

# Preservation Assessment and Needs: A Case study with the University Archives

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# Western College Memorial Archives



- Founded in 1998, the Western College Memorial Archives is dedicated to acquiring and preserving any and all materials related to the Western College for Women.
- The Western College Memorial Archives serves the university, local and international communities by collecting, preserving and providing access to primary resources on the culture and history of the former Western College for Women (1853-1974).

# Size and Format of Collections

- 81 collections housed in 476 boxes including:
  - 820 postcards
  - Journals, diaries, scrapbooks
  - Monographs
  - Correspondence
  - Minutes and business records
  - Photographs
  - Newspapers
  - Videos, dvd's



Western College Class of 1877

# Goal of the Survey

- Goal of the survey – to assess the preservation needs of the Archive in order to develop a comprehensive Preservation Plan
  - The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) defines a preservation planning as:
    - A process by which the general and specific needs for the care of collections are determined, priorities are established, and resources for implementation are identified.
    - Its main purpose is to define a course of action that will allow an institution to set its present and future preservation agendas.
    - In addition, it identifies the actions an institution will take and those it probably will never take so that resources can be allocated appropriately.

# Survey Process

- Performed an in-house survey, rather than use an outside consultant
- Variety of resources available
  - Assessing Preservation Needs: A Self-Survey Guide by Beth Patkus
  - NEDCC website has numerous resources available in their Preservation Leaflet series
- Working with staff to perform assessment
  - Made several visits to the archive to discuss specific, oftentimes recurring problems
  - Communication with staff throughout the process was key

# Elements of a Preservation Program

- **Environmental Control**—providing a moderate, stable temperature and humidity, and controlling exposure to light and pollutants.
- **Disaster Preparedness**—preventing and responding to damage from water, fire, or other emergencies.
- **Security**—protecting collections from theft and/or vandalism.
- **Storage and Handling**—using non-damaging storage enclosures; using proper storage furniture; cleaning storage areas; using care when handling, exhibiting, or reproducing collections.
- **Reformatting**—reproducing (e.g., microfilming, photocopying, or digital imaging) onto stable media collections that are fragile, damaged, valuable, and/or much-used.
- **Binding and Repair**—using library binding for appropriate materials (e.g., those that are not valuable as artifacts), performing minor in-house repairs (e.g., encapsulation, surface cleaning, minor paper repair).
- **Conservation Treatment**—having valuable items such as manuscripts, journals, maps, and drawings treated by a qualified conservator. Since treatment is the most time-consuming and expensive strategy on a per-object basis, most libraries choose to treat only unique or otherwise valuable artifacts.

# Areas of Assessment

- Environment
- Condition of materials
- Policies and procedures
- Staff Identified preservation issues



Stacks area at Western Memorial Archives

# Environment

- Small space, not a lot of room for growth
- Stacks area has been prone to flooding in the past– this issue was addressed with the installation of a drain pipe
- No known temperature issues
- Lighting in the stacks does not pose a problem, however, the lighting in the reading room has caused damage and fading to several items on permanent display in the area

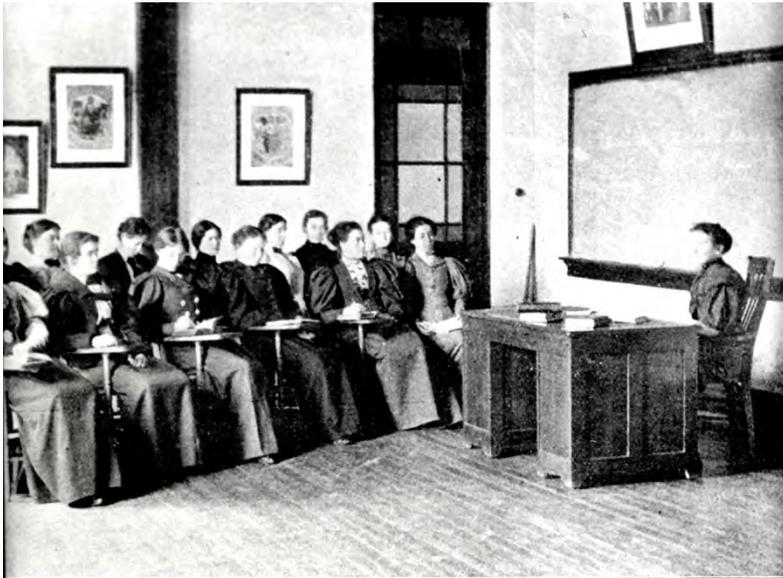
# Condition of Materials

- Overall condition of materials good – same basic issues you find in most libraries and archives: brittle books and documents, unwieldy scrapbooks, general wear and tear
- Several collections of non-traditional items, such as trophies, that pose a storage issue
- Several collections of higher risk materials, such as film and negatives, and digital materials



Helen Peabody Daguerreotype

# Policies and Procedures



The Jessup History Room. Class in Mediaeval History.

- Disaster preparedness – Yes
- Collection development – Yes
- Handling and use – Yes, basic and brief
- Display/exhibit – No

# Staff Identified Issues

- Housing material in appropriate archival storage
- Lighting in reading room (damage to exhibited materials)



Western Memorial Archives reading room

# Assessment Results

- Overall, the survey yielded satisfactory results in most areas, especially condition of the materials and both the collection development policy and disaster preparedness
- A few areas that could use improvement
  - Proper housing, shelving, space are all concerns
  - Damage from lighting/exposure
  - Well documented policies

# Proposed Solutions

- Prioritize areas of the collections for preservation action
- Identify preservation actions required to keep collections in the best condition possible for the longest time possible - identifying what will have the greatest impact on the largest number of items
- Prioritize the needs of the collections and identify steps necessary to achieve the required preservation actions
- Develop policies for handling and use, exhibit/display, processing new acquisitions etc.

- Collaboration between university departments
  - Collaboration between Archives and Preservation to address problem areas (see poster for examples)
    - Working together to set up workflows for identifying and carrying out treatment options
  - Open communication with departments about collection policy
- Funding and grants – what actions will have the greatest visibility (and greatest effect on future funding opportunities)

# Questions?