation staff of the Provincial Archives, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Museum of Man and Nature. The chief conservator of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba is coordinating a province-wide disaster preparedness plan.

The Provincial Archives of Alberta at Edmonton will open a large new conservation laboratory in 1985. The University of Alberta at Edmonton has set up a paper conservation laboratory to serve the Library's special collections.

There is considerable activity in our most western province, British Columbia. In 1979 the Provincial Archives of British Columbia hired a conservator to design and establish a conservation laboratory, which opened in 1982. In the autumn of 1981, the University of Victoria offered, in its program of Advanced Studies in Cultural Conservation, a course in paper conservation designed for conservators, librarians, archivists, and those responsible for artistic and historic works on paper. This course will continue to be offered. The instructor is the chief conservator at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

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completion of the building and before the lab was finished, the emphasis was on moving collections from old storage areas to the new stacks and identifying conservation needs in a general way. However, the entire collection of over 1,000 manuscript whaling logbooks and journals was examined. Survey sheets were compiled for each item which identified specific problems of binding, paper deterioration, pressure tape, pasted-in material, and the like. Results were compiled so that later we could identify and treat together volumes with similar conditions. Last spring, funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts, the lab treated 14 logbooks that had been covered with newspaper clippings, postcards, and other memorabilia in the best nineteenth century scrapbook tradition.

Every book and manuscript has travelled through our 36 cubic foot fumigator on its way to new quarters. We knew that some of the older storage areas had problems and we wanted to protect the new area from contamination if at all possible. By fall we had fumigated approximately 10,000 books, pamphlets, and manuscripts with the help of 20 volunteers who cleaned and loaded material onto book trucks before fumigation, and identified and shelved the treated material.

As part of the shelving process volunteers wrapped and marked binding problems. Later, when we had developed the box design that has now become standard, it was a simple matter to pull cripples off the shelf for boxing. Each box has a color-coded label which identifies the binding type (leather, cloth, paper) so that problems can be treated in batches of like material.

Also during that first summer, a team of three archivists, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, began cataloging the library's manuscripts. As part of processing each collection the archivists routinely cleaned the material more thoroughly than could be done during the moving phase. In addition they completed conservation survey forms for each collection which identify specific items or groups of material needing treatment. Again, the results will later be analyzed to provide a batch approach to treatment.

Insect Problems

Not all problems can wait. Last spring we discovered hide beetles busily at work on baleen and tortoise shell objects in the museum. The culprits were iden-

tified with the help of Dr. Ralph Mankowsky, an entomologist at the University of Massachusetts, and dispatched by a trip through the fumigator. Later in the spring we received a large collection of seventeenth to nineteenth century family papers which must have spent some time in the dark corners of a barn, attic, or chicken coop. They were very dirty and as a precaution archivists have been wearing masks and brushing surface dirt into dishes of water and vacuuming regularly with a portable cleaner to keep the dirt confined. Nevertheless we were worried. We felt we needed more assurance concerning the results of fumigation than was provided by the indicators we routinely place in the fumigator. Dr. Fred Kazama at South-eastern Massachusetts University made several trips to take cultures and analyze them in his laboratory.

To summarize, the conservation program at the Whaling Museum Library has begun by surveying the condition of library material, designing and implementing a boxing project using volunteer help, addressing problems involving fumigation, and treating a group of manuscript volumes formerly used as scrapbooks. Recently the installation of a ledge along the back of our largest sink has enabled us to convert it periodically to a humidification chamber where we can treat the large number of rolled plans, maps, and charts in the Society's collections.

Each step in the development of the conservation lab and program, while not necessarily progressing methodically from a "grand design," has been preceded by investigation and comparison of both methods and supplies, often assisted by serendipity. In the course of investigating the facilities of local binders, for instance, Robert Hauser discovered that a binder of town records routinely discarded nineteenth century ledger bindings. Now we collect them and give our two lab volunteers practice in soaking and removing paper from old boards, while at the same time building up an inventory of nineteenth century material which can later be used in repairing or rebinding manuscript volumes in our own collections. As part of the logbook survey we identified makers and/or distributors of the blank volumes wherever possible, and we are currently compiling information on binders and binders' tools used in the New Bedford area.

The conservation laboratory was initially conceived and subsequently designed for treatment of library materials. Conservation of photographs is done

next door by the Society's assistant curator, and works of art on paper, paintings, and other museum objects have always been sent out to specialists for treatment. Nevertheless a resident conservator becomes the first point of attack for a wide variety of conservation problems and Hauser has found himself designing exhibit cases for Japanese scrolls, preparing material for museum exhibits, investigating Japanese screen-making techniques, and de-bugging scrimshaw. Under the circumstances the library administrator must be philosophical — but also grateful for the support that has taken the library conservation program so far along the road during the past year and a half.

Virginia M. Adams
Librarian
Old Dartmouth Historical Society
Whaling Museum

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Unmentioned in this short summary of conservation activity in Canada are the numerous fine art and artifact conservation facilities across the nation. The focus here has been archival conservation. And one has to agree that within the last decade we have suddenly become aware of the pressing needs of our paper artifacts and have taken a giant step forward in dealing with these needs.

In closing I would like to acknowledge the great assistance given me by Joyce M. Banks, rare books and conservation librarian, National Library of Canada, especially in reporting on activities in eastern Canada.

Charles A.E. Brandt
Chief Conservator
Artistic and Historic Works on Paper
Provincial Archives of Manitoba
Winnipeg

Preservation News

Grants

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) has awarded the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) \$5,000 for consultation and meetings to plan a national study and to develop guidelines on methods of duplicating historical photographic negatives.

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has awarded the University of North Carolina/Chapel Hill \$19,965 for cataloguing and preserving historical photographs in their Southern History Collection.