At least from the founding of the British Museum in 1754 until the present day, librarians have been burdened with a lot of books—too many, it has seemed, given limits to funds and storage capacity. From early on they or their employers have sought, and found, reasons for getting rid of these burdens: as being mere duplicates; as being obsolete in content; as useless for any imagined reader; as unfit for use because of poor condition; as about to turn to dust; as conveniently superseded by digital facsimiles; as too expensive to preserve outside the imagined shared custody of a few remnant copies. None of these more or less creditable excuses takes into account the critical value for historical scholarship of access to many different copies of material books, which the MLA asserted in its “Statement on the Significance of Primary Records” (1995; excerpted in the bibliography below).

In his provocative treatise *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (1979, 2017), Michael Thompson, taking a long view of the life span of cultural objects, proposes that all such things occupy a continuum that ranges from objects that are consumed quickly, such as foodstuffs, through objects of impending obsolescence, such as cars and dishwashers, through objects of human-scale durability, such as books and houses, to objects of extreme durability (durable both as material objects and as socially valued objects), such as diamonds. All objects, except for those imagined to be at the limit, are transient, tending to lose value over time *(vanitas)*! unless arrested from decay and loss by active, value-renewing, human intervention. Before they are entirely lost, and before they may be revalued by intervention, many relatively durable cultural objects will linger in a limbo-like state that Thompson calls *rubbish.*

Large academic libraries house millions of such objects. Although Thompson just mentions the relative durability of books, his theory well accounts for their mutable values. Despite the fact that leaves of one copy of the Gutenberg Bible were repurposed from rubbish to serve as

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1 Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 27, 122. The third edition of the *OED* heads the article for “rubbish, n., adj., and int.” with the specification “Chiefly British” (a detail added since the second edition). The possibility that *rubbish* might be salvaged is less vivid in American English, which tends to merge it with final, unreclaimable *trash.*
protective covers for some boys’ schoolbooks, most of the copies of that book that have survived have been valued and conserved by antiquarian book dealers and bibliophiles, finding refuge in the relative security of special collections of rare books. Most surviving incunabula, too, have avoided or escaped from limbo to enter rare book libraries. Many Early Modern books, up through the eighteenth century, have benefitted from such caution and curation. However, most books that were published industrially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, being multitudinous and until recently lacking special advocates, still linger in the rubbish category, even on the shelves of academic libraries, where eventually many will be revalued and either rescued to the care of special collections or cast out to the dumpster.

The MLA’s “Statement on the Significance of Primary Records” argues against the dumpster option, preferring to save material evidence that is essential to any comprehensive humanistic study of the past. That call to action has not had a compelling effect. Instead, the adventitious digitization by Google (from 2004) and by Microsoft (from 2006 to 2008) of a large tranche of the printed archive has inclined many librarians to let go of the books. Thanks to the happy initiatives of proprietary corporations, librarians’ patrons (students and professors) wound up with virtually free access to digital facsimiles of many millions of books: why, then, should librarians pay scarce dollars to retain and store actual copies on their overcrowded shelves in stack space that could be repurposed for communal purposes such as makerspaces and conference rooms? Current policy advanced by OCLC (formerly Online Computer Library Center), the leading global library cooperative, and by other library organizations, recommends and enables the discard of actual books if digital facsimiles, supposed to be adequate “surrogates,” are accessible. On those terms a lot of books are destined to the dumpster. Precedent had already been set for such a purge by JSTOR’s digitizing backfiles of academic journals, a massive project launched with the support of the Mellon Foundation in 1995 (coincidentally the same year that the MLA’s “Statement” was published), which enabled the discarding of long runs of those journals by hundreds of libraries, to alleviate the “cost disease” that such institutions had to suffer as “nonprofit service-intensive organizations.”

It is time now, if it is not already too late, for scholars and librarians to consider why, how, and how many copies of books that were published in the nineteenth century and later should and can be reclaimed from their vulnerable status as rubbish, before they are destroyed.

The bibliography that follows takes a long view of this question, noting arguments that date back to the seventeenth century for the discarding or retention of books. It is intended to


inform critical discussion by scholars and librarians. Perhaps it may help to save some books. The immediate occasion for this review is a roundtable discussion scheduled for the next annual meeting of the MLA, January 2021, titled “A Lost Cause? ‘The Importance and Challenge of Preserving Research Materials in Their Original Forms.’”\(^5\) I hope that that discussion and this survey will prompt action by other MLA members (including MLA administrators), and by members of other scholarly and library organizations. Certainly the books that are not saved will be lost.

In a crisis scene, triage is often thought to be an efficient and even a fair response. Instead of our trying to save all the books some may deserve special care. Those books that bear marks of readers’ engagement have been well spoken for by Andrew Stauffer and others.\(^6\) Another special kind is books that contain illustrations. Even at the level of mere information (aside from the question of artifactual presence) illustrations fared worse than text in the quick scanning that they suffered early in this century. They were not “preserved” by digitization; they were always degraded. They should not be discarded too.

The poor quality of mass-produced digital scans of graphic images in books, which renders the resulting image files inadequate for many serious purposes, is generally acknowledged in the literature that is surveyed below.\(^7\) No one denies it. When librarians claim, as they often have done, that the “information” in books can safely be “preserved” by digitizing it, it is assumed that the main information of interest in a book is the part that has already been alphabetically encoded, in a kind of pre-digitization, and that “lossless” remediation can be achieved, alphabet to bit and back to alphabet. However, that assumption cannot be made for analogue images, for which remediation must always be more or less “lossy.” Such inevitable losses deface countless “surrogates” of illustrated books proffered by HathiTrust and the Internet Archive. To preserve the illustrations many copies of the actual books must be saved. That is, actual, material copies of books that contain illustrations have a special claim for actual, material preservation and curation on a very large scale.

For books with less obvious special claims than annotated books or illustrated books, how many copies should be conserved? As many as possible, says the MLA “Statement,” since every copy is different. “Up to five copies when possible,” according to HathiTrust.\(^8\) A not quite random census of “commitments to retain” so far, evident in OCLC’s WorldCat (FirstSearch), shows the following results:

\(^{5}\) The background of that roundtable discussion is detailed [here](#). Like the rest of the MLA meeting it will be conducted online.


\(^{8}\) 2019 Weltin.
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston, 1962)  
Libraries Worldwide: 3505 (2 Committed to Retain)

Langston Hughes, *Collected Poems* (New York, 1994)  
Libraries Worldwide: 1900 (5 Committed to Retain)

Libraries Worldwide: 1822 (7 Committed to Retain)

Wanda Gág, *Millions of Cats* (New York, 1928)  
Libraries Worldwide: 1716 (3 Committed to Retain)

Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York, 1966)  
Libraries Worldwide: 1404 (4 Committed to Retain)

Libraries Worldwide: 1051 (1 Committed to Retain)

Libraries Worldwide: 730 (3 Committed to Retain)

Libraries Worldwide: 141 (1 Committed to Retain)

*Harriet Martineau’s Autobiography* (London, 1877)  
Libraries Worldwide: 55 [no commitment to retain]

*Harriet Martineau’s Autobiography* (Boston, 1877)  
Libraries Worldwide: 21 (1 Committed to Retain)

That’s a beginning. Why should we do better? Some answers are indicated below.

Full disclosure: Most of this bibliography was prepared during the pandemic using liberalized access to digitized facsimiles of books (thanks to HathiTrust and Internet Archive) and of articles (thanks to JSTOR). Thanks also to Greg Eow and Leslie Howsam for drawing attention to several items.

Hyperlinks direct to whole works or particular pages, as appropriate. Mentions of the MLA’s “Statement on the Significance of Primary Records” (1995) are highlighted.

“[The Overseers] shall ... in writing sette downe and appoint (if euery one of them agree and condescend thereunto ...) some bookes to be exchanged for better Editions, and some in like sort to be cleane made away, as being wholly superfluous, or of no estimation.” (58–59)


“Your library is reckoned here to be ill managed, by the account I have of some that know it. ... If you want roome for modern books, it is easy to remove the less usefull into a more remote place, but not to sell any, they are devoted.” (556)


This is the statute that established the British Museum, which would house, along with other important collections of books and manuscripts, Hans Sloane’s “Library of Books, Drawings, Manuscripts, Prints, Medals, and Coins, ancient and modern, Seals, Cameos, and Intaglios, Precious Stones, Agates, Jaspers, Vessels of Agate and Jasper, Chrystals, Mathematical Instruments, Drawings, and Pictures.” This large and miscellaneous collection grew considerably in later years. Specimens of natural history were transferred to the British Museum, Natural History (now the Museum of Natural

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10 It may have been in keeping with this statutory permission to renew its stock of books that the Bodleian Library parted with its distinctive copy of Shakespeare’s First Folio. Falconer Madan, Strickland Gibson, and William Gladwyn Turbutt, *The Original Bodleian Copy of the First Folio of Shakespeare (The Turbutt Shakespeare)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).


12 “Could this be a hint of an idea which more than two centuries later developed into the New England Deposit Library?” (editorial comment by Lovett; see 1900 Eliot below).
History) in 1881. Books and manuscripts were nominally assigned to the British Library, a new entity, in 1973, and were removed to its new building in 1992.

An important stipulation in the Act required that “the ... Collection be preserved intire [sic] without the least Dimunition or Separation” (12)—a stipulation in keeping with Sloane’s testamentary wish “that the ... collection may be preserved and continued intire in its utmost perfection and regularity,” which he expressed again, verbatim, in a codicil. A congruent stipulation held that “a general Repository” be provided to house “the several Collections, Additions, and Library,” and that “they shall remain therein and be preserved for Publick use, to all Posterity” (29–30).


This petition, after rehearsing that 26 Geo. II, c. 22 required the Trustees of the British Museum to secure its holdings “to remain and be preserved ... for the Publick Use, to all posterity,” and noting furthermore that those holdings continued to increase in number and bulk, stated that “there are now, and there may hereafter be, in the various Departments of the British Museum, many Duplicates of printed Books, Medals, Coins, and other Curiosities, which it would be proper to dispose of, in order to make room for others, but the same cannot be done without the Authority of Parliament” (198–99). Therefore the Trustees prayed “that they and their successors ... may from time to time, and at all Times hereafter, be impowered [sic] to exchange, or sell, or dispose of, the said Duplicates, and to lay out the Money to arise by such sale, in the Purchase of other Things that may be wanting in, or proper for, the said British Museum” (199).

1767. “An Act to enable the Trustees of the British Museum to exchange, sell, or dispose of, any Duplicates of printed Books, Medals, Coins, or other Curiosities; and for laying out the Money arising by such Sale, in the Purchase of other Things that may be wanting in, or proper for, the said Museum.” Acts and Votes of Parliament, Statutes and Rules, and Synopsis and Contents of the British Museum. 3 vols. in 1. London, 1808. 58–63. (Cited as 7 Geo. III, c. 18.)

“Whereas there are now, and there may hereafter be, in the various Departments of the British Museum, many Duplicates of printed Books, Medals, Coins, and other Curiosities, which it would be proper to dispose of, in order to make Room for others: May it therefore please Your most Excellent Majesty, that it may be enacted ... That it shall and may be lawful to and for the ... Trustees, and their Successors, or any Five or more of them, at any Meeting assembled, and they are hereby authorized and impowered, from Time to Time, and at all Times hereafter, to order any Duplicates of printed Books, Medals, Coins, or other Curiosities, to be exchanged for Manuscripts, Books, Medals,

Coins, or other Curiosities; or to direct any such Duplicates of printed Books, Medals, Coins, or other Curiosities, to be sold or disposed of, and the Money to arise by such Sale, to be laid out in the Purchase of Manuscripts, Books, Medals, Coins, and other Curiosities, that may be wanting in, or proper for, the said Museum; [26 Geo. II, c. 22], or any other Act, Matter or Thing, to the contrary thereof in any wise notwithstanding.”¹⁴ (60–61)


> “Of purchasing entire libraries I know not whether the inconvenience may not overbalance the advantage. Of Libraries collected with general views, one will have many books in common with another. When you have bought two collections, you will find that you have bought many books twice over, and many in each which you have left at home, and therefore, did not want; and when you have selected a small number, you will have the rest to sell at a great loss, or to transport hither at perhaps a greater. It will generally be more commodious to buy the few that you want, at a price somewhat advanced, than to encumber yourself with useless books.” (Barnard 1:v)

> “Of purchasing entire libraries I know not whether the inconvenience may not overbalance the advantage. Of [a] Library collected with general views one will have many books in common with another. When you have bought two collections you will find that you have bought many books twice over, and many in each which you have left at home and therefore did not want, and when you have selected a small number you will have the rest to sell at a great loss, or to transport hither at perhaps a greater. It will generally be more commodious to buy the few that you want, at a price somewhat advanced, than to encumber yourself with useless loads.” (Redford 310–11)


Facsimile of Wellcome Library copy, annotated with notes of prices and purchasers. For example:

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Lot 246, Iordanus Brunus Nolanus, *De specierum scrutinio et lampade combinatoria Raymundi Lullii* (Pragæ, 1588), sold for 7 shillings.

Lot 247, Giordano Bruno Nolando, *De l’Infinito Universo et Mondi* (Venet., 1584), sold for 11 shillings and sixpence.\(^{15}\)

The sale yielded the Trustees £468. Harris comments on it and the sale of 1769: “These two sales of duplicates (plus the six others which took place in the period from 1805 to 1832) provided much needed funds for the Museum, but the effect on the collections of the Department of Printed Books can only be regretted. *There can be little doubt that many items which were not true duplicates were lost from the library, and numerous books with interesting provenances and manuscript notes were also disposed of.* A few of these were re-purchased in due course, but the vast majority have disappeared with all the loss of information which this involves for those who wish to study the provenance and growth of the library’s collections.”\(^{16}\)


> “WHEREAS amongst the several Collections and Additions thereto, which, from Time to Time, have been and may be placed in the British Museum, there now are, and hereafter may happen to be, some Articles which are unfit to be preserved therein; and it would be beneficial for the said Institution, that the Trustees thereof should have Power to select and dispose of such Articles either by Way of Exchange or Sale, so that such Articles, or the Produce thereof, be applied in obtaining other Things, which may be wanting in, or proper for the said Museum:

> “May it therefore please Your Majesty, that it may be enacted … That it shall be, and may be lawful to and for the said Trustees and their Successors, or any seven or more of them (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor of Great Britain, or Lord Keeper, and the Speaker of the House of Commons for the Time being, respectively, or any two of them being of the Number) present at any Meeting specially assembled for that Purpose, to order that any Articles in the said Museum, which they then adjudge to be unfit to be preserved therein, shall be exchanged for Manuscripts, Books, Medals, Coins, Statues, or other Things more suited to the existing Collections and the Nature of the Institution, or to direct the same to be sold or disposed of, and the Money to arise

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\(^{15}\) The book was actually printed not in Venice but in London by J. Charlewood (STC, 2nd ed., no. 3938). The copy remaining in the British Museum was reproduced by University Microfilms in 1954.

\(^{16}\) Harris, *op. cit.* (note 14 above), 21 (emphasis added).
by such Sale to be laid out in the Purchase of Manuscripts, Books, Medals, Coins, Statues, or other Things, which may be wanting, in, or Proper for the said Museum, any former Act of Parliament, or any other Matter to the contrary thereof in anywise notwithstanding.”


Or English books, neglected and forgot, Excite his wish in many a dusty lot: Whatever trash Midwinter gave to day, Or Harper’s rhiming sons, in paper gray, At ev’ry auction, bent on fresh supplies, He cons his Catalogue with anxious eyes: Where’er the slim Italics mark the page, Curious and rare his ardent mind engage. (6)


“Gravity itself must own that there is something rather ridiculous, in the excessive eagerness with which very worthless productions are frequently sought, for the merit of rarity alone.” (641)


“Unique Copies. A passion for a book which has any peculiarity about it ... is indicative of a rage for unique copies, and is unquestionably, a strong prevailing symptom of the Bibliomania.” (65)

17 John Ferriar, physician.
18 Richard Heber, book collector; see 1834 below for obituary.
19 Thomas Frognall Dibdin, bibliographer and cleric. His most influential work, The Bibliomania, a satire on and advertisement for aristocratic book collecting, was amplified in several later editions.

“It is presumed that the number of duplicate volumes in the two collections [i.e., the collection of George III, and the library of the British Museum, to which it would be annexed] does not exceed 21,000. ... as this estimate is formed from a comparison of the Titles only, it is probable that upon comparing the Books themselves several of them would not be found to be strictly Duplicates.” (7)


“Mr. Croker.20 ... It was for the committee to understand what they meant by the word duplicate; for if there happened to be one edition of Virgil in one place, and another in another, surely no man could call the one a duplicate of the other.” (1123)


“He has been known seriously to say to his friends, on their remarking on his many duplicates, ‘Why, you see, Sir, no man can comfortably do without three copies of a book. One he must have for his show copy, and he will probably keep it at his country house. Another he will require for his own use and reference; and unless he is inclined to part with this, which is very inconvenient, or risk the injury of his best copy, he must needs have a third at the service of his friends.’ This was a handsome speech to address to a borrower; but it cannot be denied that Mr. Heber’s duplicates were often

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20 John Wilson Croker, MP for Bodmin (Tory); frequent contributor to *The Quarterly Review.*
purchased from that passion of Collectors, which demands not only that an article should be possessed, but that it should also be kept from the possession of others. The fact was that collecting had grown into an uncontrollable habit, and that it was only satisfied in him, as in others, by an almost unlimited indulgence. The same desire of possessing duplicates, or (which is the same thing under another form) preventing other Collectors obtaining them, was not peculiar to Mr. Heber, but is more remarkable because exhibited on a larger scale and with ampler means.” (107)


“All the great establishments founded by Governments to promote science and the arts, museums, collections, galleries, and libraries, possess, besides the riches they spread out to view, others which their own abundance condemns to actual sterility: these are duplicates, which are necessarily, but with regret, consigned to dust and oblivion.” (1)

Proposes that it is better to exchange such duplicates with other institutions that lack them, as has been done successfully in Europe.


“JOINT RESOLUTION for the exchange of books and public documents for foreign publications. Be it resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the librarian, under the supervision of the Committee on the Library, be authorized to exchange such duplicates as may be in the library for other books or works. … Approved, July 20th, 1840.” (55)


“[Mr. Milnes.22] … Are you decided in your opinion, that however, many copies of a book there are accumulated in this establishment, none of them should be got rid of in any way whatever?

“[Antonio Panizzi:23] If the Commissioners would enter into the detail that must be gone into before we can say that a work is an exact duplicate of another, they would see the difficulty attending it; for instance, I get a rare edition of Homer or Shakspeare [sic]; before we dispose of the copy which would be sold as a duplicate … we must ascertain that it has no manuscript notes, and the book must be carefully collated with the other

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21 Nicolas Marie Alexandre Vattemare, French ventriloquist, philanthropist, and proponent of free libraries.
22 Richard Monckton Milnes, MP for Pontefract (Conservative Party); literary author.
23 Anthony Panizzi; keeper of printed books at the British Museum from 1837.
copy. ... I do not know that a book is a duplicate till I have carefully compared it with the book I keep.” (267)


“Sir GEORGE LEWIS24 said, ... No doubt what ordinary persons would call duplicates were not so called at the British Museum. If a person had ten copies of Shakspeare [sic] or Milton in his library he would call them duplicates; but the British Museum did not consider copies of our classical authors of different dates as duplicates.” (43, 46)


“[Antonio Panizzi:] If a book has manuscript notes, and another has not, they are not duplicates; if one is printed on large paper or on vellum, and another on small paper, they are not duplicates.” (31)

“Duplicates, in the sense of all bibliographers[,] are identical copies; for example, the plan which you have before you, and the one that I have in my hand, are duplicates; but, if there was another plan which was half an inch wider than this, it would not be a duplicate. ... I am not for procuring and keeping several copies; I am for keeping several editions, and even all editions, which is a very different thing from copies.” (32)


“MR. SPENCER WALPOLE25 said, ... It was necessary to explain that there were three classes of duplicates in the Museum. In the first place, there were books which were supposed to be duplicates, but which were variations of and additions to the original work. In a national institution like the British Museum it was of great importance that such editions should be preserved, partly for the purpose of showing what changes took place in the author’s thoughts, or mode of dealing with his subject, and partly to illustrate literary, historical, and scientific questions with reference to the opinions formerly entertained by the author. These editions were not in fact duplicates, and the House would see that it was not desirable to part with them. The second class comprised real duplicates of works which were also to be found in the King’s and the Grenville Libraries. But the copies in these libraries were of a much finer character, some being printed on vellum, and others having manuscript notes and annotations, so that the duplicates were required for the use of ordinary readers, in order to preserve the more valuable copies from unnecessary risk of injury. The books in the third class

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24 George Cornewall Lewis, MP for Radnor (Liberal Party); secretary for war, previously chancellor of the exchequer and home secretary; classical scholar.

25 Spencer Horatio Walpole, MP for Cambridge (Conservative Party); former home secretary; trustee of the British Museum.
were also duplicates; but it was difficult to say what limit ought to be put to them, inasmuch as they were dictionaries, encyclopædias, modern histories, and works of great interest, in daily use by the students—from 200 to 300—in the Library. He thought the House would see from these facts that the question could not be easily dealt with.” (737, 738)


“MR. MUNDELLA\textsuperscript{26} suggested that the Museum would confer a great advantage on country museums by sending interesting objects to them which were not of sufficient importance to justify their being placed in the National Collection.

“MR. SPENCER WALPOLE said, ... With respect to the suggestion of the hon. Member for Sheffield (Mr. Mundella), the Trustees had again and again considered the important question as to how far any duplicate works either of literature or art might be sent to other collections. At present the Trustees had no such power, and it ought only to be conferred upon them, in his opinion, with the greatest care; for many things, especially books which appeared to be duplicates, were in fact new editions, and in the interests of literature and science it was of the highest importance that distinct editions should be preserved.” (1796)


“Mr. G. BULLEN,\textsuperscript{27} ... As to the so-called duplicates at the Museum, a large number were not really duplicates at all, and it was only by the retention of supposed duplicates that four distinct editions of Bishop Poynet’s catechism printed in England were found to have been published in the same year, and by the same printer, viz., John Wolf, London 1553.” (143)


“The library ... may be likened to a reservoir, into which streams of considerable volume are always pouring, and from which there is no outlet. Under this process, there is necessarily a large accumulation of what may not inaptly be described as literary sediment, that is, books either of ephemeral interest, or small original value, or not adapted to the use of a public library like that of Quincy. These are placed upon the shelves, and, though very rarely, if ever, called for, remain there, taking up room needed

\textsuperscript{26} Anthony John Mundella, MP for Sheffield (Liberal Party).

\textsuperscript{27} George Bullen, keeper of printed books, British Museum, from 1875.
for works of a better class or in more immediate demand. This condition of affairs, common to nearly all libraries, may go on through a number of years; but it is obvious that the time will come, soon or late, when a measure of relief must be applied. Shelf room is nowhere unlimited; and in the case of the Crane Memorial Hall, must soon be exhausted.” (136)

“As the result of an experience now stretching over more than twenty years and of careful observation of the use made of the library, the Trustees concluded that it ought to be regarded, and in future developed, as a collection of books for popular reference, consultation and reading, and not as a collection designed for the use of scholars or specialists. It is, in their opinion, both futile and unwise for a city like Quincy, in the immediate vicinity of Boston, to attempt to have a large general library.” (136–37)

“In order to keep the library within ... limits, a judicious and continual process of winnowing is necessary; all duplicates and books of ephemeral interest, nearly all books relating to specialties and most rare books being from time to time removed from the shelves, and either destroyed or sent elsewhere.

“Acting on this principle, the trustees during the past year have removed from the shelves of the Thomas Crane Library 1,070 duplicate volumes and 1,075 other volumes, principally public documents—in all, about a tenth part of the collection.” (138) 1893. “The Problem of Small Libraries.” The Nation 56 (1447): 210–11.

Responds to the 22nd annual report of the trustees of the Thomas Crane Public Library (1892 above).

“It is easy to put away, by a broad rule, duplicates and whole classes like public documents; but when it comes to passing upon works of ephemeral interest and works not often called for, one needs to be a very broad minded and a very well-informed trustee, with plenty of leisure. There are degrees of value even in what is ephemeral, and minds capable of comparison and reflection will often gain as much by studying the taste and mode of thought of a previous generation as by familiarizing themselves with those of their own.” (210)

“If the giving of books such as the library would not be justified in buying is discountenanced, there will be a general falling off in the quality of such gifts; and, finally, the library will be denied its share in the custody of the rarer works accumulated in the neighborhood of Boston. A catastrophe might any day overtake any one of the metropolitan libraries in which the trustees would concentrate these treasures. Such risks of total destruction should be distributed.” (211) 1893. “Sifting as a Library Policy.” Library Journal 18 (4): 118–19.
Reprints much of the 22nd annual report of the trustees of the Thomas Crane Public Library (1892 above).

“In the recent (22d) report of the trustees of the Thomas Crane Public Library, Quincy, Mass., the advantages to be gained by restricting the book capacity of small or middle-sized public libraries are considered. In all libraries the tendency is toward a vast accumulation of matter, the bulk of which renders the complete up-to-date cataloguing of the library impracticable, and thus seriously impairs its usefulness. A year ago this condition confronted the trustees of the Quincy Library. They have dealt with it in a summary way, and in so doing have made a new departure in library methods.” (118)


Abstract of Green’s presentation to the fifteenth general meeting of the American Library Association. Reported in more detail in 1895 (see below).

Green reports on and advocates “the Quincy plan” for maintaining collections in small public libraries, which involves discarding books that are not of general interest—as had been directed by the trustees of the Thomas Crane Public Library (see 1892 above). Discussion of this presentation showed the plan to be controversial (see 1893 below).

“A small library, well catalogued, is more available and useful than a large library poorly catalogued. The library will in no sense be made a special reference library, in view of its proximity to the great special libraries of Cambridge and Boston.” (119–20)

“The necessity of ‘weeding’ a library wisely; broad-minded intelligence is needful in making decisions as to what books are no longer useful. In many cases there is as much need for the services of an expert in discarding books from a library as in selecting them for it.” (120)


“Chairman [Samuel Swett] Green.—What are the advantages and what are the objections to this system [i.e., the Quincy plan]? It is said that the representative of my district in Congress a good many years ago proposed, when Mr. Spofford [Ainsworth Rand Spofford, librarian of Congress] wanted a new building, that they should weed out the Congressional Library and throw away all the books that were of little importance. Of course that is the silliest proposition that could be made. We want a national library

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28 Samuel Swett Green was librarian of the Worcester Free Public Library, Worcester, Massachusetts. In 1891 he had served as president of the American Library Association.
in this country like that of the British Museum, and in that library should be found every book published in the United States and a good portion of those published elsewhere.

“How is it with small libraries? It is true that in most libraries of this kind there are many books which would be much better elsewhere. If you weed out your library you do not have to build additions to store these books when the library grows. It does not cost you so much to manage it.” (18)

“It is important that the library, if it is to be weeded out, should be weeded out carefully. You ought to employ an expert to select the library when it is being started, and you ought to be sure that the books are selected by persons who know how to select. There are experts who do that. Can there not be experts who will take charge of this weeding out of the library? It is not in every place you can find a man who could wisely do it.” (19)

“W. C. Lane.29—I suspect the trustees of the Quincy Library have not considered that they will not save anything in expenses, but rather increase their expenses. They will save room, but otherwise they will not save. They do not propose to have fewer books. The work of selecting the books to throw away will be just as great as selecting the books to add. All the books selected to throw away must be cancelled on shelf-lists, catalogs, and everywhere else. There is a considerable addition of expense attending that plan.”

“Pres. [Melvil] Dewey.30—When a librarian goes through his collection and selects the books that he thinks will be no longer useful it will happen that the very next week perhaps some man will come in and want that very book that has been thrown away. Perhaps this man’s grandmother placed that book there. Packing the books in close stacks, it seems to me, would be more economical than the new plan. The theory sounds beautifully. In carrying it out I am afraid you will not only fail to save money but will cause an amount of criticism that will make it very undesirable. It is bad enough to stand the critics who complain that a book they wish has not been bought. You can always fall back on lack of funds. But it is a rash librarian who would like to tell one of these gentry that he had recently thrown that very book away. It is a nice question to determine what to add. To decide what to reject after it is received, paid for, and cataloged is infinitely more difficult.” (19)

“W. F. Poole.31—... Weeding is the elimination of weeds. A weed is a plant of which some ignorant person does not know the name, the properties, or the use. Perhaps the weeder raises cabbages exclusively, and there is the limit of his botanical knowledge.

29 William Coolidge Lane was newly appointed librarian of the Boston Athenaeum.
30 Melvil Dewey was president of the American Library Association in 1893.
31 William Frederick Poole, sometime president of the American Library Association and the American Historical Association, was librarian of the Newberry Library, Chicago.
Everything which is not a cabbage-plant or a cabbage-head he roots up. I think our profession has got beyond that status of information in bibliography. ... In science there are no weeds. If a book has come into a library, there was doubtless some reason for its coming, and it should be kept there. I know of no person who is competent to go through a library and perform the function of weeder. I have read the printed abstract of Mr. Green’s paper, and wholly disagree with his theory and his method.

“He admits that the weeder must be a very wise person; but he must consider that no wise person would accept such a duty, and if he did, he would discard nothing from the library. It is a fool’s mission, and no one but a fool can perform its functions.” (20)


The full text of the presentation that is abstracted and discussed above (1893). Melvil Dewey introduces it here with a contrarian footnote:

“With this paper should be read those pages of the Chicago discussions in which it was pointed out by leading librarians [including, of course, Dewey himself] that to weed out safely would require much costly expert service; that the most hurtful criticism would be attacks after inevitable cases where some one would greatly wish a book that had been withdrawn as useless; that the printed catalogs already circulated would be made untrustworthy by parting with any volume included; that what one wise and learned man would throw out as trash, another equally wise and learned would consider specially valuable because of differing personal equations. In short, that however excellent in theory, it was perhaps the most difficult thing in librarianship to put successfully in practice.

“While few favored ‘weeding out’ simply to gain room by getting rid of books little wanted, many believe in transferring to other libraries which have a distinctly greater need of them.—M.D.” (698)

“The Thomas Crane Library ... is acting on the well-established principle that a small library well cataloged, if at all adapted in the number of its volumes to the size of a town, is of incalculably greater advantage to its constituency than one many times larger but poorly equipped with catalogs.

“It is a distinctive feature of the Quincy plan not to make the library a special reference library. That city is very near Boston and Cambridge, which it is well known are richly supplied with large general and numerous special libraries.” (699)

“Many will hold it unwise to discuss such a subject publicly. Remembering many ill-judged efforts at economy by ignorant, uneducated, or parsimonious men in town
meetings and on library boards, they will pronounce it hurtful to libraries to point out to
such men that some library experts consider it well to keep down expenses for
cataloging and housing books by weeding out libraries. Perhaps they are right. Whether
they are so or not, however, their objection is too late. The matter now under
consideration is undergoing public discussion, and it is important that men having
special knowledge of library matters should contribute now the results of their
experience. Unreasonable men in town meetings and in boards of trustees must be
answered, and reasonable men and women need to understand thoroughly the subject
in order that their answers may be discriminating and wise.” (699)

“Cambridge, though very much nearer Boston than Quincy, becomes, because of
Harvard University, a center where there must be a large library. It is too great an
inconvenience for Harvard professors and students to rely, except for book rarities, on
libraries even so near as those in Boston.” (700)

“There are many small libraries which do not need weeding. If a library needs weeding,
as many undoubtedly do, will it be weeded out wisely?

“Broad-minded intelligence is needful for this kind of work, as well as education and
experience in library work. An expert is as much needed in this work of weeding out as
in selecting books for a library at its start. Great harm might result from injudicious
discarding.” (701)

1900, 14 April. “Literary Notes.” Literature. “ Published by The Times.” 4: 301.

“A Bill has been introduced into Parliament to enable the British Museum authorities to
deposit copies of local newspapers with local authorities, and also allowing the Museum
to destroy printed matter which may be ‘entirely worthless.’ This seems to leave too
much to the discretion of the officials. Question will arise as to the permanent utility of
any printed document. We hope that the storehouse of the national records will err, if
at all, upon the side of safety. Other libraries have not invariably done so in the past.”

London: Wyman and Sons. 82: 397–400.

“Viscount Peel:32 My Lords, I rise to ask your Lordships to read a second time a Bill
promoted by the Trustees of the British Museum33 in the interests, I hope, of that great
institution. Its object is twofold. The first is to enable the Trustees to deposit copies of
local newspapers with local authorities, and the second object is to enable them to

32 Arthur Wellesley Peel, sometime Speaker of the House of Commons.
33 In fact the bill was initiated by the government as an economy, preconditional to any request from the
Trustees for funds to build an expansion. “British Museum—Extension of Buildings—The British Museum Bill,” The
Parliamentary Debates, 4th series, 84: 297–98. After receiving opposition, some of it documented here, the bill,
though passed by the Lords, was withdrawn from the House of Commons.
destroy matter which is practically of no value and absolutely useless. I may say that the
pressure on space in the British Museum has long been a source of great anxiety to the
Trustees and authorities of the Museum. ... The second object of the Bill is to enable the
Trustees to destroy matter which is practically of no value. I have myself seen the kind
of matter which it is proposed to destroy, and I need hardly say that this is a power
which requires to be jealously guarded on behalf of the public, so as to see that nothing
is destroyed which possesses any value whatever. I will give your Lordships an idea of
the class of matter to which the power to destroy would apply, and it will be seen that it
is such matter as can be of no conceivable value to anybody or to any institution.

“The following is a description of the classes of useless printed matter which it is
proposed to destroy—

“1. Wall diaries and books of blank forms, such as washing books, household and
trade account books, etc.

“2. Wall-sheets of texts, alphabets, or elementary instruction, and blank register
and other forms for use in elementary schools.

“3. Trade advertisements (excepting those which are well illustrated or which
may be useful as showing the progress of manufactures, machinery, etc.).

“4. Christmas, birthday, and similar cards and coloured texts. (Some publishers
supply these mounted in bound volumes, which will sufficiently show the nature
of these cards and the progress of printing in colours, etc.)

“5. Children’s toy books, packets of games, boxes of alphabets, etc. (The larger
and better coloured children’s books are catalogued and placed on the shelves.)

“6. Single sheet and small miscellaneous religious tracts. (All tracts issued in
series which can be catalogued together and bound in volumes are kept.)

“7. Single sheet songs, ballads and hymns. (All those by known writers or of any
interest, historical, political, or literary, are catalogued and placed on the
shelves.)

“8. Duplicates of single volumes, odd parts of periodicals or broken sets, together
with duplicates of books complete but so valueless that no library would accept
them as a gift [emphasis added].

“Some trade advertisements would illustrate the trade of the day, and be a valuable
record, perhaps, for some future historian in dealing with that particular item of history.
Of course, those advertisements would be preserved.” (397, 399)

“It is beyond the capacity of human intellect to discriminate between what is valuable and what is valueless in the pursuit of historical research. No printed matter from this point of view has either absolute ‘value’ or absolute worthlessness. Such terms cannot be rationally applied to the raw materials of research which the British Museum Library exists to preserve, not only for the passing generation but for the generations that are to follow. ... As editor of the ‘Dictionary of National Biography,’ I speak with some feeling, and also, I think, with some knowledge on the subject. The Dictionary is now on the point of completion, after investigations extending over nearly 18 years, which have been largely conducted in the British Museum. The newspapers and the ‘valueless’ printed matter which it is now proposed either to destroy or remove elsewhere have proved of the highest importance in tracking out or in testing numberless pieces of pertinent information. Had the threatened books and periodicals not been accessible in the Museum the Dictionary must have proved less complete than it is.”


“The great library [i.e., the library of the British Museum] takes all knowledge for its province. The object is to store beneath a single room, in a home accessible to all, the ampest materials available for the pursuit of every form of literary research. The dispersal or destruction of any printed matter, whether in the shape of local newspapers or of advertisements and street songs, seems to him [i.e., Sidney Lee, in his letter published in The Times that same day; see above] to be a departure from this principle. As he truly says, it is beyond the capacity of the human intellect to discriminate beforehand between what is valuable and what is valueless in the pursuit of historical research. What would we give now for newspapers and trade circulars illustrating the social habits of many bygone times and peoples? How much has been lost to us by the arrogance or the indifference of the educated classes of the past?”


“The Librarian [William Coolidge Lane; see below] points out that the storage capacity of Gore Hall will shortly be exhausted, and, therefore, that the need of a new reading-room is again urgent, since the present reading-room occupies space intended for stacks. One who watches the rapid accumulation of books in any large library must long for some means of dividing the books that are used from those that are not used, and for a more compact mode than the iron stacks supply of storing the books that are not

34 Sidney Lee, chief editor of the Dictionary of National Biography from 1891.
used. Although the iron stack was a great improvement on any former method of shelving books in a large library, it still wastes much room, and access to the books that are wanted is made slower and more difficult by the presence on the shelves of a great number of books that are never wanted. The devising of these desirable means of discrimination and of compact storage seems to be the next problem before librarians.

“The card catalogues are also reaching a size which greatly impairs their usefulness; and here again means of discrimination between dead books and living books are urgently needed. A library for the use of young students feels the encumbrance of masses of dead books on the shelves, and of useless cards in the catalogue drawers more than any other sort of library; for large bodies of young men in process of education want easy access to many live books in rapid succession, but have small interest in superseded books.” (29–30)


“Another method of securing shelf-room is suggested by the fact that every large library contains many useless books and many books having only a very slight or a very remote use. It is accordingly sometimes proposed that the useless books, and even those of doubtful utility, should be resolutely weeded out from time to time, leaving those which may be thought to possess some real current or future value. Suitable as it might be for a small library, situated within easy distance of larger neighbors, to limit its collections in this way and even to confine itself to books of strictly current interest, the difficulties and disadvantages of such a plan applied to the oldest and one of the greatest depositories of the country are evident. The expense of the process of withdrawal would itself be burdensome, while the labor involved on the part of those whose expert advice would have to be sought in order to make the selection a reasonably wise one would be very great. And after all, no matter how great the care bestowed, or how many the experts consulted, the selection could not fail to be unsatisfactory. Probably we cannot choose more wisely for our successors of another century than would our predecessors of the last century have been able to choose for us. In one respect, it is true, we have to choose, namely in deciding beforehand what to buy and what to accept as gifts, thus determining the direction in which our collections may most profitably increase. But what the Library once receives and incorporates in its collection, that it becomes responsible for, and should preserve for future reference, since there is scarcely a book or a printed sheet that does not record some fact or aspect of current life, and hence possesses its own special interest to the student of human affairs.

“It remains true nevertheless that every old library contains an increasing amount of what might be called ‘dead wood,’ which impedes the progress of the student as the

36 William Coolidge Lane was librarian at Harvard University from 1898.
dead branches in a pine forest block the way of the walker, and it may well be that in
time such dead wood will have to be thinned out and stored away at one side, making a
library ‘wood pile’ which can be looked over and drawn upon when necessary, but will
not constantly cumber the ground.

“This suggests a third measure of present relief, namely to transfer temporarily to some
other building certain classes of little used books and the dead portions of such other
classes as are most crowded. This would give room for the reclassification of those
branches not already classified and would keep for the time within their present limits
the classes most congested. Such a course is not free from objection, but the books
removed would still be accessible if needed, and errors of judgment in the separation
would not be so serious as if the books taken out were permanently alienated from the
Library. This seems to me the most practicable relief measure for us to adopt if we are
forced by lack of shelf-room to take some action.” (213–14)

1903. William Coolidge Lane. “The Library.” Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of

“One solution of the difficulty [of storing too many books] is to be found in the
suggestion made at a conference of librarians last spring during an informal discussion
on the ultimate condition and policy of the large libraries,—the libraries that feel under
obligation to preserve as records immense masses of printed matter.

“It was suggested that in several great centres in the United States storehouses should
be established to collect and preserve the books which in course of time will necessarily
be crowded out from the libraries, large and small, of the several sections of the
country. In the immediate vicinity of Boston, for instance, in some place where land is
not too expensive and where sufficient isolation to insure protection from fire can be
had, a fire-proof but absolutely plain building with compact bookstack could be erected,
of small size at first, but capable of great enlargement. To this storehouse would be sent
from time to time the overflow from the Harvard Library, the Boston Public Library, the
Boston Athenaeum, the Massachusetts State Library, and perhaps from other libraries
large and small all over New England. Duplicates received from these sources would, for
the most part, be rejected, or sold, or sent to some other depository (emphasis added),
but one copy at least of every book received would be retained and made accessible to
the few persons who would have occasion to consult the collections so deposited.” (219)


37 H. Ralph Mead was reference librarian, University of California–Berkeley.
“In checking a collection of books for duplicates particular attention needs to be paid to several points: (1) to retain the best copy of the book for the library; (2) to consider the desirability of extra copies—for the main or branch library, for the seminar or department collection; (3) to keep all editions. … “A good deal of discriminating needs to be done in duplicating; ordinarily, one cannot have too many copies of such books as Thackeray, or Bryce’s ‘American Commonwealth;’ and also care should be given to the future as well as to present demand.” (202)


“There is no more striking fact in the history of libraries than the extraordinary rate at which they grow. We often hear of libraries starting with, say, a modest 19,000 volumes attaining in the course of a few years a magnitude of 50,000 or 100,000 volumes. And so the accumulation of the stock goes on merrily, until it suddenly occurs to the librarian or committee that in a short time there will be no shelving room left.” (108)

“If the library in question be of the large museum type which aims at universality, then little or no reduction of the stock can be attempted. To take an example, such a library would have at least a copy of the first, third and people’s edition of J. S. Mill’s Political Economy, for each of those editions vary considerably. … Then there have raged from time to time peculiar mental epidemics which have given rise to the literature of the ‘burning question’ or ‘problem of the hour.’ Such writings, frequently the result of the per fervid imaginings of transported enthusiasts, are for the most part as valueless as anything in literature. Think of the amount of ink spilt in England over the French Revolution during the latter part of the 18th and early part of the 19th centuries. Yet how many of the works engendered by that great historical event are still read? Burke’s Reflexions on the French Revolution and Mitford’s History of Greece probably represent the sum total. And so the literature of the ‘burning question’ may be discarded with a light heart, and along with this class may be put another great class of writings, generally known as ‘superseded literature.’ To this class belong all manner of ephemeral literature such as out-of-date text-books, expositions of exploded theories, etc.” (108–09)

“LITERATURE. The number of books upon literature, criticisms, histories, &c., is so great that occasionally this fertile growth must be weeded a little. But great care must be exercised. Only those books which are noted for inaccurate information or detestable criticism, and they are pretty numerous, can be safely discarded. … The works of poets and dramatists who are dead and forgotten should be discarded. … There is a

38 James D. Young was librarian, Greenwich, England.
considerable number of old collections of essays, miscellaneous studies, and ‘thoughts’ (on nothing in particular) which should be rapidly discarded. Only a person who has gone conscientiously through a collection of old literature can guess the tremendous number of people who have dreamed dreams and seen visions and unfortunately published them. Such literature is practically worthless. Collected editions of great writers should however never be discarded unless replaced by better ones.” (111)


Includes the text of a circular letter sent to 100 law librarians asking whether they might exchange duplicate books with other libraries.

“Note. By ‘Duplicate’ is meant any volume or pamphlet which you wish to exchange for some other volume.” (13)


“Another problem in respect to which librarians show a good deal of timidity and lack of definite policy [is] the discarding from their shelves of obsolete and useless material. In the nature of the case, this is a problem for the larger and older libraries rather than for the newer ones, and becomes increasingly pressing with each year of library growth. When a book once gets on the shelves, it seems to acquire in the eyes of most librarians a peculiar virtue and reverence, irrespective of any service it may render. On books, for which if they were not already in the collection, the librarian would not think now of spending actual money, he will go on expending year after year, care, time, shelf space and catalog space until these items far exceed the actual cost of the book, and yet he will feel that he has carefully conserved the library’s property! In how many libraries where costly additions of new rooms or buildings have been necessitated to accommodate the growing collection, could this expense have been spared and the money utilized for positive enrichment of the collection, had the shelves been freed from the dead material with which they are encumbered! Recently a librarian in this State gave as an excuse for not keeping and binding the excellent periodicals for which he subscribed—the most valuable reference material in his library—that there was no space on the shelves for such bulky material, while at the very time there were standing on those shelves more than a thousand volumes that had not once been opened during the last eight years. There was place for the dead but none for the living.

“Not only does this policy involve a very real and positive expense, but it is a serious detriment and hindrance to the work of the library. Good live books are often lost or buried among dead ones. It has been shown by experiment again and again that a collection of best books, when grouped by themselves, receive twice as much use as

39 Gertrude E. Woodward was assistant law librarian, Law Library, University of Michigan Law School.
when scattered among old and obsolete material. A library’s shelves attract readers not in proportion to the number of volumes on them but in proportion to the amount of fresh and vital material which they contain. There are many libraries where the very first requirement for a revival of interest and increased service is a firm and vigorous policy of elimination. There is no intrinsic reason why the application of this policy should be such a difficult or delicate task. It is certainly easier to know the value of a book which has been on the shelves for years than that of a book which has not yet been bought. Every time books are selected for purchase, other books are rejected, and rejection after purchase and after a test of years is certainly an easier matter than rejection before purchase where no tests of actual value have been possible. Once get rid of the fallacious idea that the main expense of a book is its original cost and realize that its principal expense to the library is for its care and maintenance, and the rejection of a useless book from the shelf will be found not only as easy but easier than the rejection of a doubtful title from a proposed buying list. There may of course arise a practical difficulty, in the fact that library boards, in their reverence for mere size and numbers, will not be persuaded to take this point of view, but in such cases much the same result can be reached by establishing a storage department, away from the public shelves, to which all obsolete and useless matter can be transferred, without lessening the number of volumes in the library. In any case, the thing to be insisted on is that the progressive, efficient library is not a mere accumulation of books but a selection, and this selection should represent not a mere succession of past acts but a continuous and active process.”


“Entering those enormous aggregations of volumes—180,000 of them, he was told, there are or are to be in the Mitchell Library when it is quite finished—he was filled with a hideous depression at this enormous mass, this cemetery of books, because after all most of them were dead. He should like to ask Mr. Barrett [the librarian of the Mitchell Library], with all his experience, how many really living books, how many inevitable, time-proof books there were in the whole of the Mitchell Library. If it was true that the percentage of living books was so exceedingly small, we could not test the life of a book until after two or three generations had passed. What a huge cemetery of dead books, or books half alive, was represented by a great library like that. Some of them were absolutely dead—books that no human being out of a madhouse would ask for. Some were semi-living; some stray traveller or wandering student might ask for them at some heedless or too curious moment. Most of the books were dead. … Here they had folios which our generation could not handle; novels as vapid as soda water which had been open for a week; bales of sermons which had given satisfaction to no one but their
authors; collections of political speeches even more evanescent than forgotten sermons; bales of forgotten science, superseded history, biographies of people that nobody cared about—after all, those were the staple of the public library."

“There was another point of view from which he received almost equal depression. Most of those dead books contained knowledge. ‘Who was ever to overtake the reading of those books? If the youngest of them had to devote his whole life to try to get through half the Mitchell Library, he would be baffled long before life was over, and he would find a stream of new books drowning him which it would be necessary to read before he went on to the books of the Mitchell Library. In the Middle Ages a whole library of the world could be contained in a cupboard. The largest library did not exceed 400 volumes—those were the monastic libraries. People had then a very good chance of grasping the whole available knowledge of the world, but now there was no such chance. There was a man, he forgot who he was, who Dr. Johnson said was fitted to grapple with whole libraries. There was not one man, there were not ten men or 20 men, who could grapple with the Mitchell Library or with the libraries of these days. The late Lord Acton was one of the most learned of men. He had collected a library of some 50,000 volumes, a private library, and he was said to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest one thick German octavo volume every day of his life. But even then Lord Acton could have produced no effect by his reading on the stores of the Mitchell Library, and therefore he could not help feeling that so enormous a collection had rather a stupefying and paralysing than an encouraging effect.”


“Lord Rosebery in his speech at Glasgow has raised a question which no one before him has had the courage to discuss in public, though many lovers of literature have whispered over it in private. It will be a great misfortune if the wit of Lord Rosebery’s address leads to a disregard of its serious weight. I will venture to proceed one step further than he went, and without persiflage, without the least wish to startle, confess that I think the time has come for regulating an immense public destruction of books. The mixed and doubtful blessing of Carnegie libraries, scattered all over the country, has made the superfluity of printed matter an absolute nightmare. We have to grope for the needle of literature in an ever-increasing haystack of rubbish.

“No one who really loves books and is accustomed to them will seriously pretend that the Mitchell Library is to be envied for possessing 400,000 volumes. Like Lord Rosebery, every honest bibliophil [sic], though he may not yet think it decent to say so, is ‘filled with a hideous depression at this enormous mass, this cemetery of dead books.’ The living ones, those which by the exercise of every stretch of varied interest,

40 Edmund William Gosse, librarian to the House of Lords from 1904.
antiquarianism, bibliography, enthusiasm, and affectation, can be shown to preserve the least flutter of life, are, at the utmost, a tenth. There must be more than 300,000 volumes in the Mitchell Library which add nothing, and can never to the end of time add anything, to human interest, pleasure, or instruction. Surely we worship a fetish of the silliest superstition when we persist in preserving them all.

“Let me have the audacity to say that I am, and have long been, in favour of an enormous destruction of printed books. I believe in selected and concentrated libraries. The most exquisite and probably the most valuable private collection in England is contained within the drawing-room of a small house in London. This includes nothing which is not a masterpiece of condition, of rarity, of quintessential literary value. Here we have, of course, excess in a direction opposed to the huge aggregations of the Carnegie libraries. I do not wish to see all public libraries turned into jewel-boxes. But something must be done in that sense; we must start a tendency towards concentration and selection, or else librarians will go mad, and the public, face to face with these gigantic masses of rubbish, will give up reading altogether. Why should a printed book be considered a sacrosanct object? Why should it not enjoy its hour or its day of usefulness, and then disappear?

“We want to get rid of the almost universal superstition that numbers and quantity make up the value of a library. If The Times would help us to invent a scheme for the wise and careful, but unflinching, reduction of books it would add to its manifold benefactions. I am told that the Caliph Omar’s burning of the library at Alexandria has been proved to be a fable. I am sorry to learn it, for we need just a precedent of that kind.”


Summarizes Rosebery’s speech and Gosse’s response.

“Of course this whole subject of weeding out is by no means new and has engaged the attention of library authorities for many years. The question is such a knotty one that no central body of experts could be constituted and no code of rules formulated to deal with it.

“Every library is a law unto itself in regard to the selection of books. The whole matter turns on the question, What is a useless book? Who is to decide?”


Quotes from Gosse’s letter about Rosebery’s speech, and quotes from the version of the latter that The Daily News published (which differs in details from that reported by The Times). Quotes critical responses from the press. Includes a photograph of Rosebery leaving the Mitchell Library, showing “a ‘hideously depressed’ reader.”

Quotes from Rosebery’s speech and Gosse’s letter. Excerpts from press accounts, mostly critical, include an extensive quotation from John Thomson, librarian of the Philadelphia Free Library, who notes that “students have to refer to dozens of ‘dead books’ when tracing the development of some theory or practice which may be branching out into wholly unexpected lines of scientific work” (540); and that “a library, according to the size of its financial support, is bound to keep and preserve for the use of its readers books which may not appeal to some particular reader, and yet may be of the greatest interest to another” (541).

Rehearses Rosebery’s speech and Gosse’s letter.

“In this increasing demand for the ruthless destruction of books that have passed the stage of active usefulness, there is of course much that is not to be taken seriously. The older and larger libraries serve a distinct purpose in being the storehouses of printed matter that no single student and no small library can afford to own and keep. The least likely book is occasionally called for by somebody somewhere. Therefore let the great libraries of the world retain their vast collections intact, but let the newer ones heed the outcry against dead books and use every possible precaution to acquire none but living and useful ones. Finally, who would undertake to determine, and by what rule, the books that are sufficiently dead to be cast on the funeral pyre?”


“My two theses are—

“(1) That our present methods for detecting duplicates are inadequate;

“(2) That it is dangerous to part with any book as a duplicate, if printed before 1800, without close inspection.

“In the first place, there is no such thing as a duplicate. Of course not. Can you print two copies on the same paper? Then, so far as the paper itself and the watermarks are subjects of enquiry, ‘duplicates’ may be astoundingly different. But I do not mean to take up so extreme a position as that. I would rather lay stress on the unknown and unexpected differences between issues, and on the inadequacy of our ways of detecting and recording them.” (15–16)

“We are far too prone to look at each book as a single individual whole, forgetting how it lay in many separate parts, each of which had its history, before they were put together. So that from this point of view also we come to the strange but inevitable conclusion that there are no such things as duplicates!” (19)

“I do not advocate the collection of duplicates (that way madness lies), but I do advocate (and this is my emphatic point) the greatest care in getting rid of them, when you think you have them.” (20)

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⁴¹ Falconer Madan, bibliographer; librarian at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, from 1912.

“The amount of material which is piling up in libraries sometimes appalls the poor librarian. He wants to dispose of ‘useless’ books. Unfortunately and necessarily, this work in the greatest libraries must often be turned over to subordinates. ... Moreover, it takes an expert to determine which books are duplicates. The problem of the disposal of duplicates is fraught with danger. ... The problem of determining what books are duplicates is not one to be left to subordinates, and not one upon which a librarian is entitled to trust his own judgment unless he is also an expert bibliographer, which many librarians are not.” (326–27)


“Microfilms are microfilms and not the original book or manuscript.” (282)

[Aside from] “failure of verisimilitude ... the failure of the films to give one the ‘feel’ of the original [impedes discovery of significant material features such as] a cancel, a facsimile leaf, or a change of paper which may be indicative of something important in the printing of that volume.” (285)

“No photograph can take the place of the original.” (287)

1963. “An Act to alter the composition of the Trustees of the British Museum, to provide for the separation from the British Museum of the British Museum (Natural History), to make new provision with respect to the regulation of the two Museums and their collections in place of that made by the British Museum Act 1753 and enactments amending or supplementing that Act, and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid.”

The major thrust of the act was to reform the constitution of the British Museum; however, a noteworthy provision was to allow the disposal of printed matter “made not earlier than the year 1850 of which a copy made by photography or a process akin to photography is held by the Trustees” (sec. 5.1.b).44 (The same enabling language was carried forward into The British Library Act 1972.)

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42 Randolph G. Adams, historian; director of the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, from 1924.
43 William Alexander Jackson was associate professor of bibliography and assistant librarian in charge of rare books at Harvard from 1938.
44 In his History of the British Museum Library (see note 14 above) Harris comments: “[The Trustees] obtained the powers which they wanted to outhouse material, to lend for public exhibition abroad, and to dispose of printed matter produced after 1850 provided that a copy made by photography was held by the library. But the price paid was the imposition of a new constitution which abolished the Board set up by the Act of 1753” (626). On
“Be it enacted by the Queen’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows: ... 

“DISPOSAL OF OBJECTS

“5. (1) The Trustees of the British Museum may sell, exchange, give away or other wise dispose of any object vested in them and comprised in their collections if—

“(a) the object is a duplicate of another such object, or

“(b) the object appears to the Trustees to have been made not earlier than the year 1850, and substantially consists of printed matter of which a copy made by photography or a process akin to photography is held by the Trustees, or

“(c) in the opinion of the Trustees the object is unfit to be retained in the collections of the Museum and can be disposed of without detriment to the interests of students:

“Provided that where an object has become vested in the Trustees by virtue of a gift or bequest the powers conferred by this subsection shall not be exercisable as respects that object in a manner inconsistent with any condition attached to the gift or bequest.”


“Documents which were exact reprints of sample items or differed from them only in place of printing were also counted as exact matches. Documents which were textually similar to sample items but which differed from them in respect to edition, publisher, publication date, editor, compiler, translator, etc., were recorded as *approximate matches* of the sample item. The same treatment was accorded microcopy editions and partial duplication of multivolume sets. This criterion for approximate match, though somewhat arbitrary, is at least quite definite. The motivating idea behind the criterion is that a campus collection should be recorded as containing an approximate match for a sample title provided it contains a document that stands a reasonably good chance of filling a user’s need, even though the user may [not] request the item in the precise form in which it exists in the sample. A translation of a work into another language was not counted as even an approximate match.” (261–62)

the previous page Harris summarizes a report sent by the director to the government in February 1961, which noted that “the library planned to extend the use of microfilm, but microfilm had serious disadvantages.” By specifying 1850, a round-number date, the Act enabled the Trustees to discard books and newspapers made from fragile wood pulp—which, however, did not become an important ingredient until the 1860s, and did not prevail until the 1880s. D. C. Coleman, *The British Paper industry, 1495–1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 344.

Very influential, the bible for deaccessioning, now in its fourth edition, still in print (see 1997 below). Emphasis is on community libraries but some attention is given also to university libraries. Based in part on Slote’s Ph.D. dissertation, “The Predictive Value of Past-Use Patterns of Adult Fiction in Public Libraries for Identifying Core Collections” (Rutgers University, 1971).

“Weeding criteria based upon use patterns.” While this entire book relates to weeding criteria based upon previous use patterns, the suggested patterns are to be developed by carefully controlled statistical data. The use patterns below were developed as were the other criteria in this chapter—by the judgment of experts. This is what accounts for the wide divergence of opinions. Weed …


“The question of what to do with duplicate copies is [an] issue which has often in the past been a point of contention between bibliographers and librarians. The fact that books which seem to be duplicates may not really be so is well known—and has been at least since December 1911, when Falconer Madan spoke of ‘the duplicity of duplicates’ [note omitted; see above]. … The necessity for full textual collation of supposed duplicates is by now, I think, commonly understood—if not always practiced—in connection with early books. … No two physical objects are ever identical, even if they are intended to be, so in the strict sense there are never any duplicates. The crucial question, of course, is to decide what differences are significant enough to pay attention to—a question made particularly difficult by the fact that one can never know what details now regarded as insignificant may be shown in the future to be important.” [note omitted] (755–56)

“Perhaps the central point to be made about the bibliographer’s approach to ‘duplicates’ is that, whatever period he is dealing with, multiple copies are essential to his research. … Bibliographers and editors always need to see as many copies of a book as they feasibly can because, as in any inductive investigation, new evidence may turn up at any moment invalidating conclusions drawn on the basis of the previously known evidence. … Many public libraries have … copious quantities of old bestsellers, no longer in demand. The need for space may dictate that they be discarded, but no librarian should take this action without weighing in the balance what will be lost. To the bibliographer, whether one is disposing of a ‘duplicate’ Elizabethan quarto (for the money it will bring) or a bestseller of 1934 (for the space it will vacate), the theoretical considerations are the same. The action taken, to be sure, may finally rest on practical

45 G. Thomas Tanselle was professor of English, University of Wisconsin–Madison.
grounds; but if it is to be an informed action, it must always take into account the fact that for bibliographical research there is no substitute for a group of copies in one location.” (757)


“Duplicates are second, or subsequent, copies of books already in stock, identical in edition and involuntarily acquired. They are mainly acquired through unsolicited gifts, by the global acceptance of special collections, literary bequests, etc., by second-hand purchases in bulk as well as by occasional mistakes in the acquisitions department. The term ‘duplicates’, as used here, excludes purposely acquired multiple copies of important works for reference departments, etc., as well as antiquated and unusable material (e.g. old schoolbooks, textbooks, editions of classics) which should be eliminated.” (31)


“Note: This web version was prepared in 1999. ... This version may differ from the printed version.”

“The term ‘intrinsic value’ has long been used by archivists to describe historical materials that should be retained in their original form rather than as copies. In 1979 the term gained particular importance for the National Archives and Records Service (NARS) as it began to consider possible large-scale replacement of paper records with miniaturized or other copies. To meet the challenge of distinguishing between records that need not be retained in their original form after an acceptable copy has been created and those that require preservation in the original, NARS established the Committee on Intrinsic Value. ... The Committee recognized that application of the concept of intrinsic value would be subjective and must always be dependent on trained archival judgment and professional debate.

“REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON INTRINSIC VALUE

“Intrinsic Value in Archival Materials

“Intrinsic value is the archival term that is applied to permanently valuable records that have qualities and characteristics that make the records in their original physical form the only archivally acceptable form for preservation. Although all records in their original physical form have qualities and characteristics that would not be preserved in copies, records with intrinsic value have them to such a significant degree that the originals must be saved. ...

“Qualities and Characteristics of Records With Intrinsic Value
“All record materials having intrinsic value possess one or more of the following specific qualities or characteristics. These qualities or characteristics relate to the physical nature of the records, their prospective uses, and the information they contain.

1. Physical form that may be the subject for study if the records provide meaningful documentation or significant examples of the form ...
2. Aesthetic or artistic quality ...
3. Unique or curious physical features ...
4. Age that provides a quality of uniqueness ...
5. Value for use in exhibits ...
6. Questionable authenticity, date, author, or other characteristic that is significant and ascertainable by physical examination ...
7. General and substantial public interest because of direct association with famous or historically significant people, places, things, issues, or events ...
8. Significance as documentation of the establishment or continuing legal basis of an agency or institution ...
9. Significance as documentation of the formulation of policy at the highest executive levels when the policy has significance and broad effect throughout or beyond the agency or institution ...

“Application of the Concept of Intrinsic Value

“Records that possess any characteristic or quality of intrinsic value should be retained in their original form if possible. The concept of intrinsic value, therefore, is not relative. However, application of the concept of intrinsic value is relative; opinions concerning whether records have intrinsic value may vary from archivist to archivist and from one generation of archivists to another. Professional archival judgment, therefore, must be exercised in all decisions concerning intrinsic value.”


“The level of title duplication among all the UW libraries was much lower than previously assumed. Since this study relates to currently cataloged material, it does not necessarily serve as an indication of total collection overlap among the libraries studied.” (17)

“As expected, the overlap among the smaller, nondoctoral group was higher than the overlap between the larger university libraries.” (18)

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46 Barbara Moore was systems librarian, Library and Learning Resources, University of Wisconsin–Whitewater. Tamara J. Miller was head, library systems, University Libraries, University of Tennessee–Knoxville. Don L. Tolliver was assistant director for planning and budget, University Libraries, University of Michigan.
“The highly overlapped titles do not appear to be a core of needed reference materials. The materials most likely to be frequently duplicated are English language materials published by university presses. ... The purchase of these materials by six or more of the UW libraries may be an indication of both the pertinence of the material published by university presses and the reliance on these publishers by book selectors. University press titles are prime candidates for inclusion in a systematic cooperative acquisition program.” (21)


“This review of the literature dealing with the collection overlap has revealed a great diversity in orientation, methodology, and reporting-diversity that makes comparison and generalization very difficult, if not impossible.” (19)


An influential manifesto.

“What is the role of the institution’s traditional academic information system—the library—in the new high-tech environment? Will it be, as any number of technical gurus and disaffected academics predict, an irrelevant, obsolete museum of the book? Or will it be, as grumpily forecast by many humanists and historians, who fear the replacement of the book by the computer, an empty shell ineptly managed by library technocrats for their own obscure purpose?” (12)


Abstract: “An overview of the weeding process is presented along with a review of its nature, purpose, and proper functioning in a variety of environments. Attempts to define the various terms used synonymously for weeding give some insight into the general nature of the process. The value of weeding lies primarily in developing a quality collection by eliminating out-of-date information that is potentially misleading and, in areas such as medicine, even dangerous. Factors supporting the development of a weeding program may include redundancy in the collection, shifts in goals and emphases of the institution, physical deterioration of materials, obsolescence of materials, and the need for space. Matters such as cost, politics, availability of storage or cooperative agreements should be taken into account in determining the appropriate

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47 William G. Potter was associate dean of libraries for technical services, automation, and systems and associate university librarian for technical services at Arizona State University.

48 Patricia Battin was vice president and university librarian, Columbia University.
weeding strategy. Different potential criteria (such as use of materials) are defined. Finally, it is indicated that, while there is a cost for weeding a collection, not weeding carries a more subtle cost.” (47)

“Public libraries, unless they purport to be research institutions, will probably find it easier to justify removal of materials from their active collections than will major academic libraries.” (48)

“The value of a book cannot be determined by use studies or other quantitative means alone.” (52)

“Experts within the University of Chicago and outside ... said that past use of materials in areas such as chemistry and economics could be used as predictors of future use of those materials, but that it was not possible to make similar predictions in other subjects, such as English and American literature. In other words, one must agree that an arbitrary retirement age for materials in all subject areas is probably not desirable.” (56)


A documentary that situates the “brittle books crisis” in the history of cultural preservation.

04:37. Robert MacNeil: “Month by month and year by year these precious volumes are burning away with insidious slow fires.”

05:15. John Baker, chief of conservation, New York Public Library: “We have miles of books in our stacks and they’re all lined up very neatly on the shelf, shelf after shelf and they really don’t look so bad. But when you open them many, many of them are so brittle and deteriorated they simply fall apart in your hands. The paper is silently disintegrating and the intellectual record of the last 150 years is in danger of disappearing.”

07:38. Vartan Gregorian, president, New York Public Library: “Seven million books in the Library of Congress are disintegrating now.”

26:16. Robert MacNeil: “But it is the slow fires, the acid imbedded in the paper, that remains the greatest threat. Page by page at considerable cost a book may be deacidified by hand. Some books and other library materials are beyond any such process. To be saved they must first be cut apart.”

27:23. Unidentified library worker: “It kind of bothers me to guillotine newspaper collections because I know the actual papers are not going to go back on the shelves but
to contain the information on microfilm is the ideal which preserves the newspapers. So that the viewer will be able to see the construction of that newspaper and all the ads, all the articles, all the neat things of old newspapers.”

27:45. Robert MacNeil: “To be saved these printed materials must be transposed to another medium, of which the most common is microfilm.”

28:01. Margaret Child, assistant director, Smithsonian Institution Libraries: “Microfilming is important because it offers a cheap or relatively cheap way of preserving the informational content of the books. These books are not artifactualy valuable in and of themselves, so that they do not warrant investing the three or four or five hundred dollars that it would take to preserve them as artifacts. What we want is the information that they contain. The only proven technology that we currently have available to us is microfilming. It’s an old technology, it’s been around in use since the mid thirties, and if it is properly done and if the master negatives are properly stored—it, we know that, that those images will survive for hundreds of years.”

35:45 Vartan Gregorian: “Problem is, that we don’t know what is junk and what is not. That’s one problem that, by the time you sift through ... .”

45:44. Robert MacNeil: “More and more of the raw data of our civilization are contained on magnetic materials, materials subject to their own slow and secret fires, their own forms of deterioration and to technological obsolescence. Often it’s harder and more perplexing to preserve the most advanced technologies.”

47:51. Patricia Battin, vice president and university librarian, Columbia University: “There is a lot of concern about the fact that we will have information haves and have-nots, because the electronic format permits a control over the ownership of the information that was not possible before. And as you know we have a for-profit enterprise that is moving into the whole scholarly environment based on a fee per use. In other words that you have to pay before you can use the information and that you don’t buy it you only buy the use. Which is very different from the subsidized browsing concept that we have had in the book here; and I think it has tremendous implications for public policy in this country.”

Traces changing notions of the desirability and practicality of preserving the form and/or content of records indefinitely.

“Refocusing [archivists’] attention on the permanence of the information in records rather than on the documents themselves will restore a broader view and will reemphasize the possibilities and the usefulness of preserving information in formats other than the original.” (24)


A detailed critical survey, taking into account many of the twentieth-century statements listed above.

“Accidents do happen, and reproductions do mislead. Everyone knows that; and everyone knows (though many people act as if they do not know) that every form of reproduction can lie, by providing a range of possibilities for interpretation that is different from the one offered by the original. ... Every reproduction is a new document, with characteristics of its own, and no artifact can be a substitute for another artifact.” (33–34)

49 James M. O’Toole was assistant professor of history and archives at the University of Massachusetts–Boston.

50 G. Thomas Tanselle, textual critic and bibliographer, was vice-president of John Simon Guggenheim Foundation from 1978.
“Although different methods of reproduction may offer different opportunities for error and for intentional alteration, all are alike in producing new documents that in one degree or another are not identical with the documents supposedly being copied.” (36)

“Copies of an edition (that is, copies printed from the same typesetting) cannot be assumed to be identical to each other for the same reason that reproductions cannot be assumed to be identical to the originals: they are separate physical objects, separate documents. ... A reproduction of any one copy of a printed item represents only that copy, not the edition as a whole.” (36, 37)

“There is no way that reproductions—regardless of what technology is developed in the future ... —can ever be the equal of originals as documentary evidence, for there is no way of getting around the fact that they are one step (at least) removed from those originals. And there is no way that the existence of reproductions, however high their quality, can justify the destruction of originals.” (38)

“The study of the past requires artifacts from the past; reproductions are the products of a different time from that of the originals they attempt to duplicate, and they therefore transport us to a different time.” (39)


“2. Image Quality: All significant textual and graphic information in the original must exist in the surrogate, in this case a bit mapped image.” (1: 8)

“3. Longevity: The image must be available permanently: that is it is mandatory to have permanence, if not of medium itself, at least that of the stored image data.

“7. Safety: Document capture should be accomplished without unduly damaging the originals.” (1: 11)

“For a portion of the literature that is desirable to access and process in the future, the transfer from one set of disks to another is a much easier, quicker and cheaper process than the conversion from paper to electronic form, and therefore the concern about media longevity is less of an overriding issue.” (1: 17–18)


“A final component of moral obligation is loyalty. The concept of loyalty takes motives and intentions into consideration. As librarians, we shape and determine our book

51 Rosann Bazirjian was head of acquisitions and coordinator of collection development, John C. Pace Library, University of West Florida.
collections and service policies by molding the library into what we feel, in conjunction
with our administration, is the most efficient way to operate. We make the library work
and we make it either good or bad. Loyalty to the university’s goals, to our
administrators’ beliefs, and to our patrons’[‘] needs is part of what makes us
professionals. The loyalty to our book collections is what should be leading us to discard.
We want the best collection we can have, and that can only be accomplished through a
steady weeding practice.” (142)

“We take extra, time-consuming steps when we want to discard books. Some of us
provide faculty members with a list of every title about to be withdrawn for their
review, others surreptitiously take their books to the dumpster ten or more blocks away
just so no one ‘catches us,’ and of course, we must remember to remove those covers
and all markings that indicate that we ever owned the book. Wouldn’t it be so much
simpler if respect for our profession was so strong that there would be no question that
what we selected to discard was right?” (143)


“Major portions of the world’s research library print collections are presently in
immediate or near-term jeopardy. Because of the chemical nature of the paper on
which they are printed, millions of volumes are either presently unusable or are rapidly
approaching that point. An increasing number of print volumes have, in fact,
deteriorated to the point of being irrecoverable. A variety of efforts have been
undertaken to deal with this problem. ... Research librarians have largely settled on
microfilming as the most viable long-term remedy.” (71)

“Massive microfilming of research library collections will, perhaps more than any other
step that research librarians can take, strengthen their ties to the past and complicate
their progress into the future. ... Converting these materials to electronic form is
perhaps the most important single effort that research librarians can presently make
toward achieving ultimate completion of the record of scholarship.

“A decision by the research library community to abandon its various print preservation
programs and redirect its efforts toward electronic conversion would enable it to
stimulate further improvements in conversion technology.” (72)

“Such an effort would position research librarians at the forefront of movement into the
electronic era, rather than relegate them to continued pursuit of print solutions. No
present decision by research librarians has more significance with regard to their future
and the future of the scholarly record than the choice between microfilming and print-

52 Eldred R. Smith was librarian, University of Minnesota Libraries, from 1976 to 1987.
electronic conversion with respect to the preservation of deteriorated print materials.”

(72)


“As early as 1891, Justin Winsor, then librarian of the Boston Public Library, predicted, in an unsuccessful attempt to alert librarians and publishers to the threat of acid paper, that some future bibliographer would construct an ingenious theory to explain the absence of books published after 1870.54 One hundred years later, no ingenious theory is needed—the ‘yellow snow’ of crumbling paper drifting continuously from the bookstacks of our libraries and archives provides the vivid and devastating answer.” (11–12)

“The ‘slow fires’ of deteriorating acid paper took 100 years to ravage our print collections. The ‘fast fires’ of short-lived electronic storage and dissemination media consume our creative output almost before we know it’s gone.” (17)


“We began with some dubiety about the wisdom of using microfilm as the technique of preservation. Some members of the committee believed, or wanted to believe, that scanning and digitalizing techniques are already well enough developed to justify a switch to that form of preservation. We have gradually become aware of the enormous scope and urgency of the problem. If more than 80 million volumes in the nation’s research libraries, about one quarter of our libraries’ holdings, and more than 2.5 billion pages in the nation’s archives are in danger of being lost through oxidization over the next fifteen or twenty years, some concerted plan needs to be established immediately. Large resources need to be deployed to preserve as many books as possible. Members of the committee have also been mindful of the value of the actual physical books and of the need to preserve as many copies and editions as possible for the purposes of scholarly research. (See G. Thomas Tanselle, “Reproductions in Scholarship,” Studies in

53 Patricia Battin, formerly librarian of Columbia University, was president of the Commission on Preservation and Access from 1987.

54 Justin Winsor was superintendent of the Boston Public Library from 1868 to 1877, when he became librarian of Harvard University. An editorial note in The Library Journal reported that “fifteen or twenty years ago” Winsor had tried to persuade “the publishers of the leading daily newspapers of Boston to have a few copies of each issue printed on paper of extra good and durable quality, for the files of the Boston Public Library”; he did not succeed. “Inferior Paper a Menace to the Permanence of Literature” (“Rossiter Johnson in the N.Y. World”), Library Journal 16 (1891): 241–42; 242.

55 J. Hillis Miller, Distinguished Professor, Department of Comparative Literature and Department of English, University of California—Irvine, was president of the Modern Language Association in 1986.
Bibliography, 42 (1989), 25–54, for an eloquent defense for the need to have the actual books and papers for scholarly research.) But if these original books in all their copies and editions, along with all the papers in archives, printed or written on paper from the 1850’s to the recent past, are slowly burning up, then microfilmed or digitalized preservation is obviously demanded.

“Though we began with the assumption that of course everything could be duplicated and thereby saved, we have gradually come to recognize that probably only between 20 and 30 percent of brittle books and papers can be saved by microfilming.” (1–2)


“Millions of so-called brittle books, texts printed on acid paper and dating from about 1850 to the present, are slowly burning. More than 80 million volumes in the nation’s research libraries, about one quarter of our libraries’ holdings, and more than 2.5 billion pages in the nation’s archives are in danger of being lost through oxidation. All will become unusable during the next fifteen or twenty years. Among these books are, of course, millions of texts necessary for scholarly research and teaching in language and literature, as well as newspapers, pamphlets, and archival material essential to our work. Congress has appropriated $22.6 million for fiscal year 1991 for the NEH’s Office of Preservation. It is hoped that this level of appropriation will be maintained or even increased from year to year. These funds are being used to save as many books and other materials as possible by microfilming them, currently the best technology available. (Microfilms can be digitalized later, when a common format exists for that technology.) Unhappily, even the most optimistic estimates predict that only between twenty and thirty percent of brittle books and papers can be saved. This means that hard choices must be made.”


“It is far more convenient on screen; so why, apart from sentiment and atmosphere, bother with a physical library at all?”

“Lynne Brindley, in charge of the British Library of Political and Economic Science, agrees that ‘The future of libraries is the future of librarianship skills—helping people to learn what to discard.’ [emphasis added] Technology is spreading rapidly: ‘In the past two years an awful lot more of the necessary technical building blocks have arrived.’ But


57 Lynne Brindley was librarian of the British Library of Political and Economic Science at London School of Political and Economic Science from 1992 to 1997. From 2000 to 2012 she was chief executive of The British Library.
as for paper libraries being replaced: ‘My answer is never, in some subjects, and certainly we have a ten-year transition’ in those subjects which may become paperless.”


The text of this document is posted online by CLIR, with this ironic caveat: “NB: The printed version of this document contained images which are not included in this electronic version.”

The copy held by the library of the University of Michigan was digitized by Google, presumably between 2004 and 2012. Two files that image the pages of that copy were temporarily made available by HathiTrust during the summer of 2020 (because of the pandemic). They show several illustrations that were selected to dramatize the risks that illustrations in “brittle books” encounter.

Neither file was prepared to a high standard. The illustrations (of vulnerable illustrations) in particular suffer from both deficient exposure and moiré patterning; for example this image in the first file, from page 12 of the report:


The omission of important illustrations from the CLIR text transcription and the inadequate representation of them in the digitized files dramatize in different ways the complaint that the task force made at the start of its report, which is emphasized in the first of the following excerpts:
“The ‘brittle books’ problem has been recognized largely in terms of the pressing need
to preserve texts in danger. Many of these texts include a variety of images, often just as
significant, if not even more so, as the words that accompany them. However, present
preservation practices are relatively insensitive to the vast majority of these images and
fail to capture them with sufficient fidelity to be useful.” (1; emphasis added)

“The mission of the Joint Task Force on Text and Image was to inquire into the
problems, needs, and methods for preserving images in text which are important for
scholarship in a wide range of disciplines and to draw from that exploration a set of
principles, guidelines, and recommendations for a comprehensive national strategy for
image preservation.” (1)

“High-contrast black-and-white microfilm does not reproduce half-tones satisfactorily
for scholarly purposes.

“Available alternatives (e.g., color and continuous-tone filming and electronic scanning
and bit-mapped storage) require further study and experimental trials to estimate cost
and time requirements and quality of results.” (1)

“Recommended strategies should include conservation of some volumes as physical
items in the context of a national (or even international) plan. Since the per-unit costs
for artifact conservation are considerably higher than for preservation by converting
content to a different medium, a well-worked out strategy for selection for conservation
is of utmost importance. ... In cases where conservation actions have been taken
because items are rare or have intrinsic value, those items should be passed to a
category of ‘limited use.’” (2)

“Intellectual, social, and cultural historians assert the significance of the ‘actual
relationship’ of image to text as it exists on the printed page in understanding both the
intent of the author and the connection between text and image that the contemporary
reader perceived and reacted to. This point of view argues for the preservation of the
original relationship or the artifact itself.” (6, emphasis added)

in G. Thomas Tanselle, Literature and Artifacts (Charlottesville: The Bibliographical Society of
the University of Virginia, 1998), 3–23.

“The capability of photographing books without damaging them does not ensure that
the books will be retained after photographing, so long as attitudes are not changed
along with the technology. I think it is undeniable that the common attitude of disregard
for the physical evidence in books has produced an insensitivity to the destruction of
books that would not be condoned by professionals dealing with any other category of
artifact. Yet the professional literature of book preservation routinely recommends
‘format conversion’ (or a similar euphemism for discarding originals) except for books of
‘intrinsic’ or ‘artifactual’ value. The absurdity of the notion that some artifacts have artifactual value and some do not is never recognized. Even if readers at large believe that the ‘intellectual content’ of books is incorporeal and yet movable to different containers, we should hold librarians to a higher standard, for it is their business to understand, and to show others, the relation of books to verbal works—and thus to be scholar-teachers of the book.” (17)


“Let us first dispense with the most commonly held belief, which in my opinion has led to panic and uncontrolled and ineffective reformatting policies throughout the United States. It is, that once paper reaches the brittle condition, it will not survive. There is no basis in truth or scientific evidence to support this belief. Brittle book material can and will survive for an indefinite period of time, if they [sic] are physically protected and not abused by stack attendants, readers, poor housing conditions, and administrative policies that ignore or write off their existence.” (emphasis in Baker’s quotation)


“As we have explored the uses of digital technology to preserve the deteriorating printed documents of the past, we have discovered the paradigm of the future virtual library: in the digital world, preservation is access, and access is preservation. The boundaries of the analog world have dissolved.” (367)

“The use of digital technology requires a new definition of our concept of preservation, which now becomes those strategies and actions necessary to provide access to the accumulated human record as far into the future as possible.” (371, emphasis in the original)

“It is important that we explore these questions with our scholarly colleagues rather than simply transfer our analog mindsets to digital information. We need to know what their scholarship requires—not what we want to save.” (373)


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58 Peter Godfrey Waters was restoration officer, later chief of the Conservation Division, at the Library of Congress from 1971.
59 “Patricia Battin is President of the Commission on Preservation and Access, Washington DC. She has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Council on Library Resources since 1984, and on the Board of Consultants for the National Endowment for the Humanities since 1978” (367).
60 Phyllis Franklin was executive director of the Modern Language Association from 1985.
Abstract: “A survey of Modern Language Association members and of representatives of other associations participating in the American Council of Learned Societies indicates that the vast majority of those surveyed see ongoing need for collections of primary records. Respondents note that neither photocopies nor digital records can satisfy the traditional needs of bibliographers, textual editors, and literary scholars; furthermore, renewed interest in the materiality of texts and the history of print promises to continue to influence scholars who study publications belonging to the print era.” (397)

“Modern language scholars and other humanists want ongoing access to primary records in their original form.” (399)

“Thirty-nine percent of the respondents cite as important scholars’ renewed interest in the materiality of texts, and 28 percent point to the needs of those who study the history of the book.” (400)

“Only 12 percent of the survey respondents think saving a few copies of a book will satisfy the needs of modern language scholars. The majority argue that our society should maintain as complete a record of print as possible because such a record will continue to be essential to scholars who wish to study the print era.” (402)


“We think of the creation, with paper, ink, leather, cloth, type, and money, of the object that appears in a particular material form, and that can in turn be related to other similar objects created from the same resources. Both inside and out, that form will affect any meanings we may attribute to or extract from it. Libraries are just as much guardians of that material form as of the particular ordering of the words it contains, whether as manuscript, broadsheet, picture, printed book, film, tape, or disc. For books as they are now generally known, neither microfilms, CDs, nor screens are satisfactory media by which to preserve that form.” (67)

“For administrative convenience, most libraries now are no longer linked to museums, as was formerly the case in the British Museum. Yet the purposes of the two are not so very different. This divorce is now so widespread that the International Council of Museums has defined a museum as an establishment in which objects are the main means of communication. Clearly, libraries were not in mind, even though we would certainly think of books as objects.” (69)

61 David John McKitterick was librarian at Trinity College, Cambridge University, from 1986.

“Digital transformations can only substitute for but not replace originals. The limited number of editions or other versions of text that it will be economically feasible to produce cannot serve all scholarly purposes. Nor can they replace the physical form, important not only for bibliography but for economic and social history as well. What a Luther sermon or Napoleon’s survey of Egypt or a three-decker or a pulp magazine really meant to its readers cannot be perceived or understood from mere text.” (42)


“Preference for embodied knowledge, for the material object that once existed in a social context rather than for information that can be abstracted and reproduced in any form, could be construed as a feminist predilection. Women have always been associated with the body, the carnal, and have frequently been represented as less able than men to transcend the body. Or, to put it another way, bodily reality has been feminized and undervalued whereas disembodied abstraction has usually been understood as masculine and privileged. Since Descartes, the unreliable senses have been suspect in the search for truth; or to put it another way, true knowledge has been dissociated from bodily knowledge.” (61, note omitted)

“We do not know what might be learned in the future from the bodies of these texts, but we must not foreclose the possibilities from the outset by dismissing the material form as irrelevant.” (62)

“To film a text and discard the book is to act as if text and context are separable and that context is expendable. Such action ratifies the classic split in knowledge between mind and body or—to use contemporary terms—between information and format. To insist on the preservation of the material object is to refuse that division, and to show respect for material culture and all that it implies.” (62)

“The bodies of the texts we read tell us things we are not fully articulate about, because they do not exist in language. But just because they exist nonverbally, communicating to us in other bodily ways, does not mean they do not exist. We need all the help we can get trying to understand the past. Let us not give up the body so lightly.” (62)

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62 Alexandra Mason was head of special collections (rare books), Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, from 1975.

63 Ruth Perry is Ann Fetter Friedlaender Professor of Humanities at MIT.

“As a practical matter, one cannot realistically expect all copies of all books will be saved, but it is important to understand that theoretically all of them ought indeed to be preserved—both because copies may vary from one to another and because, if physical details are part of reading, access to those details should be as widespread as possible.” (40n5)


“The present time will be regarded in the future as an age of book destruction. And the irony is that this destruction is being accelerated by those whose intention is to preserve books or facilitate their use.” (271)

“The artifactual evidence of books has its own story to tell—that books as objects (and not just their so-called contents) are ‘texts’ from the past. ... Every copy of every book ought theoretically to be saved. One understands, of course, that it is unrealistic to expect all copies of books to survive—for the various vicissitudes of physical existence are bound to take their toll on all categories of artifacts. But there are reasons to lament the loss of any copy of a book and to advocate the preservation of as many copies as possible.” (273)

“Most of the talk about a bookless future, or the death of the codex, has focused on new works, without much cognizance of the difference between new and old works. Whatever forms new works take will automatically become their historic forms, the original published sources for evidence about their texts (sources that must therefore be preserved for future use); but earlier works that first appeared in book form can never be fully divorced from that form, and the books must remain (by virtue of past action) the original published sources, with all their unique potential for revealing textually relevant information. If librarians, in planning for the future, were to make clear that the book stacks of the present must be maintained (indeed, treated with the same care now given ‘rare’ books), alongside the machinery for increased electronic access to data bases, they would be helping not only to preserve the books but also—and in a powerful way—to educate the public. Librarians should of course be joined by the larger scholarly world in this effort, and it is a hopeful sign that the Modern Language Association of America (representing over thirty thousand literary scholars) has established an Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Print Record.” (275)
“Books are for reading. Book-reading is the activity of reconstructing the texts of intangible works from the physical evidences for them found in books. Every physical characteristic of every copy of every edition is potentially relevant for the activity of reading. Saving the texts of books is therefore only part of the task of saving the verbal heritage of the past; the objects themselves must also be saved.” (277)


PMLA 109 (6): 1202–03.

Presiding: G. Thomas Tanselle, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.


5. “Digitally Seeking Shakespeare; or, Why We Still Need Card Catalogs,” Peter Donaldson, Massachusetts Inst. of Tech.


“A workshop arranged in conjunction with the forum The Importance and Challenge of Preserving Research Materials in Their Original Forms (254). Presiding: G. Thomas Tanselle, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

“An open hearing on the draft Statement on the Preservation of Research Materials in Their Original Forms, sponsored by the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Print Record.”

Includes a history of debates about the practice dating from 1883 to 1994 (353–64).

“Academic and research libraries have three options when faced with the necessity of reducing the gap between diminished budgets and increasing publication output. The first option is weeding materials and placing them in remote storage. ... The second option is to initiate collaborative resource-building efforts. ...

“A third approach would be to reduce the physical size of the collection while maintaining access. This would be accomplished by providing access to materials in a different format, such as in microform or in an online database or CD-ROM product.” (383–84)


“Used with full understanding of their limits as representations of the originals, both photographic and computer images can be essential in providing initial access for a much wider audience than can afford to visit and use the originals, and these techniques are justifiably encouraged by funding sources. The threat is that, having been microfilmed, or digitized, or microfilmed and then digitized, the originals will be discarded with some relief by those making very hard decisions about allocating money and space, because they do not understand that reproductions are not substitutes for originals.” (1)

“A reproduction gives no solid basis for drawing conclusions about the physical nature or production of the original object, and yet those conclusions may be essential to an understanding of the work that the original contains. In the second place—and this is a more difficult because less immediately obvious problem—reproductions, photographic or digitized, are the result of someone else’s judgment about your source. If you understand that from experience or from logical deduction, if you know that microfilmers may rearrange leaves or skip pages or neglect to shoot text under a waxed-on sheet; that facsimiles may be retouched or oped; that what seem to be features of the original can be artifacts of the copying process; that scanned and digitized images are susceptible to even more insidious, because disguised, doctoring; if you understand or can imagine all this, then you can use the reproductions for what they are, with appropriate caution. But for those who have never had reason or occasion to compare

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64 Loriene Roy, professor, School of Information, The University of Texas at Austin was president of the American Library Association from 2007 to 2008.

65 Elizabeth Hall Witherell was president of the Association for Documentary Editing.
the originals with reproductions, or to imagine the steps in the copying process, the shortcomings of the reproductions will not be obvious.” (2)


Approved by the Executive Council as an official statement of the Modern Language Association on 19 May 1995.

“The concept of a textual source must involve attention to the presentation of a text, not simply to the text as a disembodied group of words. All objects purporting to present the same text—whether finished manuscripts, first editions, later printings, or photocopies—are separate records with their own characteristics; they all carry different information, even if the words and punctuation are indeed identical, since each one reflects a different historical moment.” (27)

“Not only do editions differ from one another, but also copies within an edition (of any period) often vary among themselves; as a result, every copy is a potential source for new physical evidence, and no copy is superfluous for studying an edition’s production history. Furthermore, since the shape, feel, designs, and illustrations of books have affected, and continue to affect, readers’ responses (some of which have been recorded in the margins of pages), access to the physical forms in which texts from the past have appeared is a fundamental part of informed reading and effective classroom teaching; if that access is to be as widespread as it can be, the number of available copies of past editions, held in libraries of all kinds, must be as large as possible. The existence of community libraries along with academic libraries has been, and will continue to be, essential for bringing historical embodiments of texts—and the sense of the past they impart—to a wide readership. The loss of any copy of any edition—from the earliest incunables to the latest paperback reprints (regardless of whether its text is considered interesting or consequential at the present time)—diminishes the body of evidence on which historical understanding depends. There is an obvious practical consideration that also supports the retention of textual artifacts (handwritten as well as printed) after their texts have been copied: the fact that the accuracy and stability of reproductions can never be guaranteed. For this reason, the preservation of the sources of photographic or electronic reproductions would seem a prudent course even if those reproductions were the equals of the sources; but since they cannot possibly be, a concern for maintaining our inheritance of textual artifacts is not simply desirable but imperative. ...

“As [readers] welcome the benefits conferred by new technology for creating reproductions, they must remember the distinctive limitations of every form of reproduction and the continuing need for the artifactual sources on which the reproductions are based. Not only do those artifacts provide the standard for judging
the reproductions; they also contain, in their physicality, unreproducible evidence that readers (scholars, students, and the general public) need for analyzing and understanding, with as much historical context as possible, the writings that appeared and reappeared in them. If we approach the electronic future with these thoughts in mind, we will be more rigorous in our demands of new forms of textual presentation and more vigilant in our protection of the artifacts embodying the old forms. Both these actions are necessary to ensure the continuation of productive reading, teaching, and scholarship.” (28)


“No reproduction of a text can ever be a fully adequate substitute for the original, since every reproduction necessarily leaves something unreproduced. Besides, there is always an uncertainty attaching to a reproduction; the user of one at any point may wonder whether the original was accurately rendered, and the only way to find out is to examine the original. The use of originals as the ultimate check on the accuracy of reproductions is simply an illustration of what it means to use primary evidence.” (30)

“Even copies from a single edition can be expected to contain variations (a point that applies to books of all periods).” (31)

“The books in existing book stacks should never be abandoned, because they will remain crucial as the original sources for future study of works transmitted in printed form. There can be no book in which the format and other physical features are unrelated to the process of reading and understanding the book’s text. But a recognition of this fact does not stand in the way of an enthusiastic acceptance of the developing technology for the electronic dissemination of texts. After all, even those scholars who understand that microfilm and xerographic copies do not fully substitute for originals have gladly used them as convenient interim tools. The availability of printed texts in electronic form is an advance greater in degree but not different in kind: it accomplishes in a far more sophisticated way the same function that xerography has fulfilled, making texts widely accessible and more easily manipulable at the price of removing them from their original physical contexts. All scholars should welcome the day when they can sit in their studies and call up on their terminals an enormous array of texts without the cumbersome process of interlibrary loan or the ordering of xerographic copies. But they should also realize what evidence they are thereby missing and why recourse to the originals can never be rendered irrelevant, however inconvenient it may happen to be. Many discussions of the future of libraries speak of access replacing ownership; but when it is understood that access to physical evidence is an essential kind of access and that printed books must therefore be preserved in multiple copies, the questions of ownership and care remain significant. The theoretical content of the ‘Statement on the Significance of Primary Records,’ in short, is that texts and their settings are not separable; that all the characteristics of the artifacts conveying texts are potentially
relevant to the act of careful reading; that those characteristics can differ even among copies of individual editions; and that there is a consequent need to preserve as many copies of printed editions as possible in order to maximize both the quantity of evidence available and the access to that evidence. The usefulness of textual reproductions is not in question, but it has no bearing on the rationale for the preservation of artifacts.” (31–32)


“The future of the print record is jeopardized in two quite different ways these days. The first threat: approximately one hundred million books and other materials in United States libraries printed on acid paper will become unusable during the next several decades. They are oxidizing, slowly burning up, becoming brittle, crumbling away, and becoming unreadable. Second threat to the print record: new electronic communication technologies are bringing about a revolution as great as was the shift from manuscript culture to print culture. Books and other materials printed on paper will become, indeed have already become, less and less important in the new electronic culture we are rapidly entering.” (33)

The MLA ought “to attend closely to the uses of original materials and to save as many of those artifacts as possible.” (34)

An example indicates “the extreme difficulty of deciding which books to save in their original form for their artifactual value, as they cannot all be saved. Nevertheless, we must decide. I hope the MLA will play an important role in that process.” (35)


“The net present value cost of digitizing the estimated national collection of monographic documents was far less than the net present value cost of maintaining the same documents in a paper-based format.” (abstract 1)

“Very large net present value cost savings can be attained if a digitization project on a national scale is undertaken by academic and public libraries.” (abstract 3)

“The traditional method of preparing, storing and disseminating paper-based documents for use in libraries and information centers has led to spiraling costs which have reached crisis proportions in recent years. These costs have been fueled by increasing activity by publishers coinciding with decreasing availability of financial resources to libraries. Faced with these problems, many information professionals have begun to doubt the usefulness of paper-based technology as a long-term foundation for providing cost-effective information services.” (1)
“Large net present value cost savings can be realized over the assumed model life cycle if a large-scale digitization project is undertaken by academic and public libraries nationwide. Output data for the costs of both the digitized document system and the paper-based document system indicate that these cost savings over the life cycle of the study model can be attributed primarily to one factor: the tremendous cost savings resulting from the elimination of duplicated copies of digitized documents, due to the selection for digital processing of documents which are highly demanded and quickly processed.” (158)


“The proliferation of electronic information and communication systems has created a crisis of accountability and evidence. As more and more of the records of our society are available in electronic form, users are asking how they can be sure electronic records created in the past will be available in the future and how they can be sure those received today are trustworthy. The issue is critical for all aspects of humanistic studies because these scholarly disciplines depend on the study of original texts, images, and multimedia sources. To even imagine the humanities, it is essential to have correct attribution, certainty of authenticity, and the ability to view sources many decades or centuries after they are created.” (63)


“An awareness of the significance of primary records is not incompatible with a desire to see old texts converted to forms that make them amenable to the advantages of electronic access and searching; what it does mean, however, is a recognition that any converted form can never stand as a full substitute for the original record from which it derives.” (57)

“Reproductions normally represent single copies; but there is no limit to the number of copies that are useful for textual collation and physical analysis. Differences among copies of the same editions exist in books of all periods ... no matter how many copies one has looked at, there is always the possibility that the examination of additional copies will disclose further variants.” (61)

“The ease with which electronic texts can be altered (both intentionally and inadvertently) is already a matter of concern to some readers seeking the primary

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66 David Bearman was editor of *Archives and Museum Informatics: Cultural Heritage Informatics Quarterly* from 1987.
records of writings that were originally transmitted in digital form; it is misleading, however, to contrast this instability with what one writer on the subject calls ‘the fixity of text in the print world’ for variations exist in printed editions of all periods.” (61, note omitted)

“The totality of a book’s design constitutes a cultural message and is part of what the book offers for reading.” (62)

“Pre-nineteenth-century items are likely to be relatively safe, both because the rag paper used in them is not destructively acidic and because they are widely perceived to be valuable in monetary terms. The voluminous stock of nineteenth- and twentieth-century materials, on the other hand, is certainly at risk, both because many of them contain highly acidic paper that becomes brittle and because the vast majority of them are regarded as having insignificant market value. When these facts are combined with a belief that verbal content and physical form are distinct, the items considered important enough to be microfilmed or otherwise reproduced (as in electronic form) are in danger of being discarded afterward.” (63)

“Caught in a material world, we have no choice but to recognize that the most reliable evidence from the past comes to us in physical objects.” (70)


“One need only review the conference program for the next meeting of the Society for Textual Scholarship to see the range of views and approaches represented in contemporary textual studies. The separation of text from its physical embodiment is not in evidence here. Increasingly the physical text, that is, the text as displayed and transmitted in its individual manifestations, has gained status as a category of evidence for literary study and research. A recent policy statement adopted by the Modern Language Association [1995 above] offers that ‘since the shape, feel, designs, and illustrations of books have affected, and continue to affect, readers’ responses (some of which have been recorded in the margins of pages), access to the physical forms in which texts from the past have appeared is a fundamental part of informed reading and effective classroom teaching.’” (327)

“Teaching materials and approaches that are informed by considerations of the physical text can help students experience a work of medieval literature to some degree in its manuscript expressions.” (329)


“The Literatures in English Section (LES) of the Association of College and Research Libraries supports the efforts of the Modern Language Association and, more recently,
the ARL-MLA Joint Working Group in drawing attention to the issues surrounding the preservation of print materials in their original formats in the nation’s libraries.

“Historically the survival of the print record has been threatened from forces as varied as manufacturing processes, publishing practices, environmental conditions, space limitations and deaccessioning practices, and microfilming programs. The impressive capabilities of computer technology, combined with the widespread perception that digital images can serve as surrogates for materials in their original formats, now pose a new threat to the preservation of primary materials within our libraries. While digitization offers enhanced capability for the manipulation of texts, it has not yet been proven an effective long-term preservation strategy. In addition, digitized and microform images of texts cannot fully convey the range of information preserved in actual artifacts themselves, and, therefore, are not appropriate replacements for the primary record in all circumstances.

“The MLA Statement on the Significance of the Primary Record [sic] is a valuable document in that it makes unequivocally clear the importance of primary materials in their original formats for a host of research purposes including, but not limited to, printing and publishing history, textual criticism, reader response studies, and reception studies.”


“If the same title exists in different editions, it is not unusual for there to be heavy use of the newer editions and little or no use of the earlier editions. Certainly such older editions should be weeded out.” (211)


“The entities defined as work (a distinct intellectual or artistic creation) and expression (the intellectual or artistic realization of a work) reflect intellectual or artistic content. The entities defined as manifestation (the physical embodiment of an expression of a work) and item (a single exemplar of a manifestation), on the other hand, reflect physical form.” (13)


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67 James Joseph O’Donnell, a classical scholar, was vice provost for information systems and computing at the University of Pennsylvania.
“Transference [of ancient texts from scroll to codex] did not guarantee survival, of course[,] but it was a necessary condition. It is worth bearing in mind that when we think of scanning our libraries into machine-readable form, we are making a similar judgment about their fates. Put another way, too much attention to preservation of the printed book may have the perverse effect of undermining prospects of future readership if materials fail to be digitized. (That judgment is rendered increasingly draconian by the decay of much twentieth-century archival and library material preserved on acid-based paper. It simply cannot be economical to preserve indefinitely every library’s every copy of every book, and the sheer quantity of discards that will be forced by decay over the next few decades will at first astonish us.)” (52–53)


“Some books and documents must be preserved in original form because they have scholarly value as objects as well as for the information they contain. The challenge of preserving these materials, called artifacts, requires an understanding of the scholarly value of artifacts and the development of an effective and efficient strategy for their preservation.” (2)

“The information value of some formats in and of themselves, limitations of current preservation technologies to capture all significant information, and occasional special requirements for access indicate a need for a strategy for preservation of selected books and documents in original form.” (3)

“Perhaps the least obvious (and most commonly overlooked) problem with the effectiveness of any preservation technology that reproduces or alters the original, no matter how ‘faithful’ the reproduction or unobtrusive the alteration, is that the scholar is left with information less reliably accurate than that in the unaltered original format.” (5)

“The vast majority of all artifacts could be preserved without treatment and at low cost through preservation measures to reduce their rates of deterioration and wear, thereby extending their lives and minimizing the number of artifacts in need of treatment at any one time. Controlling the environment (temperature, relative humidity, air impurities, and light levels) reduces the rate of deterioration; protective enclosures mitigate the effects of a poor environment or housing arrangement and reduce wear; sensible handling and use practices help preserve artifacts for many decades of continued research.” (5)

68 Barclay Ogden was director for library preservation at University of California–Berkeley.
69 The transcription published online by Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) is incomplete:

“The ‘Statement on the Significance of Primary Records’ issued in 1995 by the Modern Language Association (MLA) resulted in the formation of a task force by the MLA, the American Historical Association, and the Association of Research Libraries to examine the issues related to the preservation of primary records or ‘the artifact’. The task force concluded that a report documenting the development of library preservation activities would be helpful to inform scholars that libraries have developed effective mechanisms to preserve printed materials, however, funding will never be sufficient to save every physical object. Moreover, new formats (film, video, digital information) have introduced new technological and additional financial challenges. The report should also encourage scholars to become involved in discussions of preservation priorities, both at the national level within their societies and on their local campuses. Preserving Research Collections is the result of the task force’s recommendation.

“The following organizations were represented on the Task Force on the Preservation of the Artifact:

American Academy of Religion
American Historical Association
American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies
American Society for Theatre Research
Association of Research Libraries
Council on Library and Information Resources
Library of Congress
Modern Language Association
Society of American Archivists

“This report focuses on these libraries’ strategies for maintaining access to scholarly resources in their original physical form or in new information formats.”

“In contrast to environmental control, conservation, and deacidification, reformatting does not treat the artifact but instead focuses on reproducing and saving the intellectual content of endangered items. Reformatting creates a permanent replacement of deteriorating monographs, journal volumes, and other paper-based documents. Libraries have used preservation microfilming to reformat at-risk materials since the 1930s. It is a mature technology that is governed by a detailed set of standards, but it is also an imperfect technology. Microfilming cannot affordably capture detailed, continuous-tone, or multicolored illustrations, and it complicates access, being machine-dependent.”
“It is important that scholars understand not only the causes and consequences of the deterioration of different information media, but also the choices involved in protecting and preserving research collections at risk. Scholars should participate in the debate about priorities for action.”

“Research libraries lack the funds required to preserve all the deteriorating and endangered materials in their collections. Therefore, choices about what to preserve and how to preserve it must be made.”

“Ultimately the defining issue is selection: Which resources should be preserved and in what format?”

“Not surprisingly, concerns have been raised about the long-term impact of preservation microfilming on scholarship. While many scholars acknowledge the need to reformat brittle print resources, they also stress the enduring value of these resources as artifacts. Selection decisions, they emphasize, need to be made in a context that recognizes the importance of retaining the original object. This position is cogently presented in the Modern Language Association (MLA) ‘Statement on the Significance of Primary Records,’ [note omitted] and the accompanying essays by several humanities scholars in the MLA’s Profession 95 articulate the important issues concerning preservation of texts whose original formats have scholarly value. The ‘Statement’ arose from the concern that reformattting was endangering the continued availability of the physical artifacts. Central to the policy recommendations of the MLA are the vital importance of the physical features of printed texts and the consequent need to retain primary records for humanistic scholarship.”

“Scholars and librarians recognize the difficulty, even the impossibility, of solving the problem of preservation in its entirety. But now is certainly the time to strengthen the involvement of scholars and to forge new partnerships.”

“The value added by digitization, the use of electronic materials in both teaching and research, the retention of crucial features of the source materials, the importance of the original artifact, and the convenience of navigational tools must all be kept in mind.”

“National scholarly organizations play a vital role in making preservation, and all that the loss of the nation’s cultural heritage means, explicit on the national agenda. The Modern Language Association, working with the American Historical Association, has taken the lead in publicizing the importance of preserving textual artifacts.”

“The pressure to contain costs in higher education has intensified competition for resources. There is a danger that the preservation of print collections will be underfunded and pushed to the margins of institutional concerns. But it is clear that substantial investment in preserving print-based resources will continue to be necessary.”

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“In the words of John Bruer, there is a danger ‘that our overall preservation programs may lose their appropriate balance, resulting in both the abandonment of proven (non-digital) techniques as well as the likelihood that large categories of (non-digitizable) materials may be put at risk.’ [note omitted]

“Future preservation efforts in research libraries will require a strategic vision that integrates the need for maintaining print resources with the opportunities offered by digital technologies. Adding to the challenge of balancing conflicting needs is the problem of limited financial resources. If libraries are to preserve scholarly resources either in their original formats, or as reformatted surrogates, substantial economic and technical investments are necessary.”


2000. Lynne Brindley.70 “Pulp Fiction about the BL.” Times Literary Supplement, 17 November. 15.

“Until the summer of this year there had been few who challenged the accepted wisdom that long-term access to newspapers could only be effectively provided by means of microfilm. Microfilming (to modern standards) preserves the information contained in newspapers while wood-pulp paper deteriorates rapidly.”

“Before individual newspaper titles were listed for disposal curatorial staff reviewed them to see if there were exceptional reasons why originals should be kept and a few fell into that category. We appreciate that in some cases there are elements of colour, a feel of the paper, or fine detail, which will not be captured on microfilm. At the same time most of the problems with viewing detail on microfilm come about because the original is in bad condition.

“There are a number of myths concerning the conservation issues. According to some there is a belief that if newspapers are well cared for they will not decay beyond a certain level. That is not the view of British Library conservators who sadly have to deal with the appalling deterioration that takes place with newspapers printed on wood pulp.”


70 Lynne Brindley was chief executive of the British Library from July 2000.
71 Janet Gertz was and is director for preservation, Columbia University Libraries.
“In order to achieve presentation, we must provide a longterm version of at least the intellectual content of the item. Ideally we preserve the original object itself, appropriately repaired and properly housed.” (97)

“To date no one can prove that any digital version will survive and still be accessible beyond a few decades, despite much talk about migration and emulation, especially considering the repeated intervention these will require. Further, the accuracy and authenticity of a digital version may be open to question. ... Digital copies alone cannot constitute preservation.” (97)

“Microfilming has always caused some wear and tear on materials, and there was a time when many of us routinely disbound volumes and discarded them after filming. Readers objected strongly not merely because they disliked microfilm, but through genuine concern about the destruction of the original volumes, as stated by the Modern Language Association statement (1985) and perhaps most strenuously expressed by Tanselle (1989, 44), who speaks of ‘the unnecessary destruction of books in the name of textual ‘preservation.’” (101)


A detailed and much-publicized exposé of the destruction of newspapers and books by libraries in the name of preservation by microfilming and digitization. Winner of the National Book Critics Award for Nonfiction in 2001.

“Lynne Cheney, the new chairperson of the National Endowment for the Humanities, said: ‘Our thrust at the Endowment has been on intellectual content rather than on the book itself.’” (179)

“I asked [Patricia Battin] about Thomas Tanselle’s proposal to store any post-preservational rejects in a publicly financed repository. ‘Tom has presented this to me in public meetings before,’ Battin said. ‘And I don’t think the economics have been worked out.’ ... Tanselle, she said, ‘represents a fairly small group of scholars for whom this is a very passionate issue. I think the vast number of scholars would rather have the access that we were trying to provide.’” (256)

“‘Access,’ as employed by practicing retrievalists, does not mean physical access. The ability to summon words from distant, normally unreachable sources, which can be a fine thing for scholarship, is being linked to the compulsory removal of local physical access, which is a terrible thing for scholarship.” (257)

“Most of Baker’s horror stories date from an era that has passed, leaving a trail of destruction, to be sure, but also a reaction against its misguided policies. After some scandals about the loss of precious books, the New York Public Library committed itself to a strong stand against deaccessioning; and other libraries have followed suit. Not that the danger has disappeared. Baker rightly warns that the enthusiasm for digitizing could produce another purge of paper.”


A cautionary tradition summarized by William Blackstone in *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69) favored writing on parchment or paper because both substrates are sufficiently “durable” and also sufficiently “secure from alternation.” Although electronic text can be made sufficiently durable if remediated and backed up at appropriate intervals, it can be made secure from alteration only in ways that are not open to ordinary inspection, leaving in doubt the question of its authenticity.


“Yes, I and other preservationists exaggerated the danger of paper turning to ‘dust.’ We did so because we were presented by the NEH with a once-in-a-century opportunity to reformat wood pulp papers that will eventually become unusable, and scare tactics were sometimes necessary to convince repositories to part with their decaying holdings.”


“At the very time that more material is made available online and retrievable anytime, anywhere, there is increased attention among scholars to original, unreformatted materials and an increased appreciation for the material aspects of these sources (Tanselle 1998). There are eruptions of public outcry when material losses in libraries and archives are discovered. Scholars demand increasing attention to an ever-expanding range of candidates for preservation, but library budgets simply cannot support those

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72 Robert Darnton was Shelby Cullom Davis Professor of European History at Princeton University from 1985. In 2007 he became Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor and director of the University Library, Harvard.

73 Daniel P. Jones was archivist and publications director, New Jersey State Archives.

74 Stephen G. Nichols was James M. Beall Professor of French and Humanities, The Johns Hopkins University, from 1992. Abby Smith was director of programs at Council on Library and Information Resources from 1997.
demands. Preservation has thus become an unfunded mandate, the more pernicious for often being implicit.” (3)

“In recent years, scholars have identified an increasing number of library items that have research value as physical objects, above and beyond the information recorded in them. The Modern Language Association (MLA) has been concerned that the technologies of reproduction, such as photocopying, microfilming, and digital scanning, are becoming so good, so readily available, and so serviceable for many research and teaching purposes, that the importance of the underlying original might be devalued. To call attention to the dangers inherent in ignoring the fate of physical collections, the association created a committee to consider the issue. This group defined an artifact or primary record as ‘a physical object produced or used at the particular past time that one is concerned with in a given instance’ (MLA 1996 [sic; 1995]). Members asserted that for practical purposes, all historical publications, even those produced by mass-production techniques designed to minimize deviations from a norm, have unique physical qualities that may have value as a carrier of (physical) evidence in a given research project. [note omitted] Although careful to note it is not possible to save all copies of printed materials from destruction and the ravages of time, the committee’s statement nonetheless provoked some anxiety among librarians. This is because, while asserting the importance of preserving as many artifacts as possible and acknowledging the need to set priorities for preservation, the statement gave no guidance about how to make such priorities.

“Nicholson Baker recently alleged that libraries’ poor stewardship of books and serials has resulted in the loss of many resources of artifactual value. He further asserted that it is the responsibility of libraries in general and of certain large libraries in particular to collect masses of primary source materials and preserve them in their artifactual form. Yet he, too, failed to address the crucial matters of who would bear the responsibility for setting priorities, who would assume the custodial burden of these comprehensive collections, and who would fund these activities (Baker 2001).

“An increasing number of library collections are being promoted, as it were, to resources of artifactual, not just informational, value. Given the nature of contemporary scholarship and its wide-ranging interest in material and popular culture, this trend makes perfect sense. Regrettably, libraries have never had sufficient funds to collect and preserve everything of potential research value. Thus, for libraries, this expansive view of artifactual value presents problems that are not primarily theoretical, but eminently practical.

“Given the task of identifying achievable, fundable preservation strategies and goals for libraries, the task force took seriously its charge to identify parameters of artifactual value and to do so in a way that, following the spirit of preservation principles, would
accept some loss as inevitable. It sought, in other words, to manage the risks of unacceptable loss.” (8–9)

“Libraries need to consider whether ... infrequently used and commonly held materials are ... being preserved in a concerted and deliberate way in their original form by any one (or more than one) library. If they are not, the sources for digital surrogates that are common today could easily become rare, or nonexistent, tomorrow. This is the substance of Nicholson Baker’s objection to libraries’ practice of discarding their newspaper holdings. If 50 libraries are holding the same issues of the same newspapers in original form, at great expense and with limited use, then it is difficult to make the case that all of them should pay to house, shelve, reshelve, and preserve the originals. However, if 49 of those libraries, over time, have replaced their physical holdings with digital surrogates, one certainly hopes that the fiftieth library would be aware that its physical holdings were now rare, and therefore subject to [certain] considerations.” (44–45)


“Librarians and archivists are not blind to the aesthetics of the materials in their care, but they cannot make large-scale decisions about the management of those collections on the basis of aesthetics alone. There are other competing demands, at least equal in importance to preserving neat stuff, and, in most cases, the microfilming was done to try to balance those competing interests, each of them commendable in itself.” (387)

“Since the 1960s ... scholars who practice what is still called the ‘new social history’ have continued to read newspapers, but they recognize how limited they are as sources. They are biased and generally offer elitist views. (You need a fair amount of cash and equipment to go into the newspaper business.) At the same time, historians have come to rely on frankly more informative sources, such as census and other demographic data. Pretty pictures in pretty bindings are pretty nice, but they are pretty much immaterial to most historians.” (388)

“Of course, he is correct in saying that ‘mistakes still occur’ (p. 45) in all preservation efforts, and the serious issues, buried in this breathless prose thus deserve careful consideration. In that process, archivists and librarians will have to rethink much of what they do and how they explain it to the wider world. Three areas merit particular attention. First, Baker is entirely right that technological solutions to the problems of preserving research collections were seriously oversold by their proponents. ... There is little question ... that those who sought to increase both public awareness of the

75 James M. O’Toole was associate professor, History Department, Boston College.
problems of deterioration and the money available for addressing them often overdid it.” (390)


“Access to paper journals is preserved by making lots of copies, scattering them around the world at many independent sites, making it easy for a reader to find a copy, making it easy for a library that discovers its copy to be missing or damaged to find a replacement, and making it hard to find all the copies to modify or destroy them. LOCKSS allows librarians to keep the purchase model by running independent web caches that collect the journals to which the library subscribes. The caches crawl the journal web sites, and deliver the journals to their readers if the journals are not available from the original publisher.” (24-1)


“Objects containing electronic texts are no different from other objects (artifactual or natural) as subjects for our evaluation. We need specialists to help us determine the status of all texts, however they were produced, just as we need them in other areas of life. There is nothing alarming in our reliance on experts, as long as it occurs in [a] critical spirit. Rather it is a sign of how we come to terms intelligently with the complexities that we face in every aspect of life.” (136)


An impassioned (“angry,” 3) response by an archivist, asserting the need for librarians and archivists (the latter neglected by Baker) to claim the respect due to them as expert professionals, and discounting Baker’s critique as an unbalanced “jeremiad” (37). Makes perfunctory mention of the fact that “many scholars and many forms of research require the maintenance of the artifact, requiring us to work with legacy systems whether we wish to or not.” (20–21)

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76 Vicky Reich was assistant director, HighWire Press, Stanford University Libraries and Academic Resources. David S. H. Rosenthal was a distinguished engineer at Sun Microsystems Laboratories, Menlo Park, California.
77 Richard J. Cox was professor of archival studies, Department of Library and Information Science, School of Information Sciences, University of Pittsburgh.
“‘Form affects meaning,’ as the late Don McKenzie succinctly put it in his Panizzi lectures delivered at the British Library in 1985 [note omitted]. He was expressing a widely acknowledged commonplace of literary and historical study that is very far from universally accepted in library management.” (7)

“Since the dawn of microfilm in the 1930s, its proponents have been saying that newspapers will soon turn to dust—but they haven’t and they won’t, unless they are brutally mishandled.” (29–30)

“The deputy director at the Library of Congress during one of its most self-destructive phases, in the 1980s, said that libraries can no longer be warehouses of little-used material. But in fact that is what libraries are. They are warehouses, or storehouses if that sounds better, of things awaiting their infrequent summons.” (21)

“Even a model of distributed responsibility faces a number of serious obstacles. The first is the determination of what is important to save. We do not have the resources to save every single newspaper in its original form. There are parallels to architectural preservation, where it is routinely accepted that not all buildings are worth saving. Likewise, some newspapers are not worth saving. They will have little or no value to scholars. The challenge will be to get scholars and librarians together to make those tough choices.” (38)
“All this time I was amazed, too, by the condition and readability of the nearly 100-year-old papers, a bit yellowed or browned inside, the pages tearing easily if not turned carefully, the brittle exposed edges often crumbling on the desk; but never in twenty-eight years have I opened a paper of this period and found its columns unreadable or its pages disintegrated beyond use.” (53)

Mike Crump.80 “The British Library’s Policy with Regard to Newspaper Disposal.” 87–98.

“Much analysis has taken place since the grim realities of acidic nineteenth century paper were brought to the attention of the library world in the late 1970s. No research to date has overturned the basic chemical fact of life that the paper is acidic and will self-destruct over time. It is agreed that much can be done to slow that process but nobody has argued in a reputable conservation source that it can be arrested, let alone reversed, without hugely expensive intervention. ... [A] sense of urgency should not be stilled by arguments that the paper does not deteriorate at the pace that was originally posited, because the pressures on libraries such as the British Library have not diminished.” (93)


“We are meeting as part of the School of Advanced Study in London University. One of the courses for which the school is responsible is the MA in the history of the book. Anyone interested in that subject will know that above all it is concerned with the study of the book as a material object. During this conference we have been told several times that while the newspapers have been disposed of, their content is available on microfilm. You do not have to have read Thomas Tanselle’s eloquent arguments to know that this is a contradiction in terms. A microfilm cannot reproduce or embody or be the same as an original newspaper. This is not just because of the simple fact that microfilms tend to be made only in black and white, which cannot do justice to the wonderful colour made use of by the American newspapers Nicholson Baker showed us, but also because they cannot reproduce the form of the original newspapers they purport to be preserving. It is an obvious point, but an essential one, that in all cases form affects and determines meaning. I want to end by quoting what the late Don McKenzie said in his centenary address to the Bibliographical Society, ‘What’ s Past is Prologue’. McKenzie, who was so acutely aware of the importance of the role of form in relation to content, chose his words with characteristic care: ‘Any simulation ... is an impoverishment, a theft of evidence. By not keeping our newspapers, the British Library has impoverished us all: it has stolen our evidence.” (100–01)

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80 Mike Crump was director of reader services and collection development, The British Library.
81 H. R. Woudhuysen was professor of English at University College, University of London.

“When Nicholson Baker’s book, Double Fold, appeared in early 2001, the task force’s work took on added importance. Baker’s naïveté and ad hominem attacks irritated many librarians, but he, nevertheless, drew attention to the value of original documents, the desire of those who use libraries to interact with primary resources, and the failure of society to fund libraries sufficiently to enable them to adequately carry out their archival missions.” (676)


“Double Fold, as was widely reported in the popular press and many professional publications, criticized the nearly universal library practice of microfilming newspapers and then discarding the originals, or more usually, purchasing someone else’s microfilm and discarding one’s own copies.” (493)

“During the nearly hundred years of BSA’s existence, the discipline of bibliography has been practiced from a number of perspectives—enumerative, descriptive, analytical, historical. What all these approaches have in common is that they rest on the study of physical artifacts. ... Original printed artifacts are the raw stuff of our discipline and the foundation of the contribution which bibliography can make to knowledge. Their survival is essential to our enterprise.” (496)


“Collection development and weeding can be a sticky point between faculty and library staff. Teaching faculty would react negatively to librarians making all collection development and weeding decisions. Library budgets make it impossible and even impracticable to acquire all needed library resources. The library will need a clear and straightforward mission statement crafted by both librarians and members of the library committee to educate users about collection development and weeding. Faculty agonizing over which library materials would be cut should be educated about the availability of resources and the ease of access of these resources electronically.” (60)


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82 Nancy E. Gwinn was director, Smithsonian Libraries, Washington, DC.
83 Hope Mayo was and is Philip Hofer Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts at Houghton Library, Harvard University.
84 Patience L. Simmonds was assistant librarian, The Behrend College Library, Penn State–Erie. Jane L. Ingold was assistant librarian, The Behrend College Library.
“Those who do not wish to accept his condemnation of the library policies that have resulted in the disposal of so many books and newspapers cannot brush [Baker’s] book aside as the screed of a naive sentimentalist. Instead, they must recognize that his position follows logically from the basic reasons for the value of artifacts and that any meaningful argument with him must attempt to find flaws in those reasons.” (250–51)

“Originals are necessary for answering questions raised by reproductions, which are often misleading or defective. Reproductions offer secondary evidence and can never carry the authority of originals, which survive as direct testimony to what people made and used at particular past moments.” (252)

“Every verbal artifact, published or unpublished—indeed every object, whether or not it has words attached—is of value as evidence of the culture that produced it.” (258)

“There is unfortunately still ample reason to be gravely concerned about the unnecessary (as opposed to the unavoidable) future diminution of the stock of nineteenth- and twentieth-century verbal artifacts.” (260)

“The very fact that books can be treated as artifacts in one part of a library and as disposable containers of information in another shows how unclear the library world is about what libraries are for. The two approaches to books actually constitute two distinct, if complementary, fields, and there is no point trying to force them together. If this dichotomy were embraced rather than covered over, ‘librarians’ would then be in charge of all books and would regard them all in the way ‘rare books’ are now viewed; and ‘information specialists’ would supervise the manipulation of texts without calling into question the value of preserving artifacts, which would not be in their domain.” (262–63)


“Despite valid reasons for weeding, some librarians may be reluctant to weed due to possible repercussions from administration, faculty, or the community when large numbers of books are discarded. Other librarians may be reluctant to weed for fear of discarding material that may become important for future historical research.” (95)

“With any weeding project, librarians run the risk of withdrawing material from the library’s collection that may become useful in the future for historical reasons. However, the weeding project at the Briscoe Library has resulted in opening up shelf space by removing dated, damaged, and little-used materials from the shelf, and these benefits

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85 Rajia C. Tobia was associate library director for collection development, Briscoe Library, The University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio.
must be weighed against the risk of withdrawing material that may be needed in the future.” (98)


Detailed accounts of some regretted large-scale deaccessioning projects and notice of more casual disappearance of library books.

“Paradoxically, it is precisely this kind of book—a title that very few people know very much about, or care very much about for that matter—that is of mounting concern to preservationists, since collections of unquestioned rarity such as [several described previously] are not likely to fall victim to neglect or indifference even if they are deaccessioned. Those books simply go someplace else where they will find a more welcoming home. Academic titles that are in constant circulation or support ongoing research programs are not likely to be discarded either. It is the huge reservoir of material in the middle—books no longer in demand, books that are decidedly dated, books that do not appeal to prevailing tastes, ‘brittle’ books that are not high-priority items for repair—that are most immediately at risk.” (220)


“Nobody goes into this profession to make money or become famous. So when anyone, especially an outsider, raises criticisms of the work we do our response is to circle the wagons. Cox, despite his intentions of taking the moral high ground, unfortunately fails by resorting to character assassination and reflexive defensiveness.

“I find this response to be troubling and ultimately counterproductive. Baker raised many substantive issues, from public accountability to sloppy science. It is our task to rise to the challenge of continuing the debate—not by trivializing it or dismissing it, but by carefully analyzing the issues and asking for better answers.” (77)


Abstract: “Weeding or deselection of materials has become an integral part of library management. Based on a nineteen-question survey about weeding practices in public libraries, this article discusses the personal perspectives of public librarians on weeding

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87 Lincoln Cushing was electronic outreach librarian at the Institute for Industrial Relations, Haas School of Business, University of California–Berkeley.

88 Juris Dilevko was assistant professor, Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto. Lisa Gottlieb was a doctoral candidate, Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto.
as well as the weeding practices of their institutions. The three most common criteria for weeding are circulation, physical condition, and accuracy of information. Librarians overwhelmingly believe that weeding increases use of books and patron satisfaction. In addition, the public library was framed as a venue that offers safe, clean, and fresh ‘product lines’ with various natural life cycles and expiry dates. This discursive formation raises questions about the extent to which public libraries and their collections are becoming commodified, homogenized, and ephemeral, and whether such ephemeralness and homogenization serve the interests of all community members.”

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2003. Helen Forde.89 “Blast and Counter-Blast: Perfidy Exposed?” Review of Baker, Double Fold (London, 2002) and Cox, Vandals in the Stacks (London, 2002). Journal of the Society of Archivists 24 (1): 103–06. “Occasionally the dislike by readers of the medium of microfilm is mentioned [by Baker], but more often the emphasis is on the loss of the artefact as a result of dumping the original following copying. … He argues passionately about the need to ensure the survival of every edition of every newspaper. … Costs, too, are bandied about in a scattered fashion, out of context, potentially endangering future funding.

“It is easy to overlook the issues Baker avoids, and these are manifold. Perhaps the most basic is the nature of the information he is so intent on saving. Newspapers are filled with immediate material, not intended for long-term survival.” (104)

“Richard Cox is absolutely correct to insist that the public must be involved in and understand the type of professional problems faced by librarians and archivists.” (105)

“Nicholson Baker has provided a racy read and the response must be as compelling. Cox has done the right thing, rehearsed the right arguments and pointed out all the flaws in Baker’s diatribes but I doubt if Vandals in the Stacks will serve his purpose in ensuring that the issue stays in the public eye.” (106)


“Baker is not, by the way, saying that reproductions should not be made or that they are not useful for some purposes but only that they should not be regarded as replacements for the originals.” (156)

“A massive job of education is needed to acquaint those in charge of documents (of all kinds, including books and newspapers) with the essential role of originals in scholarly research and, indeed, in serious and historically informed reading. … It is to be hoped

89 Helen Forde was president of the Society of Archivists, UK.
that widespread and productive awareness of the problem will occur while there are still materials to be saved.” (157)


“The practical reality for libraries and archives has always been that deciding what to discard and eliminate is far more pressing than deciding what to save and preserve.” (208)


Abstract: “As part of a study by the British Library into long-term growth in our collections and our corresponding requirement for physical storage, the Library sought the views of professionals in comparator libraries in Europe, North America and Australasia on the suitability of digital material as a long-term archival surrogate for print.”

“In summary, digital is not generally viewed as a suitable long-term preservation archival surrogate for print. It is currently regarded more as an access medium. As a preservation medium, digital was generally seen as unstable, experimental, immature, unproven on a mass scale and unreliable in the long term.”

“The preservation of the print publication as ‘artefact’ is becoming an increasingly important factor, whereby the look and feel of the print format has intrinsic value for future research. Similarly, safeguarding the authenticity of the national published output for legal and research purposes are cited as reasons for collecting and retaining the print format.”


An account of defensive mischaracterizations of Nicholson Baker’s critique.

“How future decisions are made among academic research library administrators on broad issues of national policy as were exposed by Baker in *Double Fold*, will indicate whether Baker himself has had some long term influence on the profession. This will most likely play out around the current hot issue of digitalization.” (13)


90 David Woolwine was associate professor of library services, Hofstra University.

91 Graham Barwell was associate professor, School of Social Sciences, Media and Communication, University of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia.
“In a recent, brief outline of his views on the authenticity of electronic texts, Tanselle [2001] argues that it is necessary to compare like with like. Thus, in thinking of textual instability, one should see the ease of producing altered, often corrupt, clean copies using electronic means as merely an extension of the process that already exists in print, where a form of type can be altered or a document cut and pasted for xerographic reprinting to produce corrupt, clean copies. This view, while pleasing in its placement of digital text production as an extension of other forms of text production, glosses over the much greater degree to which an electronic text is subject to corruption.” (419)


“Based on our knowledge of certain journals that rely heavily on detailed graphical elements to convey information, a selection of online articles from these journals was checked to assess the quality of images and illustrations. We did not have the resources to evaluate every title, but instead used our best judgment when deciding which titles to examine in more detail. A number of poorly scanned images that did not compare favorably with the print equivalent were discovered. Notes about these problems and specific examples were then shared with our Elsevier representative.

“As the evaluation proceeded, it became clear that we would not be able to withdraw as many print titles as anticipated. The question then became one of determining what could reasonably be withdrawn.” (63)


Projects an inventory of monographs held by members of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries, in part to facilitate the selective discarding of copies of “low use, low value” titles.

“Each library could arrive at its own comfort level about how many copies need to be held in the national/regional preservation collection before it discarded its copy of the item. ... We postulated that most libraries’ comfort levels, before being willing to discard a title held in other storage facilities, would be three copies in a regional storage facility.” (140)


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92 John Burger was executive director of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries. Paul Gherman was university librarian at Vanderbilt University. Flo Wilson was deputy university librarian at Vanderbilt University.

93 Paul Metz was director of collection management, University Libraries, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia. Caryl Gray was college librarian for agriculture and life sciences at Virginia Tech.
“While the best-known controversies have surrounded public libraries, academic librarians are not immune to criticism and must recognize that often powerful faculty stakeholders are correct when they argue that many research library materials have enduring value and are not widely held elsewhere.” (273)

“The realities that make it easier to defend weeding and storage may include the following: ...

“Shifted emphasis in research away from the humanities disciplines towards scientific and technical disciplines whose materials lose their value more quickly.” (273–74; emphasis added)

“With many critics it helped to give tangible examples of the materials being discarded. For example, we would ask, ‘Who would want a book on personal finance that predates the personal computer and spreadsheets, or the fourth edition of a chemical engineering textbook now in its seventh edition?’” (275)

“Duplicate copies will be discarded if encountered.” (277)

“While it is hypothetically possible that any superseded books or serials on a scientific topic could be of future interest to an historian of science, it is important to recognize that unwarranted reluctance to discard such materials could frustrate essential efforts in controlling our collections. Seminal works, classic textbooks even if superseded, works about the sciences themselves, examples of bad or controversial science (Lamarckian genetics, cold fusion) should be retained, but most other superseded materials in science and technology should be discarded.” (277)


Considers implications for historical research of the instability and unreliability of digital records.

“The study of reading, books, book production, editing, and the research process posits a very simple assumption: that which has been read, edited, absorbed, used and studied will still exist as an artifact.” (2)

“A true archive ‘shouldn’t depend on duplication for preservation.’ [note omitted] While expressing gratitude to libraries for digital and microfilming preservation efforts, the Modern Language Association states that ‘the advantages of the new forms … cannot fully substitute for the actual physical objects in which those earlier texts were embodied at particular times in the past. … All objects purporting to present the same

94 Dorothy Warner was associate professor and librarian, Rider University Libraries, Rider University, Lawrenceville, New Jersey. John Buschman was professor and librarian, Rider University Libraries.
text ... carry different information, even if the words and punctuation are identical ...’” (9, quoting from the MLA’s “Statement on the Significance of Primary Records”)

“We are nearing a time when we will bequeath a scholarly record that will be akin to the study art history only through the descriptions of the critical literature, but without the original artifact.” (10)


“Papers originally presented at a symposium organized by the University of Maryland College of Information Studies and the University of Maryland Libraries in March 2002.”


Although Double Fold [by Nicholson Baker (2001; see above)] received favorable reviews and attracted many supporters, detractors saw flaws, for instance, in his denial of the fragility of brittle paper and his refusal to admit that there are simply not enough resources for librarians to save everything. While not agreeing among ourselves about the truth of Baker’s conclusions, we all recognized that he had performed an important service in creating a greater public awareness of preservation issues. ... we ... decided to move beyond Double Fold and consider the whole question of what original research materials should be saved more broadly.” [note omitted] (xi)

“G. Thomas Tanselle has written so eloquently on the research value of original publications that we are pleased to include an excerpt from his article ‘Uses of Primary Records,’ even though he was not able to participate in the symposium.” (xii)


Mark Roosa. “Some Thoughts on the Race against Time and Inherent Vice: Library Preservation in the Late Twentieth Century.” 23–35.


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95 Yvonne Carignan was head of the preservation department at the University of Maryland Libraries.
Phyllis Franklin, in her essay on ‘The Importance of Primary Records’ articulates the view of the members of the Modern Language Association (MLA), sophisticated users and lovers of primary records. Although we cannot ask the MLA to stand in for all scholarly users of original resources, we can note that their concerns about the survival and accessibility of imprints are typical of many humanities disciplines. These professionals are often enthusiastic adopters of the digital delivery of information. But not all of their needs can be met through convenience of desktop access to texts. The MLA has expressed numerous occasions a strong and abiding need for access to origin unreformatted materials for a variety of very specific professional needs, all of which require close readings of different kinds. The most cogent expression of their view is the MLA ‘Statement on the Significance of Primary Records’ (reprinted in these proceedings).” (94–95)


Rehearses the poll results described above (Franklin 1993); reproduces the text of the MLA’s “Statement on the Significance of Primary Records” (1995).


“Many of us in the field of rare books and special collections are torn between conflicting imperatives. In an ideal world, of course one can say all books are unique in some way and should be preserved in their original format. And I would caution all of us who maintain rare collections to be sensitive to the perspective of the private collector and many in the general public, remembering that we are custodians and preservers of physical media that define our culture. Yet from a managerial standpoint, we have to make hard choices, using our scarce preservation resources, to decide how to best ensure maximum accessibility to researchers.” (126)


96 See note 74.
97 Douglas P. McElrath was curator of Marylandia and rare books at the University of Maryland Libraries.
Pace Baker, “not everything can be saved. Selection, or what archivists call appraisal, is critical. Even if it is immensely difficult to predict what will be useful in the future or to get various communities to agree about what should be saved, it is still necessary that we engage in these discussions, exercises, and experiments because we know we cannot literally save everything. From my own perspective, the chimera of even desiring to save everything seems only like an unrealistic, and certainly unmanageable, objective. Would a biographer want an endless videotape, in real time, of his or her subject’s life? Of course not. The question is not whether to select, but how to create the best process with the best result, documenting what we do as we go so that scholars and other researchers comprehend what they see when they use archival and library collections.” [note omitted] (180)


Abstract: “After purchasing Elsevier’s Earth and Planetary Sciences electronic journal back file package, problems with image and figure quality in articles became evident. Personnel at Elsevier verbally committed to rescanning any issues having at least one image or figure of unacceptable quality, if staff at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign would identify the problem issues. A study of 35 titles in the Earth and Planetary Sciences back file package revealed that, of the 6038 issues published before digital format was available, 73.6% had at least one image with unacceptable quality. The implications of poor image quality in electronic journals should be considered when libraries are deciding whether to discard print copies. Publishers and librarians should work together to ensure that print journals converted to digital format are of acceptable quality.” (162)

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98 See note 77.
99 Lura E. Joseph was assistant professor of library administration and geology and digital projects librarian, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

“SUMMARY: Who Wants Yesterday’s Papers? was a symposium organized by librarians and graduate students at the University of Maryland in 2002 to bring the debate about the future of print collections to campus. The symposium included academic faculty to strengthen communication with them about these issues. Besides reporting what the faculty said they wanted at the symposium, Carignan describes some of the trends changing research libraries in ways not anticipated in 2002, and some of the responses needed for continued stewardship of and access to print collections in research libraries.” (75)

“For decisions affecting the future of print collections in research libraries, it is important to listen to what scholars say about their needs for print versus electronic information. Since the Who Wants Yesterday’s Papers? symposium was held in 2002, the burgeoning growth of digital information and developments in scanning print collections have combined with stagnant library funding to force changes in the way research library administrators plan the future of collections. These developments mean that preservation of print collections may no longer be a library priority. With the struggle underway in research libraries to stretch limited resources for provision of both digital and print resources, the scholar’s input is critical for achieving the right balance.” (76)

“If there is anything to be learned from the comments of faculty who participated in Who Wants Yesterday’s Papers? it is that researchers need both print materials and electronic information, and with increasing frequency, they need both in combination.” (82)

“Continued communication among librarians and their constituents is essential for discovering what of the new and old media to preserve. Scholars can help identify the best future for the book and the research libraries that preserve them.” (83)

2006, 8 September (last updated). “JSTOR Archiving Practices.”

“Preservation of Original Source (print)

“The cost savings associated with freeing shelf space in libraries has always been an intended benefit of JSTOR. Realizing this benefit brings with it a responsibility to ensure that several complete runs of the print journals are preserved. JSTOR has recognized the need to secure original paper copies of the journals in the archive and has signed agreements with the California Digital Library and Harvard Depository to act as initial paper repositories for JSTOR. Paper copies of the first 350 journals included in the JSTOR

100 See note 80.
archive will be held and preserved by these institutions for future consultation and use by JSTOR. These repositories will play a critical role as a resource for JSTOR when new opportunities may necessitate the re-scanning of the print journals and will also provide a fail-safe in case of a disaster in which the digital archive is damaged or degraded.”


Synthesizes two dozen works, including the MLA’s “Statement” (1995), that assert the need to preserve records in their original formats for their evidentiary value.

“Digital surrogates do not serve as satisfactory substitutes for those engaged in original scholarship. Indeed, digitization provides additional access points to print collections and enhances our print collections. It does not replace them. Digitization is not a preservation tool although it is all too often construed or misconstrued as such by archivists and librarians who should know better.” (10)


“Every reformattting, every new presentation, changes the text’s meaning either dramatically or subtly. ... Users often care a great deal about format. ... A large number of scholars focus their work on medium.” (180)

“The field of book history is based upon and has grown around the examination of paper-based artifacts.” (184)

Regarding “intrinsic value” as a supposed criterion for material preservation: it is apt to neglect “the work of disenfranchised groups or neglected genres of literature.” (186–87)

“Books sitting in libraries accumulate their own history as readers scribble reactions in them. Discarding books, even unimportant editions with marginalia, is destroying precious pieces of evidence that allow historians and literary scholars to build a case history of reading.” (188)

“Will originals be saved as we head into an age of digitization? Will they be undervalued, with the textual content but not the artifact preserved? There are certainly many people in the library profession who will admit that a lot of mistakes were made when originals were considered redundant and consequently destroyed after they had been microfilmed or digitized. ... But will there be a new set of mistakes?” (192)

101 Lynn C. Westney was associate professor, Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois–Chicago.

102 Robert Bee was principal librarian, Skelton Branch, Trenton Public Library, Trenton, New Jersey.

“Mission

“The mission of HathiTrust is to contribute to the common good by collecting, organizing, preserving, communicating, and sharing the record of human knowledge.

“Goals

“In this effort our goals [include]: ...

“To stimulate redoubled efforts to coordinate shared storage strategies among libraries, thus reducing long-term capital and operating costs of libraries associated with the storage and care of print collections.”


“The Google Books and Open Content Alliance (OCA) initiatives have become the poster children of the access digitization revolution. With their sights firmly set on creating digital copies of millions upon millions of books and making them available to the world for free, the two projects have captured the popular imagination. Yet, such scale comes at a price, and certain sacrifices must be made to achieve this volume. ... Once it understood that these projects are access digitization initiatives and not preservation endeavors, the quantity of technical documentation published by each group becomes less important. Only in preservation digitization is it truly necessary to fully understand the exact technical details of the digitization process in order to understand its impact on the faithfulness of the digital surrogate. In preservation digitization, the focus is on the entire process and not just the end product. In access digitization, however, the focus is on the end product only and certain limitations and shortcuts are accepted to achieve the high levels of efficiency necessary. It therefore becomes clear that a full and complete knowledge of the workings of the two projects is not necessary: the purpose of both projects is to produce usable, but not preservation-grade, digital surrogates to offer mass access to the materials being digitized.”


“Even if the quality is inconsistent, the digitized books support discovery and can provide some level of emergency backup if something were to happen to the print

103 Kalev Leetaru was coordinator of information technology and research, Cline Center for Democracy, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.
104 Oya Y. Rieger was associate University librarian for information technologies, Cornell University Library.
books. However, inconsistent quality and gaps pose a serious preservation issue if the digitized books are used as an excuse to discard all the original books.” (23)

“Many research libraries face serious space shortages. In response to changes in library use, they are reducing the amount of space devoted to storing print materials in order to expand the user study and research areas. Will LSDIs [Large-Scale Digitization Initiatives] affect libraries’ decisions about how to use their physical space and how best to deal with their book collections? For instance, will there be more pressure from university or library administrations to eliminate duplicate copies of books or to store them off site? Also, what will happen to print originals after they are reformatted? In the era of microfilming, originals were sometimes discarded after being filmed. Likewise, it may be tempting to use the acquisition of a digital surrogate as a justification to deaccession original print material. What would be the long-term implications of discarding print copies on the basis of the existence of digital versions that may be incomplete or below-standard image quality?” (29)

“A number of funding agencies make grants available for preservation surveys, conservation treatment, and reformatting. Some of these funders may question the value of maintaining and preserving book collections that are available in digital format. If the value of preserving such print publications is not articulated and justified, funders may shift their priorities.” (30)

“With the increasing value placed on online access, research institutions will be under pressure to justify investments in maintaining their legacy print collections, some of which are low use and redundant. Consolidation of holdings in a shared-storage environment can offer significant space savings as well as improved control of ambient temperature and humidity. Agreements among geographically distributed print repositories can create additional economies of scale.” (38)

“Given that the library community is unlikely to have funds to redigitize the same content, digital books will inevitably be viewed as ‘insurance copies’—as backups for originals (regardless of the questions about quality).” (42)

“Appraisal and selection issues and the cost-effectiveness of maintaining duplicate copies of digitized content, especially given the current financial climate and competing priorities, were additional topics of concern.” (50)


105 Roger C. Schonfeld was manager of research, Ithaka S+R, New York. Ross Housewright was analyst, Ithaka S+R.
This report recommends limited retention arrangements for journals in the wake of JSTOR’s digitization initiative. Nominally focused on journals, it carries implications for books also.

“In order to guard against losses over time and assure the availability of a single copy after the stated time horizon, a greater number of print copies of any digitized title need to be secured today. In the exemplar scenario, a minimum of two page-verified print repository copies would be needed.

“When such well-digitized digitally-preserved text-only journals are held in two page-verified print repository environments, therefore, other libraries can safely withdraw their print holdings if they so choose.” (2; emphasis added)

“We do not assume that there is any intrinsic value to the maintenance of collections of print artifacts but rather take a critical perspective to analyze why the community might want to keep any print at all.” (3; emphasis added)

“Although there may be rationales for retaining some print copies, we do not assume that these print copies should be retained forever, but rather that minimum time horizons should be established for such retention.

“The questions about withdrawing print versions that this report considers are appropriate for general collections of published materials—and inappropriate for rare and unique collections.” (3; emphasis added)

“In the absence of important marginalia or other rare and unique features, therefore, identical print journals are interchangeable, eliminating the need to consider each one as an individual artifact.” (9)

“Digital collections [such as Google Books] that [were] never intended to serve as preservation reformatting efforts may be inappropriately relied upon.” (9–10)

“Even in the case of preservation-oriented digitization efforts with stringent up-front quality controls, the lack of a print collection that can serve as a source for redigitization as needed entails a degree of risk of permanent information loss.” (10)

“If a provider is responsible in its correction of user-reported errors, the need to retain print for such purposes may grow minimal after a sufficient amount of time has passed after materials were made available digitally.” (10)

“For pages containing modern printed text only, high quality scans produced according to well-understood standards are likely to remain sufficient for future needs; unless future scholars develop a deep interest in the grain of journal paper or other microscopic features, there is little meaningful additional information to be captured from these pages.” (11)
“The digitization of images has proven to be more problematic to conduct at scale.” (11)

“Idiosyncratic scholars may come to have interest in arcane features of text-based materials that are insufficiently captured by digitization. Such needs are edge cases and are correspondingly difficult to predict. Certainly, some rare book libraries or special collections will want to accession exemplars, at least, of what have been common scholarly journals, to enable book historians and other scholars to have access to this form of publishing.” (12)

“Campus politics may complicate preservation decisions. For many libraries, the risk that faculty will protest the removal of even the most rarely used print collections inhibits decision-making about print collections.” (12)

“The ability to point to the guaranteed availability of (and a mechanism for access to) print somewhere in the system would help the library to assuage the concerns of these key stakeholders without limiting local decision-making. Due to a decline in faculty interest in print preservation both locally and remotely in recent years, the political necessity of maintaining even remote access to print collections will probably remain a requirement only in the medium term.” (13)

“We suggest the need for the community to have access to one or a small number of copies of the print version for at least 20 years.” (13)

“Many libraries whose users require immediate access to image-laden journals may find the digitized version alone to be inadequate. Sufficient print must remain available to provide for access in case it is needed at some future point, and again the data available does not permit our analysis to provide system-wide assurance that print withdrawals are acceptable.” (14; emphasis added)

“A study should examine the extent to which there will be scholarly dependence on print versions of digitized materials. While studies have already found that there is very little bona fide scholarly need for access to print versions of most digitized materials, it is believed that image-intensive materials may constitute an important exception. Is this the key dividing line or are there others? Would a higher quality digitization process for image-intensive materials be unreasonably expensive relative to the marginal benefits? Are there other approaches that might empower image-intensive fields to make a more complete transition to the electronic environment?” (23; emphasis added)


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106 Paul Conway was associate professor, School of Information, University of Michigan.
“As technology devices become increasingly feature rich, usable, and affordable, the proportion of information that makes its way to paper or film is declining, along with the proportion of paper that warrants long-term preservation.” (62, note omitted)

“I asserted that preservation action should nearly always be taken in reference to use, rather than to the purely intrinsic value of an object, but that in the end, value judgments driven by limited funding are at the heart of the traditional preservation business case.” (64)

“Rieger [2008, above] sees the greatest impact of the digitization efforts on traditional book collections, including the prospect that most library books will reside in remote storage facilities, traditional preservation functions will reorient to support digitization quality control, and the artifactual value of books will pale in comparison to their digital surrogates—readily available for print-on-demand services but stripped of their tangible connection to their origins and history. … Rieger demonstrates quite compellingly that the digitization of books places the preservation community in a nearly impossible bind.” (68)


“In any plausible configuration, academic and research libraries will be called upon to preserve and make available both print volumes and electronic records. [Footnote:] Even in a world where almost all use is digital, print can serve as a backup that is subject to a different profile of risk than electronic records. Thus it makes sense to keep some print copies as insurance against loss of electronic records. Additionally, even for works that are of quite ordinary quality and purpose (for example, university press monographs of the 1940s), the original print version may prove to have value as an artifact. Finally, original print copies often have significant historical value beyond the nominal content that is recorded in their pages. Libraries are in part museums of print, for many good reasons.” (82)

“The costs associated with a print-based world, often assumed to be small, are actually large.” (102)

“University libraries tend to be located on prime real estate, and … there are uses of central campus stack space—for classrooms, study, offices, and enhanced library services, among others—that would be far more valuable than using that space to store materials most of which are used rarely, provided that access to the materials in aggregate could still be provided reliably.” (102)

107 Paul N. Courant was University librarian and dean of libraries, University of Michigan. Matthew “Buzzy” Nielsen was assistant director, North Bend Public Library, Oregon.
“Why do people assume that libraries and librarians hate books (or bound journals) and can’t wait to get rid of them? We went into this field because we love books, most of us. But we have to care more about the students and researchers who use our libraries, and we have to try to do what’s best for them. For a long time that meant taking flimsy journals and magazines and binding them, making them into solid book-like objects that would last a long time. Now it’s a new paradigm, and we’re making the texts in those journals available via the internet. We don’t like throwing out the bound journals, but we have to make room for other things in the library. We receive something like 6000 new books a year. The library building isn’t getting any bigger, but our collections are growing and growing.”


“2. In Hathi Trust and in the public domain. This scenario would use the approximately one million public domain titles currently in the Hathi Trust as the basis for identifying corresponding print holdings for de-accessioning and archiving.”


“The most visible element of a sizable library de-selection project is likely to be a Dumpster, like the one dropped outside the Tutt Library at Colorado College this past July. The project at hand was removal of print backfiles of JSTOR titles. The Library had access to full-text digital versions of all this content, as well as access to print versions in several other libraries within Colorado. JSTOR content is of course securely archived via Portico. In short, these JSTOR backfiles met all of the criteria outlined in the Ithaka ‘What To Withdraw’ framework.”

Overnight some people removed the discarded volumes from the dumpster, which they “skillfully arranged into a sort of igloo.” Staff of the library publicized this response in a blog posting (see 2010 “JSTOR” above).

“Because solid groundwork had been done by Tutt Library staff with the larger Colorado College community, this situation was not blown out of proportion by well-intentioned but uninformed passer[s]by. Even so, there was one flaming comment on the Library blog, showing the level of emotion that removing library materials can generate. And, even for many of us who believe that this is a necessary course for many libraries to

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108 Robert Kieft was librarian, Occidental College, Los Angeles. Lizanne Payne was executive director, Washington (DC) Research Library Consortium, from 1989 to 2009; subsequently, an independent consultant specializing in shared print collections.

109 See 2009 above.
take, there are very mixed feelings at seeing these carefully-acquired, well cared-for (but unused) volumes on their way to the recycler.”


“America’s top ten academic libraries alone hold more than 100 million volumes. If we truly want to make a difference in the preservation of what remains to be saved of the past two hundred years of print, then rare book and manuscript librarians should be doing much more to involve themselves in decisions their parent institutions will make, and are now making, about the fate of books held in academic libraries outside special collections.

“Many in the special collections profession like to repeat the truism that all books in libraries will be rare books someday. Or they would have been, if given the chance to get that old. The books quietly aging in our nation’s research libraries will need to account for themselves, and many books published during the last 100 years will likely not have the opportunity to do so.” (117–18)

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110 Katherine Reagan is Ernest Stern Curator, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Cornell University.
“Books will play a central part in our lives and in the creation of new knowledge for centuries to come. But we should not take our monumental institutional collections for granted, especially in hard times.

‘We may only have one chance to get this right. If we get it wrong, I am certain that the descendants of our antiquarian book trade friends will be happy to sell our deaccession mistakes from the general stacks back to our institutions’ rare book and special collections divisions in 2075, at great profit.” (120)


Abstract: “In the spring of 2008, the Collection Development Department at the University of Kansas Libraries undertook an initiative to reduce costs by eliminating print subscriptions to journals it was receiving electronically. A study was designed and implemented to determine how this might impact students, faculty, and other patrons of the Murphy Art & Architecture Library. As a direct result, the majority of print art journals under consideration were retained, largely due to inconsistencies in content and quality found within the electronic versions.” (37)

“Illegible text is a potential problem with electronic journals in any discipline, but with art in particular, image quality is paramount. Issues with color and contrast can obscure detail and meaning, rendering the accompanying analysis or commentary difficult to follow or altogether unintelligible.” (39)

“The pressure to transition from print to electronic formats was an impetus to examine closely the present condition of the library’s electronic art journals. The experience highlighted deficiencies in the electronic versions (ranging from the tolerable to the egregious) and provided a basis for the Art and Architecture Library to support its decisions, with documentation, to the head of collection development for the retention of print subscriptions for specific titles. From the literature review conducted after the study, it was clear that although concern over the content and image quality of electronic journals is incipient within the larger library field, it remains largely an untreated topic within the context of art journals. It is hoped that the experience of the University of Kansas Murphy Art & Architecture library serves to enlighten others and promote a more deliberate appraisal of these resources before major decisions (print vs. electronic) need to be made for the sake of the collection.” (39)


111 Adam Robinson was reference assistant, Wheelock College Library, Boston.
“The Center for Research Libraries (CRL) conducted a preservation audit of HathiTrust ... between November 2009 and December 2010, and on the basis of that audit certifies HathiTrust as a trustworthy digital repository. ... CRL certification applies to the repository’s ability to preserve and manage digital files of books digitized by the University of Michigan, Google, and the Internet Archive, as well as the digital files generated from books digitized by other providers that conform to comparable standards.”

“One explicit goal described in the HathiTrust mission statement is to ‘coordinate shared storage strategies among libraries, thus reducing long-term capital and operating costs of libraries associated with the storage and care of print collections.’ The repository should put in place and clarify its plan for achieving that goal, as the cost reduction described is a relevant metric of the value of HathiTrust and its services. The new HathiTrust pricing model, to be introduced in 2013, will directly correlate the overlap between the repository corpus and the print holdings of the participating libraries. This will increase pressure for participating libraries to divest of print volumes available through the repository.

“The quality assurance measures for HathiTrust digital content do not yet support this goal. Inspection criteria and standards are in place for materials ingested from the Google Books project, but it is not clear what results when an object fails such inspection. It is also unclear to what level of quality review materials digitized by partner institutions or those made available through entities such as the Internet Archive are subjected. This will be material to library decisions on whether to retain, conserve, or dispose of corresponding physical copies of books represented in the repository.

“Currently, and despite significant efforts to identify and correct systemic problems in digitization, HathiTrust only attests to the integrity of the transferred file, and not to the completeness of the original digitization effort. This may impact institutions’ workflow for print archiving and divestiture.”


“Recycling, especially at scale, minimizes materials handling. Cartloads of books are simply emptied into a large container once the record maintenance has been completed. The transaction costs are low, but such a vessel certainly increases the chance of complaints from faculty, library staff, and visits from the student newspaper. Without proper advance communication, these uninformed responses from the community can end up absorbing more time than has been saved.”

112 Rick Lugg was executive director, Sustainable Collection Services (SCS), LLC.
2011, 23 August. HathiTrust Digital Library. “Proposal 1 - Distributed Print Monographs Archive (HathiTrust Collections Committee) – PASSED.”

“From its inception, HathiTrust has aspired to reshape the landscape of research libraries. This landscape includes the management of vast, highly-redundant collections of printed resources for which readily accessible digital instantiations are increasingly available. ...

“Transparency and durability will create trusted relationships and foster a shared approach to collection management; the assurance that reliable copies exist elsewhere in the research library ecosystem will allow other libraries to responsibly reduce the size of local collections to save and/or reallocate space, without risk of irretrievable loss to the collective collection; and decreasing reliance on print collections with fewer resources devoted to their care will allow libraries to direct a greater portion of their resources toward growing digital uses and more targeted curatorial management of the print collections.”


“There are vitally significant variations in the stacks: editions, printings, issues, bindings, illustrations, paper type, size, marginalia, advertisements, and other customizations in apparently identical copies. Such evidence is necessary for us to understand what books were, how they functioned, how they were produced and consumed across time, and what they meant to past cultures and other readers.

“Moreover, in the case of Google Books and HathiTrust, the emphasis has been on quantity over quality. If our academic research libraries replace large swaths of 19th-century artifacts with hastily executed scans, they will be trading away irreplaceable legacies and gutting disciplines that rely on the evidence of the past, especially history, bibliography, textual criticism, and the history of the book. They will also be putting the real world of the historical book ever farther out of reach of students, even as they are ostensibly providing access to it via surrogates. In such a future, 19th-century books as things of paper and ink will be truly forgotten.

“Humanities scholars have a vested interest in lobbying for the retention of the printed record in the general collections of academic research libraries. Such collections are places for discovery and the foundation of entire disciplines. This archive of the history of the making and consumption of books cannot be replaced by single-copy scans; and new scholars of the historical record cannot be trained on simulations.”

113 Andrew Stauffer is associate professor of English, University of Virginia.

“In the new environment of large-scale digitization and third-party content aggregation ... repository certification may be insufficient to provide assurances to stakeholders and end-users about the quality of preserved content. For an institution and its community of users to trust that individual digital objects have archival integrity and to know that objects deposited in preservation repositories have the capacity to meet a variety of uses envisioned for them by different stakeholders, additional assurances may be needed. Archivists, digital curators, and digital repository managers must validate the quality and fitness for use of the objects they preserve and, in so doing, provide additional investment incentives for existing and new stakeholders.” (294)

“The history of the printed book is rife with descriptions of how production processes may introduce variety in the published product. Through its physical life cycle of handling and use, the physical integrity of a given volume may be compromised in any number of ways, including lost pages, rebinding that obscures text, and degradation of the paper that adversely affects readability. The digital scanning process itself captures the physical peculiarities of the source volume and then may introduce other artifacts that compromise the intellectual integrity of the volume. Finally, post-scan image enhancement, undertaken on batches of digitized volumes, provides opportunities for image and text corruption. Together, these three sources of quality errors aggregate and potentially co-relate to render a digital representation that may be significantly less useful than users desire, need, or expect to find.” (300–01)


“If redundancy in system-wide holdings were reduced to just 15 print copies per title—a figure that recent studies suggest is adequate to ensure survivability of at least one copy for the next one hundred years (Schonfeld, 2009)—a total of more than 20 miles in shelf space might be recovered by libraries.” (22)

“One can easily imagine that many academic libraries will choose to downsize local document collections in favor of online versions; for such institutions, the Hathi preservation services could provide a compelling and cost-effective alternative to local print archiving.” (24; original emphasis)

“Popular titles like Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* or Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, as well as classics like Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* or Homer’s *Iliad*, are each represented by hundreds of digitized editions in the HathiTrust Digital Library; the long-term

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114 Constance Malpas was strategic intelligence manager and research scientist, OCLC Research.
preservation of the intellectual work embodied in these manifestations is, to coin a phrase, virtually guaranteed.” (24)

“Libraries availing themselves of this service would still be ‘on the hook’ for preservation of editions not replicated in the Hathi collection, but could manage those resources more efficiently.” (25)

“The largest subject-based categories of public domain content in the HathiTrust Digital Library, based on title counts in June 2010 ... appear to represent the greatest near-term opportunity for redirection of library preservation resources, since at least some libraries can be expected to withdraw and replace locally-held physical copies with freely available digital surrogates. ... the predominance of titles in the humanities is significant, as faculty in history, philosophy and other humanities disciplines are typically the most concerned about relegation of local print inventory. The greater access enabled by full-text provision, in combination with the improved preservation conditions in most off-site facilities, should go some way toward allaying faculty anxiety.” (28)


A Foucauldian account of art installations that repurpose deaccessioned books.

“By claiming the title of library, and by deliberately using library terminology to describe their work, these alternative libraries simultaneously undermine and reinforce notions of the library and librarianship. They provide sites of resistance to traditional notions of value and utilize conventions of libraries as a mechanism of rebellion, resistance, and play.” (255)

“‘The alternative libraries enable one to be open to the possibility of ‘thinking differently than one thinks.’ They create spaces and the potential for new discursive unities by forcing one to consider the relationships between texts deemed worthy of inclusion in the library, and those which have been discarded. The reclaiming and the reanimation of discarded books is one way in which one can transform the way one thinks. Alternative libraries, of the kind discussed here, can show us the nature of this transformation.” (265)

115 Gary P. Radford was professor of Communication Studies, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey. Marie L. Radford was associate professor, Department of Library and Information Science, Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick. Jessa Lingel was a doctoral student in Library and Information Science at Rutgers.

“Since 2011, The Art of Google Books has collected and showcased analog and digital anomalies and curiosities found in the Google Books database.” These include, among other things, some striking failures of illustration digitization.


“We believe the technology behind digitization is reliable, replicable, and sustainable, and we’ve learned a great deal about how to approach digitizing materials thanks to the lessons revealed by the great microfilm boom of the last century. As such, we’ve got processes and technologies in place to monitor our digital files, keeping them secure and accessible for decades to come.

“But what about the things we can’t predict? What if the next generation of computers is so different from what we’re used to today that the very idea of digital files changes

116 Krissy Wilson is a senior learning designer, School of Professional Studies, Northwestern University.
117 Eric Ames is assistant director for marketing and communication for the Baylor University Libraries and Information Technology Services.
completely? What if a specialized virus destroys every TIFF file in creation? What if the
Mayans were right, and civilization as we know it craters at the end of the year, rendering all our painstaking efforts profoundly moot?

“The best answer is to do what people have done since 200 BC: go back to the paper
versions.

“That’s why we counsel our partners to use the process of digitizing materials to serve as a catalyst for rehousing materials in archival storage if they’re not stored that way already. That’s why we urge conservation of fragile materials before they arrive at our center. That’s why we never tell them it’s safe to throw something away just because it’s been scanned, cataloged and placed in a digital collection.”


“We partnered with Sustainable Collections Services (SCS) to develop rules to identify items for possibly withdrawal. SCS is currently working with several top tier academic libraries such as Johns Hopkins, California State University System, and James Madison University on similar projects. SCS extracted, compiled, and analyzed our data to develop a list of ‘withdrawal candidates.’ This list provides a starting point for the discussion of materials eligible for withdrawal. Data used to identify withdrawal candidates included: most recent circulation date, publication date, and the number of libraries holding the item in the US. The rules associated with each of these factors varied by subject area—for example, a more recent publication date is more important for nursing and science subjects than for history or literature books.”


“Libraries must convince scholars, faculty, and other stakeholders of the validity of a massive ‘drawdown’ of redundant holdings and increased reliance on shared collections.” (172)

“Sustainable Collections Services offers a commercial decision-support tool for monographs in academic libraries that combines circulation and item data with WorldCat holdings, HathiTrust Digital Library holdings, and authoritative title lists.” (179)

“As institutions gain confidence in a national network of shared print collections, complemented by the availability of an ever-increasing collection of digital surrogates, they will likely begin divesting duplicate copies from the collection on an unprecedented scale. While libraries welcome the opportunity to free up valuable space, they may not

118 Amy Butler was assistant professor and librarian, Collier Library, University of North Alabama, Florence.
119 Samuel Demas was college librarian emeritus, Laurence McKinley Gould Library, Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota. Mary E. Miller is director of collection management and preservation at the University of Minnesota Libraries.
be prepared for the potential logistical, legal, and political issues that may arise. It may be perceived as yet another betrayal of the public’s trust, a Double Fold redux.” (183)


“Despite the emphasis now being placed on digital collections and the virtual library, physical collections are still present and will continue to be around for many years, particularly archival and special collection material.” (26)

“Although microfilm was once the gold standard for reformatting print material and ensuring long-term access to its intellectual content, the survival of microfilming as a preservation tool is now in question.” (28)

“Even the naysayers who worried about the fate of digitized materials, should Google no longer be a player in the years to come, may be at least partially reassured by the founding of HathiTrust ... in October 2008, a nonprofit organization devoted to the long-term preservation of products of Google Books and the Internet Archive digitization initiatives.” (29, note omitted)


Abstract: “The value of local print book collections is changing. Even as stacks fill and library traffic grows, circulation continues to decline. Across the ‘collective collection’, millions of unused books occupy prime central campus space. Meanwhile, users want more collaborative study space and online resources. Libraries want room for information commons, teaching and learning centers and cafes. Done properly, removing unused books can free space for these and other purposes, with little impact on users.” (198)


“Our program arranged by the Discussion Group on ·Libraries and Research in Languages and Literatures. Presiding: David Oberhelman, Oklahoma State University Library. Speakers: Deanna Marcum, Ithaka S+R; Jay Schafer, Univ. of Massachusetts, Amherst, Libraries; Andrew M. Stauffer, Univ. of Virginia.

“As libraries rely increasingly on digitized texts and on partnerships for archiving print volumes, how do libraries and scholars cooperate to ensure preservation of copies with

120 Karen F. Gracy was assistant professor, School of Library and Information Science, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio. Miriam B. Kahn was the founder of MBK Consulting.
Globalization brought with it rapid and enormous growth in the financial industry, as a percentage of the U.S. and world economies, giving rise to immense new financial information businesses, like Bloomberg and Thomson Reuters. In addition a dramatic expansion of the policy research sector occurred, brought about in large measure by the simultaneous increase in U.S. trade and national security interests in other world regions and a downsizing in the federal government’s own research apparatus. This expansion also fueled the development of powerful—and expensive—new information and text processing software applications to serve the for-profit research industry, raising the bar for the interfaces and tools expected to accompany databases. With these developments libraries suddenly found themselves to be a smaller segment of the information market. Where libraries in the past were among the major repositories of published content, they were now suddenly dwarfed by information giants like Dow Jones, Thomson, and LexisNexis that were scaled to serve well-funded and voracious consumers of information in the business and intelligence communities.” (72)

“Today ... CRL [Center for Research Libraries] is concentrating its efforts on the primary materials of research, rather than on current scholarly journals. This is because we believe that the scholarly literature will not disappear, even without CRL’s efforts. It is different with primary sources. They require active and constant minding. To ensure their survival CRL must pursue a course different than many individual libraries, a strategy that seems counterintuitive in today’s world: one that is not based on current interest and usage. Nothing is more certain to destroy critical historical, cultural, and scientific evidence than measuring its value in terms of their immediate usefulness. If research libraries do not act on behalf of future generations of researchers and stakeholders, they have abdicated their responsibility as stewards of knowledge.” (77)

What counts as a ‘duplicate copy’ or indeed an ‘artifact’ should be the subject of much debate. In the absence of scholars’ input, librarians will necessarily make these decisions based on oversimplifications. ... Inadequate principles of redundant or duplicate copies will be employed in culling the collections.” (339)

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121 Bernard F. Reilly, Jr., was president of the Center for Research Libraries, Chicago.
“In the case of Google Books and HathiTrust, the emphasis has been squarely placed on quantity over quality. If our academic research libraries replace large swaths of their original nineteenth-century artifacts with these hastily-executed, single-copy scans, they will be trading away irreplaceable legacies and gutting certain disciplines that rely on the evidence of the past. They will also be putting the real world of the historical book ever further out of reach of our students, even as they ostensibly provide access to it via surrogates. In such a future, nineteenth-century books will be simultaneously instantly accessible and out of reach, splayed and untouched, so that, as things of paper and ink, they will be even more difficult to remember or rediscover than things truly forgotten.” (340)

“The books themselves are not merely reports on the nineteenth century; they are individual nineteenth-century scenes of evidence, produced, conveyed, sold, handled, read, and marked by the culture of study. This archive of the history of the making and consumption of books cannot be replaced by single-copy scans, and new scholars of the historical record cannot be trained on simulations.” (340)


“Page-image errors are individually identifiable attributes that affect the visual appearance of single bitmap pages, such as thick or broken text, distortions in accompanying illustrations, and warped or cropped pages. A particular error may be confined to a single page or repeated across a sequence in a volume. Whole volume-level errors apply to structural issues surrounding the completeness or accuracy of the volume as a whole, such as missing pages (including foldouts not digitized), duplicate pages, and ordering of pages.” (20)

“Whole-volume review demonstrates that fully one-quarter of the volumes in the 1,000-volume sample contain at least one page image whose content is unreadable. There are two principal reasons for this: fatal digitization error (severity level 4 or 5) or the failure to digitize a page with folded content, such as maps, charts, or other graphic materials. The latter cause stems from an explicit policy by Google not to pause scanning to digitize foldouts bound into a book.” (26, note omitted)

“To preserve the products of large-scale digitization is a decision to preserve imperfection. The findings from one aspect of a multi-faceted investigation into image quality as manifested in the artifacts of error suggest that the imperfection of digital surrogates is a nearly ubiquitous feature of Google Books and that such imperfection will become firmly accepted by preservation repositories. HathiTrust has been designed to hold, protect, and deliver what is essentially becoming an online research library collection in its own right, one that reflects the flaws of the source and introduces new and more complex artifacts.” (27)

Reports the “fifth cycle of the Ithaka S+R Faculty Survey US,” which surveyed “a random sample of US higher education faculty members to learn about their attitudes and practices related to research, teaching, and communicating.” 5,261 faculty members responded to the survey.

“While respondents continued to trend overall towards greater acceptance of a print to electronic transition for scholarly journals, they grew modestly less comfortable with replacing print subscriptions with electronic access. Monographs, although widely used in electronic form, present a mixed picture for any possible format transition. While some monograph use cases are quite strong for electronic versions, others—especially long-form reading—are seen to favor print by a decisive share. Even so, a growing share of respondents expects substantial change in library collecting practices for monographs in the next five years.” (79)


“Collection Analysis and Retention: What to Archive Next?

“Currently, shared print monograph projects start by hiring a consulting and collection analysis service (e.g., Sustainable Collection Services). The service identifies a cohort of monographs around which a group can build its political ‘legs’ for collaboration. The emphasis is initially on highly duplicated, low-use titles. The analyses are costly, difficult to repeat, and involve intense consulting. Once governance structures are in place, it will make sense for a group to externalize and routinize analyses.

“‘To support a longer-term vision, collection analyses and coordination of retention commitments could be raised to the network level and reframed to support regular decisions about ‘what to retain next.’”

“A governing group could set annual incentive rates to ensure a certain pace of archiving (number of titles retained) each year. The group could monitor growth in shared collections and develop annual selection guidelines to stimulate or discourage commitments in certain areas.”

“Certainly, there will be substantial one-time costs to build the infrastructure to support this. One-time costs would include the development of the cloud service layer, a replacements registry, guidelines for incentives, copyright guidelines for scan-on-

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122 Kate Wulfson worked as an analyst at Ithaka S+R
123 Emily Stambaugh was manager of shared print, California Digital Library, University of California.
demand, logistics research to identify providers for direct delivery by mail, and training for pilot locations in scanning and direct delivery services. These may be areas for foundation support and development by HathiTrust and OCLC. Other one-time costs may be borne by retaining libraries (e.g., scanning equipment).” (70)


“Although the fact that books printed before 1800 (and many thereafter) are not duplicates is well established, still comes the cry from librarians and those who should know better that digital images are adequate replacements for the originals or sufficient for most purposes. ... Only one copy of the book tends to be reproduced: it is good to have the singularity of that copy recognised, but what of all the rest? Most digital images fail to do justice to specific details of binding, ownership and annotation. They cannot, except in rare cases, give any indication of the nature of the paper on which the book has been printed. Anyone who has worked extensively with a digital-image book will be all too aware of the limitations of the technology. Digital images of books are extraordinarily useful and can save a great deal of time, but they are not intended to and can never be substitutes for the original. They complement but can never replace direct firsthand examination of actual copies.”


“We recognize that libraries and their parent institutions must steward both space and resources to meet a great variety of needs. In taking up the question of coordinated print collections management, we do not mean to suggest that libraries entirely refrain from withdrawing print materials from their holdings or curtail the digitization programs that have been so fruitful for increasing access to them. Rather, we hope to encourage a broad conversation about collection management, involving scholars, librarians, administrators, and other stakeholders.”


Reports the results of two surveys of research libraries regarding shared print management programs.

“There may ... be an emerging disconnect between some stated benefits and actual behaviors that warrants attention. While many respondents cite space concerns and a goal of reducing duplication as reasons for participating in shared print programs, fewer than half reported that deselection activity has commenced at their library based on retention commitments at other libraries. In fact, seven respondents indicated local

124 H. R. Woudhuysen has been rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, since 2012.
125 Rebecca Crist is project manager, library initiatives, Big Ten Academic Alliance, Champaign, Illinois.
resistance to discarding print emerged as a result of participating in shared print programs. Local concerns may be related to shared programs’ relative newness in collection management and may also reflect concerns about 1) access to print retained elsewhere, 2) level of holdings verification performed, and 3) nervousness about the stability of digital access or quality of digital resources.” (15)

“Harmonization of access, discovery, and delivery of intentionally retained materials may become more acute as shared print programs mature and libraries begin to reduce duplicates. Deaccessioning has begun.” (17)

“**Anticipated Future Uses of Print**

“To better understand the reasons for continued print management, ARL [Association of Research Libraries] libraries were asked about several possible uses for print and the number of years into the future this usage would be important. These questions were asked to begin to answer the question ‘why retain print?’ These questions were only asked about print journals that are digitally available and preserved. Questions were not asked about journals only available in print or about print monographs (the vast majority of ARL library holdings). The rationales for retention may be different but these responses may begin to help formulate a response and strategies. The questions asked are modified versions of questions originally developed by Ithaka S+R in an unpublished study, and were used with permission. It may be useful to contrast the responses in this study, which represent an ARL library perspective, with work currently underway among ARL, Modern Language Association, and American Council of Learned Societies on print collection management, a scholar’s perspective, to begin to develop future frameworks for shared print collection management, particularly for monographs.

“The rationales for retaining print when journals are well digitized and preserved can be generally grouped into 1) technical cases related to digitization/re-digitization (scanning errors, changing scanning standards), 2) research cases that require consultation with the print form, and 3) library stewardship or collection management responsibilities (catastrophic loss of online resources, my community thinks it is important, institutional prestige, and avoiding deaccessioning work).

“For print journals that are well digitized and digitally preserved, the most compelling future uses for print according to respondents were those that require consultation with the print form, including consultation for artifactual characteristics, authenticating a version of record, access to illustrative content or supplementary material, and access for digitally disabled users.” (17–18)

“Librarians choose to deselect, or weed, in academic libraries for many reasons. Sources of information sought by students are increasingly available online, and space may be better utilized for other purposes, such as group study spaces. Weeding also rids the collection of outdated or irrelevant information. Yet institutions often resist weeding, as it can be imprecise, time-consuming, and unpopular with users. A variety of procedures have been instituted by librarians in an effort to streamline and objectify the process of weeding. Starting with a single data point, such as last circulation or publication date, to determine which books in the collection should be evaluated for withdrawal is simple, but puts a great burden on librarians to make withdrawal and retention decisions. Rules-based weeding, based on multipoint data, enables librarians to make better-informed choices about the collection.” (17–18)


“Recent dramatic changes have ... led to the belief that interlibrary loan and consortia (or larger scale library networks) may allow for rapid de-accession of much of local academic print collections. This paper will argue that such beliefs are not based on a thorough consideration of the scholarly and teaching needs of even smaller academic institutions and that the process of further transition should be a careful one, best thought of as proceeding in a step-wise fashion. This should be a transition based on a consideration of local needs and on descriptions of how scholars in various disciplines use library materials. Other factors should be an understanding of the nature of student and faculty research and an acknowledgement of the limitations presently existing in electronic resources.” (2)

“Material in the humanities tends not to become obsolete.” (10)

“Quantifiable criteria for retention (e.g. how often used in the last five years or decade) ignores the unpredictability of humanistic library-based research, the inability in the humanities, and the qualitative social sciences, to predict where new interpretations of texts (be they historical, philosophical, religious studies or literary) will lead and what texts will be required to construct such interpretations.” (24)


126 Cynthia Ehret Snyder is reference and instruction librarian, Olin Library, Rollins College, Orlando–Winter Park, Florida.

127 Ross E. Davies is professor, Antonin Scalia Law School, George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia.
“Habeas Libris is a website (www.habeaslibris.com) dedicated to the salvation of books—old-fashioned, ink-on-paper books. The thinking behind the website is based on four simple observations about law libraries and law librarians: (1) they are reducing their print collections; (2) they are having a hard time finding buyers—or even takers—for the books they cannot keep; (3) they would rather give away than throw away their unwanted and unmarketable books; and (4) they lack a truly cheap and easy way to offer their unmarketable books to anyone who might want them. Habeas Libris aspires to be that cheap and easy way for law libraries to give away those surplus books.”


Abstract: “Weeding is often an emotionally charged topic for both librarians and faculty. A healthy print collection needs weeding, but the campus community is often nervous and concerned about this practice. In preparing for a large scale monograph deselection project at California State University, Fullerton’s (CSUF) Pollak Library, library faculty and administration grappled with how to productively and efficiently involve the large CSUF teaching faculty in the weeding process. Library systems staff developed an innovative web-based tool that enables faculty to easily provide feedback on deselection candidates on a title by title basis. This paper explains the thoughts behind the project, the creation of the deselection database and user interface, how the weeding project was received by teaching faculty, and the results of an initial pilot.” (184)

“Shortly after the data load to GreenGlass occurred and initial weeding assignments were made, a new interim university librarian was appointed. As a member of the teaching faculty and a former chair of the academic senate, the new interim university librarian was especially interested in involving the teaching faculty in the weeding process. In addition, at an academic senate meeting, the Provost had assured faculty that they would have some involvement.” (185)

“Ultimately, the pilot was a failure. The development and use of the interface enabled faculty participation, but also seriously hindered the weeding project. A significant amount of library staff time was invested in development, testing, and training for the interface. Subject librarians also spent considerable time separating their lists of weeding candidates into smaller lists. Some librarians also mentioned that after they put a lot of work into creating an appropriate list of weeding candidates, they disliked that any faculty member, regardless of discipline, could veto the decision.” (187)

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128 Michael DeMars is interim associate dean, public services, and systems and reference and instruction librarian, Pollak Library, California State University–Fullerton. Ann Roll is associate dean for collections and scholarly communications, Pollak Library, California State University–Fullerton.

“Harvard Law School’s [case law] collection comprises 40,000 books containing approximately forty million pages of court decisions, including original materials from cases that predate the U.S. Constitution. It is the most comprehensive and authoritative database of American law and cases available anywhere except for the Library of Congress, containing binding judicial decisions from the federal government and each of the fifty states, from the founding of each respective jurisdiction. The Harvard Law School Library—the largest academic law library in the world—has been collecting these decisions over the past two hundred years.

“Digitizing these materials will make them broadly accessible to nonprofits, academics, practitioners, researchers, and law students—anyone with a smartphone or Internet connection.”


“Shared print should mean something more than just clearing out the stacks in favor of copies held elsewhere, but we should not be shy about the need to take action on the oversupply of copies in our collections. ... shared print networks are how we are ‘wisely to use, protect, preserve, and renew’ our resources. There is some concern that shared print programs will lead to a tragedy of the commons, a phrase from Garett Hardin’s

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129 Jacob Natal was executive director of The Research Collections and Preservation Consortium (ReCAP), managing a preservation repository for Columbia University, New York Public Library, and Princeton University (now joined by Harvard University).
essay on the exploitation of shared resources. In this case, the tragedy would be that too many libraries rush to discard, razing the old-growth wilderness of the stacks, while the book becomes an endangered species, only accessible to a selected few in closely held collections. This line of thought is as much the tragedy of the facile metaphor as the tragedy of the commons, though. Shared print programs are chiefly about the secondary forest, where many uses of a resource are managed with a view to sustainability and widespread benefits. In the National Forests, scientific research and outdoor recreation can be sustained alongside timber harvesting. In our libraries, the space and money to support emerging scholarly activities can coexist with opportunities for librarians to turn their attention from eking space out of crowded stacks and, instead, focus on curating a good habitat for browsing scholars.” (71)


“Library print collections management programs are being driven by bibliographically impoverished metadata, catalog records that provide an insufficiently detailed picture of the books themselves. What look like mere instances or copies from a distance turn out to be variant species when examined. Preserving true bibliodiversity in the stacks depends upon a more nuanced view of the ‘copy,’ even (perhaps especially) for books produced in the age of the stereotype plate and the industrial printing press.” (83)

Regarding an assemblage of multiple copies of Joyce Kilmer’s Trees and Other Poems (New York: George H. Doran, 1914): “All of the thirty-plus copies in my collection conform to the same metadata and would be listed in WorldCat along with these as copies. But no two are identical. They vary either because of differences at the point of production—different bindings (brown boards or grey, blind-stamped or not), pasted labels (green ink or black, thick font or thin), number of free end-papers (from one to four), treatment of the top-edge (gilt or not)—or because of their condition and evidence of use: dust-jacket or not, gift inscriptions, inserts, marginalia, etc. To map the true history of this edition and the ways it was read, one needs as much of this evidence as possible. My point is not that the 1914 Kilmer’s Trees is particularly multiform: virtually all books from this era and earlier vary from their peers in more or less significant ways that are not being captured by WorldCat metadata. That’s what humanities scholarship is for: to disambiguate and explicate a given textual/cultural scene. But it can’t be done without the evidence found only in the historical record itself.” (83)

“The data-driven de-selection movement in the library profession is currently proceeding along distorted—because oversimplified—lines. Until we pay closer attention to individual copies in their relations to one another, we will be operating in a darkness all the more confounding because it looks like light. The acquisition of
Sustainable Collections Services by OCLC in January of this year lends a sense of urgency to the situation, since SCS is a leading force in the field of data-driven de-selection.”

Current de-selection processes result in “permanently winnowing a multiform internationally-distributed collection whose significant variations lie hidden behind blandly aggregated metadata.” (83)


Lugg: “Yes, there is still certainly (and understandably) resistance to reducing print book collections—it’s a difficult topic for most of us, even when it involves little-used surplus copies. That’s why it needs to be approached carefully, with the best information available. As a community, we need to make absolutely certain that we’ve protected sufficient print copies of everything to assure preservation and access.” (43)


“Google Books may offer different editions and translations of a work, but by digitising one library’s copy of each edition, we are losing the material wealth of all the other copies of those editions; we are losing the sense of communities of readers who engage in a material way with books, and we lose not only a sense of the materiality but also the evidence of other readers’ pathways through the books and indeed additions to the book.” (67–68)

“The human traces captured in these scans—within annotations and notes, snarky comments, library brand and records, and finger images—cast a shadow over these digitized versions. That is, the digital texts are haunted by the materiality of their previous incarnations. Logically, these traces should not exist. ... these human traces on Google Books are affective and disconcerting. Not only do they impact on how we read and relate to these texts—directly shaping our interpretations, complementing or detracting from the author’s work, or in some cases obscuring the printed text completely—they foreground simultaneously both the immateriality of the electronic document and its former materiality, signalling its own metamorphoses and causing a level of cognitive dissonance in that moment.” (71)


Informants quoted in this dissertation are identified generically but not by name.

130 Tully Barnett is senior lecturer in Creative Industries, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia.
“The distributed print monographs archive was proposed by HathiTrust’s Executive Committee and was, for HathiTrust’s lead architect, one of the primary motivations for creating HathiTrust.” (240)

“It turns out that a very small percentage, about 3%, of an academic research library’s print holdings are actually used. The other 97% is essentially stored in the libraries stacks or in off-site storage facilities. This reflects a costly, inefficient and, in the view of HathiTrust’s progenitor, unnecessary reality. While he agrees that ‘libraries do need to store this material, we don’t need to have twenty or thirty copies stored in big refrigerators all over the country.’

“In his view, the HathiTrust’s print management project is fundamentally about:

libraries gaining efficiencies in storage and preservation of services while offering better access to those materials and allowing them to do even better things in the new digital world. HathiTrust really grows out of the recognition of the great power of digital access to materials over great distances and the recognition of digital formats as a valid preservation strategy. HathiTrust has the potential to revolutionize shared print management. We don’t have a firm grasp on what the print record is but if we use HathiTrust right, if we get this print book storage effort moving forward, we will begin to understand our print collections in a much more coordinated way and manage it more effectively. We can have fewer copies, have the right number of copies, not hundreds of copies of commonly unused works.

“One library director opined that print books were going to become ‘the albatross around the necks of libraries—all cost, no value.’” (243)

2016. “Concerted Thought, Collaborative Action, and the Future of the Print Record.”

White paper prepared by the Working Group on the Future of the Print Record, convened by Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Modern Language Association, which included Dan Cohen, Digital Public Library of America; Seth Denbo, American Historical Association; Mike Furlough, HathiTrust; James Grossman, American Historical Association; Charles Henry, Council on Library and Information Resources; Geneva Henry, George Washington University; Robert H. Kieft, member, Modern Language Association; Deanna Marcum, Ithaka S+R; Judy Ruttenberg, Association of Research Libraries; Elliott Shore, Association of Research Libraries; Andrew M. Stauffer, University of Virginia; Elizabeth A. Waraksa, Association of Research Libraries; and Steven Wheatley, American Council of Learned Societies.

“While ‘the place of print’ as an often heated topic dates back many decades to the appearance of microform as a medium for reproducing and distributing paper based
content, the question is posed ever more vigorously as digital technologies have made mass reproduction and Internet distribution possible.” (2)

“Decisions about retention and deaccessioning ... are frequently, and understandably, made at the local level. Records of titles removed are rarely shared outside of the local or consortial context, and no scalable infrastructure now exists to record and publicly query commitments to retain printed works. ... thousands of individual, local decisions strongly influence the future of the print record and thereby determine in part the future of scholarship.” (4; note omitted)

“The higher education community needs a national collection management system.” (5)

“A national collection management system would secure and keep safe millions of print volumes with an acceptable, cost effective redundancy that would be audited annually; it would make this collection visible and easily discovered by cataloging using universal linked data schema that improves one’s understanding of the content of the print record.” (7)

“Questions to consider might include: ...
  • “Assessment and evaluation of the necessary and prudent level of duplication in a national-scale system.
  • “Exploration and demarcation of the boundaries where variations among print copies become meaningful in terms of the number of copies to be retained in a national system; definition of the descriptive information needed about these copies in order to make them useful for scholarship.” (8)


“A picture of an object cannot be the original and fails to satisfy many types of research. Unless paper-based collections have been cataloged as ‘special collections,’ however, research libraries today are rapidly losing the desire to save them. At risk is the loss of the primary and secondary source material in research library general collections—materials as yet unidentified as ‘rare.’” (102)

“The MLA’s Statement on the Significance of Primary Records, since 1995, expressed the concern of thousands of humanities scholars who rely on library collections as primary research material. ... Now more than 20 years since its publication, the MLA’s statement does not seem to have changed the library profession’s general disregard for the consequences of losing original material.” (117, note omitted)

131 Randy Silverman is head of preservation, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.
“The wanton weeding of U.S. research library collections has deprived researchers—primarily humanists—of the evidence they need for their scholarship.” (118)


“Insofar as we resolve whole ranges of ‘copies’ to a single catalog entry and/or a scanned version of a single copy, we strip the print record of its meaningful variety.” (219)

“Librarians pursuing significant downsizing of their collections based on the number of copies in OCLC WorldCat (a common metric for de-accessioning, along with usage numbers) will be winnowing a multiform collection whose significant variations lie hidden behind blandly aggregated metadata.” (219)

“Insofar as we allow single-copy scans to stand in for entire editions and conflate multiple copies into a single WorldCat entry, we are encouraging the growth of bibliographic monocultures, editing away the details in the interests of efficiency. With such protocols, we are enabling a flattening of the human record in all of its variability, and the humanities suffer thereby.” (220, note omitted)

“It is no surprise that Riley’s poem and its accompanying paratexts vary across editions and reprintings: but the range of variation within a single edition—pointing to numerous states of that edition invisibilized by aggregating common metadata—should give us pause before we declare them all duplicates.” (226)


“Library weeding gets a bad reputation, thanks in part to weeding horror stories.”

“What usually happens is that a disgruntled (sometimes justifiably so) staff member sets off the alarm to the public about what’s happening behind closed stacks. Or worse, a patron spies a dumpster full of discarded material and immediately jumps to the conclusion that the library is enacting a modern-day book burning. Employees who do not feel their concerns are being heard or their professional opinions are being considered may decide they have no choice but to become whistle-blowers. Patrons who do not understand the selection or weeding process are understandably alarmed when they see a mass number of items removed from their local library.”

132 Rebecca Vnuk was director, adult services, Glen Ellyn Public Library, Glen Ellyn, Illinois.
“Use positive terms instead of negative ones when talking about weeding, and never complain to patrons about bad materials that were on the shelf. Instead, explain that the library is making room for new materials, making the shelves easier to navigate, and replacing outdated information with current information.”


“The author’s experience with deselection in the humanities and social sciences confirms that weeding the print collections of books is a critical and essential tool in collection management. In six of the seven disciplines reviewed, more than 95 per cent of titles published more than 50 years ago were discarded. In all the subject areas reviewed, the library was able to replace a small number of older print titles with e-books, which helped expedite the deselection process.” (46)


Reports the sixth triennial cycle of the Ithaka S+R Faculty Survey US, based on 9,203 responses.

“There is no observable trend towards a format transition for monographs.

“Many academic libraries have faced substantial pressure to rethink the way their central campus spaces are used as the digital transformation continues. As many print collections of journal, newspapers, reference works, and government documents have been wound down or moved off-site, space has been made available for learning commons, advanced research facilities, and a variety of other purposes. Many have wondered if monographs and other books, content types which have been dominated by the practices and needs of humanists, will follow a similar course.

“The survey has found that faculty members have not shifted over the past three years towards a greater preference for digital versions of scholarly monographs. Perhaps the early excitement has been tempered by some of the discovery, access, and interface challenges that e-books have thus far posed. Overall, faculty members continue to prefer digital versions for some purposes such as search, and they continue to prefer print versions for long-form reading. As a result, even though the format transition has not proceeded for reading purposes, academic libraries and content providers will continue to shift how they provide books, rebalancing how they satisfy reading and non-reading needs in a dual-format environment.” (74–75)

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133 Victor T. Oliva is associate professor, University Libraries, Adelphi University, Garden City, New York.
134 Christine Wolff-Eisenberg is manager, surveys and research, Ithaka S+R, New York. Alisa B. Rod is associate director, Empirical Reasoning Center, Barnard College, New York.
“As artifacts, print materials ... offer a treasure trove of historical and cultural information that can only be accessed physically.” (6)

“The large print collections already held by libraries are not mountains that have to be gradually reduced in size but resources for us to draw upon in building new, intentionally designed print collections that are structured and managed for best use.” (11)

“To move forward effectively, libraries [like their patrons] must understand the affordances of both print and digital media. There are distinct advantages to both: Print materials offer an awareness of material culture, history, and durability in ways that remain elusive for digital materials, while digital materials radically accelerate the rate at which information can be retrieved, analyzed, and otherwise adapted for academic work. Similarly, there are also disadvantages to each: Print materials impose physical limitations on access and are difficult to analyze in depth, while digital materials are often unwieldy and worryingly difficult to preserve. Our task is to find the best information technology for each task and to ensure that we can provide effective solutions to the research problems our users face.” (16)

“As a sampling process in which some, but not all, features of an analog signal are chosen for digital capture and representation, digitization is always accompanied by both information loss and information gain. In GBS [Google Book Search], lost information includes the physical size, weight, or structure of a volume; the texture and color of its pages; and the sensory experience of navigating its contents. Nontextual book features such as illustrations, as well as marginalia and other evidence of print books’ physical histories of use, are often distorted or auto-cropped out of Google’s screen-based representations. As for information gain, image capture, and processing embed traces of the digitization process into digitized objects.” (6, note omitted)

“By equating digital access with full-text search, the GBS corpus has created a future for books in which they are defined principally by their textual content. Google’s workflows have elided other (historical, artifactual, material) properties of books that, when absent, threaten to disrupt or reframe the relationship between a digitized surrogate

135 Melissa K. Chalmers is lecturer III, School of Information, University of Michigan. Paul N. Edwards is professor emeritus of Information, School of Information, and Professor emeritus of History, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, University of Michigan.
and its print original. As print libraries fade into the deep background of our brave new digital world, much has been lost that cannot be regained.” (14)


“By reducing the physical size of collections, space is created in libraries not only for newly acquired books but for new uses and technologies such as wired study spaces, collaboration zones, learning commons, and maker spaces.”

“Several staff members expressed uneasiness at the prospect and fears that unique, useful material would be discarded.”

“During consultation with university administration and faculty about the reconfiguration, concerns had also been voiced by some faculty in the humanities about the deselection process; any weeding of unique titles in these subject areas would therefore be limited in scope and require careful review by librarians and faculty. The proposal to remove duplicate copies, however, did not elicit any negative reactions from these stakeholders.”

“Fewer than 250 unique items had been pulled by mistake, an error rate of less than half of one percent. Many of these were in fact near duplicates: different imprints or editions of the items flagged as duplicates.”


“2. Retention Commitment

“Retention Libraries agree not to sell, discard, donate, or otherwise relinquish ownership or control of any of their retained materials prior to the Retention Date, except to transfer materials or commitments to a storage facility or to another HathiTrust Retention Library. ...”

“3. Retention period

“Retention Libraries agree to maintain HathiTrust shared print volumes through December 31, 2042.”

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136 Meredith Giffin is library collections coordinator and Irish studies librarian, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.
“Leonard H. Axe Library at Pittsburg State University ... is undergoing a 5-year building renovation focused on creating new services and spaces, including technology rich spaces, media recording rooms, group study spaces, and more. As part of the renovation project, Library Services was tasked with reducing the circulating collection footprint by approximately fifty percent. One part of the challenge was to face the traditional campus and librarian perceptions of reducing the collection. If mishandled, perceptions of the process can turn into negative emotions or public outcry that can delay or shut down a project. Librarians at Axe Library set out to engage our campus during the deselection process and make everyone an active participant.”

“it is understandable that academic librarians are quick to reduce their print collections. Many are ready to unburden themselves from the mantle of the ‘protectors of the book’ and to move on to embrace new e-resource and service functions. Librarians want to remain relevant in what is foreseen as a future increasingly devoid of print resources, where libraries provide new and different kinds of services and content. These new roles include becoming campus guardians of group study spaces and maker technologies, such as 3-D printing and robotics. Book stacks that show decreasing circulation statistics can arguably be seen as occupying coveted space better utilized by more seating and new services.” (77)
2018. Eastern Academic Scholars’ Trust (EAST). “Notes from the Shared Print Monograph Summit.”

“This document provides a synthesis of notes taken during the Shared Print Monograph Summit held in Boston on April 5–6, 2018.

“The Summit was organized by the Eastern Academic Scholars’ Trust (EAST) and sponsored by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. It was attended by over 30 representatives from the current shared print monograph programs in North America as well as thought leaders in scholarly communications, print preservation and digitization.” (1)

“Structuring the Narrative

“There is a great need for coherent and compelling narratives to help explain and brand shared monograph retention for multiple audiences. Building and sharing these narratives will be key to securing continued access to resources, as well as ensuring that the user communities that need and use print monographs will come to accept the more complete and diverse distributed collection over the perceived need for local collections as primary. We also need to keep in mind that for certain user populations and certain communities of practice, there will be little interest in access to print per se. Narratives, including user stories/personas, should try to address what a given population thinks is important. Any narrative should be crafted in a way that helps stakeholders understand that this set of initiatives is meant to solve that audience’s ‘problems’ or improve/maintain what that population values in the print monograph collections of libraries.” (4)

“We’ve moved our print collections to the cloud (through these initiatives), how will we keep that sustainable? There are no mechanisms for infrastructure for libraries at scale to manage our cloud collection. Do we want to look at a commercial solution, or does that lead us down the same path as what happened to academic journal publishing? That is, we also need central technology infrastructure at scale. Might corporate interests such as Elsevier, Ex Libris, EBSCO, or ProQuest come in to produce needed products, and will they be at a cost that we can afford?” (10)


“Digital technology has much to offer for new publishing, but the existence of digitised versions of books is only partially satisfactory. They cannot replace the evidential value of artefacts. That is as much true of books as it is, for example, of objects in museums or art galleries, where again digital provision offers new dimensions and opportunities for exploration and comparison, but in ways utterly different from the experience of inspecting, exploring and understanding the original objects.” (4)
“The shift from private to shared interests and responsibilities, seen in the transition from generally private ownership to unprecedented investment in public libraries and museums from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, also involved shifts in choice of what kinds of artefacts were rare or of public interest, and thus a focus of, and for, memory. That requires us to embrace questions that have become urgent as we face libraries with growing financial difficulties, increasing space shortage, increasing availability of e-provision, and revolutions in staffing priorities. The easy, superficial, answers have come to be centred on digitisation, culling of books that are available online, and raising money from sales. The challenge, what to keep and how to keep it, is in fact simply an old question posed in a twenty-first century context.” (323)


Holds that digital preservation (i.e., the preservation of digital objects) is always a contingent process, never an accomplished fact. Two of sixteen “axioms”:

“4. Nothing has been preserved, there are only things being preserved. Preservation is the result of ongoing work of people and commitments of resources. The work is never finished. This is true of all forms of preservation; it’s just that the time scales for digital preservation actions are significantly shorter than they tend to be with the conservation of things like books or oil paintings. Try to avoid talking about what has been preserved; there is only what we are preserving. ... If an organization is serious about digital preservation, it should be evident from how they spend their money. Preservation is ongoing work. It is not something that can be thought of as a one-time cost.” (5)

“9. Digital preservation is about making the best use of your resources to mitigate the most pressing preservation threats and risks. You are never done with digital preservation. It is not something that can be accomplished or finished. Digital preservation is a continual process of understanding the risks you face for losing content or losing the ability to render and interact with it and making use of whatever resources you have to mitigate those risks.” (7; emphasis in the original)


“Best Practice for Determining Condition

“It is important to know if material is in usable/readable condition, e.g., that words are not lost at the margins or on the pages due to publishing or binding errors, significant damage or markings, and that materials are in good enough physical condition to

139 Trevor Owens is head of digital content management, Library of Congress.
140 Tina Baich is senior associate dean for scholarly communication and content strategies at IUPUI University Library, Indianapolis, Indiana. Heather Weltin is shared print program officer, HathiTrust.
circulate. When undertaking condition assessment, the Book Condition and Loan-ability Matrix [an attached chart] may help determine if a book is in loanable condition and thus suitable for inclusion in the shared print collection.” [note omitted] (2)


Reports the seventh triennial cycle of the Ithaka S+R Faculty Survey US, based on 10,919 responses.

“Monograph Format Transition

“Since 2015, a growing percentage of faculty report that both print and electronic versions of scholarly monographs are important for their research and teaching ... . The importance of these materials predominately varies by discipline and age cohorts.” (14)

“Greater shares of humanists have indicated that print versions of scholarly monographs play an important role for their teaching and research compared to their colleagues in other disciplines, and humanists also exhibited the largest increase in perceived importance of print versions since 2015.” (14)

“Respondents in younger cohorts are more likely to indicate that electronic versions of scholarly monographs, as compared to print versions, are important to their research and teaching practices. Faculty over 65 perceive print versions of monographs to be more important than electronic resources. ... 

“However, faculty in younger cohorts are less likely to agree that libraries will not be needed in five years to maintain collections of hard-copy books ... . Since greater shares of younger faculty have indicated they value electronic versions, they may also be more likely to recognize the limitations of the electronic format.” (15)


“This is a discussion paper prepared in collaboration with the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) Library Initiatives. It presents a framework for operationalizing the BTAA collective collection. A collective collection is a collection managed collaboratively across a network of libraries.” (1)

““The character of library spaces, services, and collections is evolving with changing learning and research behaviors. It is widely recognized that continued autonomous development of large standalone collections does not meet needs and is not efficient. A

¹⁴¹ Melissa Blankstein is a surveys analyst at Ithaka S+R, New York.
¹⁴² Lorcan Dempsey is the vice-president and chief strategist, OCLC. Constance Malpas is manager, strategic programs, OCLC. Mark Sandler is principal consultant, Novel Solutions Consulting.
library cannot collect all that its members would like to see, and much of what it does collect does not get used. At the same time, library space is being configured around engagement rather than around collections, the long-term stewardship costs of print materials are being recognized, and the role of books in research and learning is changing.” (1–2)

“In 2017, BTAA libraries undertook an exploratory project to identify potential opportunities for consortium-level curation of monographic collections. To support this pilot project, OCLC’s GreenGlass team compiled a data set of WorldCat holdings set on 33 different OCLC library symbols used by BTAA libraries. Using this data set, different scenarios for distributed archiving can be explored. One of these scenarios proposes that duplication be capped at five BTAA holdings per monographic title, at the edition level. This level of duplication effectively ensures that there is enough redundancy in consortial holdings to meet demands for both access and preservation, while enabling some space recovery. ... Individual BTAA libraries would retain approximately 80% of current inventory in this scenario.” (68–69)


“HathiTrust member libraries have committed to retain around 18.4 million monograph volumes to be retained for 25 years under the HathiTrust Shared Print Program. These volumes represent more than 5.6 million individual titles held in the HathiTrust Digital Library (about 76% of all HathiTrust digital monographs), which is a significant step toward a primary goal of the program: to steward print copies of all HathiTrust digital holdings.”


Discovers significant and unexplained errors in circulation data reported by GreenGlass for Milne Library, State University of New York–Oneonta. Cautions that in the deaccessioning process supposedly objective measures must be qualified also by subjective ones. Notes that even accurate circulation data will disfavor publications produced by marginalized communities. Includes a review of many articles that celebrate the utility of GreenGlass for weeding individual and collaborative library collections.

143 Michelle Hendley is reference and instruction librarian, James M. Milne Library, State University of New York–Oneonta.
“Included in our examination of a shift to active preservation-focused shared print retention is an appeal to the value of print retention as a corollary to the ongoing creation of digital surrogates of items originally published in print. We argue that the still-developing body of knowledge around the affordances of print and digital formats, involving research in cognition, tastes, and cultural preferences, as well as a variety of approaches to scholarship that are informed by both print and digital versions of a work, show specific benefits of print reading in several common use cases. ... This paper argues that digitization is not antagonistic to the sustaining value of print and that there are compelling incentives for libraries to maintain strong positions in both formats.” (946)

“Print books provide evidence of the history of printing and binding as trades and commercial enterprises, as artistic endeavors, and as access points to material culture.” (948)

“Many libraries are withdrawing books because of poor condition. There is an inherent assumption that other copies are in better condition, but that assumption is not based on evidence.” (955)

“When [a] survey asked respondents to consider what research or guideline development might be useful in the future as they withdraw print monographs from their collections, the majority replied that ‘commitment to preserve at another institution’ is the most desired element not currently available to them that would influence decisions.” (958)

“How Many Copies Should Be Kept

“When talking about preserving titles in the context of shared print, the conversation inevitably come around to number of copies. No one has claimed to have identified an ideal number of copies to hold nationally, but many institutions have settled on a number when making local retention decisions. While it would be unfair to say these numbers are arbitrary, they are not made through rigorous analysis of carefully generated data.” (955)
“The digital preservation community has settled around a minimum of three copies [of
digital files], though some programs … use more copies based on their preservation
methodology. Preservation strategies for digital and physical items differ significantly,
making it impossible to extend the model for the number of copies needed for digital
preservation to physical preservation.” (955–56)

Bibliography.”

“While some classic titles are listed here, the goal was to include a useful list of titles
that had been recently published pertaining to the deselection of material.”

Retention.” Press release.

“Boston, MA, January 23, 2019—Academic and research libraries have long collaborated
to preserve and protect the print scholarly record. The newly formed Partnership for
Shared Book Collections (https://sharedprint.org) takes this work to the next level by
coordinating collaboration for the protection of print books.”


“This study focuses on the comparison of forty-seven monographic titles cataloged as
identical items that show broadly varying differences in editions, printings, condition,
and preservation and repair.” (29)

“If we withdraw or ‘deduplicate’ a large portion of our print heritage, information will
be lost. That information may lie in fine bindings, historic provenance, or important but
subtle variance between editions, if not properly cataloged as different editions.” (30)

“One cannot assume that all books sharing the same OCLC number are physically
identical copies.” (37)

“As institutions undertake shared print projects, resulting in potential for large-scale
withdrawal of titles now held by those projects, the data above stresses the risks that
libraries are currently taking. By making withdrawal decisions without item-level review
of titles (or incorporating item-level information from shared MARC fields), we are
collectively establishing an insecure foundation on which our shared print heritage is
being built. The author recognizes that item-level review is logistically impossible in
many of these projects; however, this research strongly indicates that further inquiry

145 Dana Peterman was head of collection strategies, University of California–Irvine Libraries.
146 Jennifer Hain Teper is preservation and conservation librarian, University Library, University of Illinois.
into the number of copies that must be retained in order to statistically avoid the risk of such losses must be conducted.” (41)


Regarding “monographic print retention programs”: “The most prominent of these—the HathiTrust Print Monograph Archive—resulted from a ballot initiative developed for the 2011 HathiTrust Constitutional Convention. This ballot initiative put a stake in the ground for the HathiTrust to assume the mantle of leadership in developing the closest extant model to a national print retention program. While this program did not explicitly call for any institution to withdraw content, it was built under the assumption that some institutions would withdraw content based upon the presence of digital surrogates in the HathiTrust. It sought to create a base-line framework for ensuring continued retention and access to print titles that corresponded to the digital items in the HathiTrust.” (308)

“The overall circulation rate appears to decline after digitization. Yet, the average circulation per item for those published after 1923 was actually lower than that for the pre-1923 publications.” (311)


“As part of Phase 2, HathiTrust focused on a more thoughtful collection building analysis and worked with OCLC’s Sustainable Collection Services (SCS) to identify print holdings in the HathiTrust Digital Library that we lacked retention commitments [for] and aimed to retain up to five copies when possible. [emphasis added] As a result of this work, HathiTrust was able to secure retention commitments for 708,120 distinct titles that were not committed in Phase 1.”


This article was initiated by the Outreach and Engagement Working Group of the Partnership for Shared Book Collections (Stearns 2020: 812). Notes are omitted from the following excerpts.

“A collective collection, also known as a shared print program, involves mostly academic or research libraries collaborating to retain, develop, and provide access to their physical collections. Most collective collections comprise monographs and/or serials.

147 Thomas Teper is associate professor, University Library, and associate university librarian for collections and technical services and associate dean of libraries, Illinois University Library, University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign. Vera Vasileva was a graduate assistant, University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign.
Other efforts have addressed acquisition and/or retention of microform, federal government documents, and digital collections.”

“The goal of collective collections is to preserve and provide access to the scholarly record in its original print form. Each library participating in a collective collection agrees to retain certain titles for a given period of time, usually at least ten years. This practice ensures that the collective collection contains a predetermined number of unique items (such as specific editions of books and complete runs of journals) and that these items will be cared for and made available to all libraries participating in the collective collection. To prevent the loss of a unique title, participating libraries determine an appropriate number of copies that should be retained, so that if one were lost or destroyed, other copies would remain available. Shared print programs base these decisions on the number of libraries involved, the size of the collective collection, availability of the item outside of the collective collection, and other factors.

“Secondarily, collective collections enable participating libraries to make informed decisions about weeding locally held volumes that are duplicated in the collective collection. In turn, this practice enables libraries to repurpose shelf space, whether to accommodate other print materials or to create a greater number and variety of spaces for users, especially students, to study, collaborate, teach, consult, and pursue other research and learning activities.” (emphasis added)


Abstract: “The mass culling of libraries’ print collections has often been questioned by librarians and library users, yet it has become more common in recent decades. Despite several high-profile controversies, the removal and subsequent disposal of significant portions of physical collections are still seen by many library administrators as an effective way to create space and pave the way for innovation. Guided by a progressive series of photographs, this article examines the large-scale removal of books from Western University’s D.B Weldon Library as part of a renovation project in 2019. It also looks at the direct impact of these actions on a contemporary library research project that was undertaken by the authors. Focusing specifically on the E, HQ, and HV Library of Congress call number ranges, the changes to the stacks are shown in real time as materials are removed from the collection to be discarded or placed in storage. The authors raise questions about the functions and uses of libraries in our current neoliberal era as well as the logic of an academic library prioritizing study spaces and communal areas at the expense of a well-respected physical collection.”

2020. The Rosemont Shared Print Alliance and the Partnership for Shared Print Book Collections The Value of Shared Print. Video, 02:22.
“ALLOWING LIBRARIES TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT TO KEEP.” Still from *The Value of Shared Print* (2020), a video produced by the Rosemont Shared Print Alliance and the Partnership for Shared Print Book Collections.

“6/25/2020

“The Rosemont Shared Print Alliance and the Partnership for Shared Print Book Collections today launched a two-minute video highlighting the importance of shared print collections in libraries as a key component to ensuring ongoing and future access to the scholarly record and to the future of research, teaching, and learning.”

Transcript: “Faced with a global challenge our physical campuses are quiet, but our digital doors remain open. Libraries may be closed to the public for now but the wisdom of library collections is not—just the opposite. Shared print programs around the globe protect books and academic journals. Libraries and shared print programs worked for years to make content available online so readers have access to what they need when they need it, and together we ensure the original print materials are safe and accessible for future generations. *Shared print programs save money, time, and effort allowing libraries to make decisions about what to keep;* for one day teachers and students will return and the wisdom of library collections to be there to ensure teaching research learning endure. Join us, won’t you?” (emphasis added)


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148 Richard Ovenden is Bodley’s Librarian, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
“When companies like Google have digitised billions of pages of books and made them available online ... what is the point of libraries?” (4)


“The anger and horror individuals express when books are thrown away is rooted in fear that the information, or art in the case of fiction, may disappear and be unrecoverable.” (509)

“The parallels to the intense emotions of a love affair are inescapable. Few human emotions are as powerful as the headiness of love and the grief of loss. Bibliophiles live in thrall to the former and work to head off the latter in both private and public collections.” (510)

“Print collections look backward. Electronic resources by their nature look forward. Libraries collect prior work, which is central to their value and impact, but the format matters to the community of bibliophiles. Book lovers share an identity that values books as symbols of permanence in the face of change, and engaging in behavior to lament or save collections, even indiscriminate of specific titles, readily communicates membership. The emotions of fear and loss as components of nostalgia are at the root of the shared identity.” (517)


“The following is a Glossary of terms as defined in Shared Print programs. This glossary was developed in conjunction with the Rosemont Shared Print Alliance.” Selected terms only:

“Decision Support Service/Tool (DSS)

“Software designed to enable analysis of collections and identification of materials worthy of retention or other action.” (emphasis added)

“Digital Surrogate

“A digital representation of the physical object and its contents (book or article) that accurately reproduces the information within.” (emphasis added)

“Digitally Preserved

“Content (usually print) that has been captured in a high-quality digitization process that ensures its long-term survival and accessibility is referred to as ‘digitally preserved.’”

“Preservation

“Activities aimed at prolonging the useful life of materials committed for retention are referred to collectively as preservation. These include repair, stabilization, climate-controlled housing,

149 Deborah Prosser is director, Olin Library, Rollins College, Orlando–Winter Park, Florida.
etc. Shared print agreement MOUs and related policy documents differ on conservation requirements and tend to defer to local practices and circumstances.”

“Shared Print

“(see also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_collections) The collaborative effort of libraries, institutions, centers, and consortia to document, preserve and provide long-term widespread access to their print collections. *Shared print work also aims to decrease duplication of titles across many collections, resulting in more manageable collection sizes for participating members.*” (emphasis added)

“Title

“A publication for which a holdings symbol can be attached to a master bibliographic record in WorldCat, and is therefore *presumed to be bibliographically identical* to all other publications showing a given OCLC Control Number (OCN), ISSN, ISBN, or alternative title identifier; see also FRBR-defined ‘manifestation’ at https://www.oclc.org/research/activities/frbr.html.” (emphasis added)

“Withdrawal

“To remove a physical piece from the library collection.”


“Abstract

“This report traces the evolution of shared print from localized projects and programs to national and North American networks; in particular, highlighting the formation of federations of previously established shared print programs. The authors also describe recent efforts to transcend the historical boundaries of shared print by embedding it more completely in library services and systems. The report ends with the declaration that the future of collections will continue to include print and that the future of print will be shared.” (159)

“The Risk Working Group, in conjunction with Dr. Candace Yano of the University of California, Berkeley, is developing a model to help answer the question ‘How do numbers of copies in different initial conditions and storage environments affect the likely availability of a title over time?’ The spreadsheet model being developed calculates the probability of at least one usable copy existing over a selected range of times. It is hoped that this model will allow libraries, storage facilities, and shared print programs to experiment with different alternatives and begin to provide guidance on

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150 Susan Stearns is executive director, Boston Library Consortium. Alison Wohlers is manager, shared print program, California Digital Library, University of California.

**ABSTRACT**

“This article introduces the Partnership for Shared Book Collections, a federation of monograph shared print programs. Collaboration of programs at the network level allows for:

- Reducing the cost of retaining the scholarly record through shared distribution of commitments;
- De-duplicating efforts;
- Developing and promoting evidence-based best practices;
- Increasing the effectiveness of communication with end-users and funders;
- Tackling large-scale projects and research that are out of reach for individual shared print programs.

“This shared stewardship of collection is critical as local resources are depleted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and access to print for digitization increases.” (812)

“Over the last decade, the pressure on physical space in libraries has increased with libraries recognizing the need to collaborate more widely to ensure that scholarly content is available to their local stakeholders even as they must undertake ever broader programs of de-selection and weeding.” (813)

**Continued outreach and engagement**

“No topic has been of more interest to the programs involved in the Partnership than that of outreach and engagement, acknowledging that individual libraries as well as shared print programs need to develop and promote compelling narratives in support of shared print for a variety of stakeholder audiences. The initial Outreach and Engagement Working Group began by creating a matrix focused on these different stakeholders by identifying ways in which shared print impacts them and by identifying the messaging they find most compelling. The Working Group published a Wikipedia article (Wikipedia Contributors, 2020) on shared print and has begun to further identify communications strategies for shared print programs that will be expanded on in the

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Matthew Revitt is special collections and Maine shared collection librarian, Raymond H. Folger Library, University of Maine, Orono. Kirsten Leonard is executive director, Private Academic Library Network of Indiana.
future by the development of a shared print marketing and communications toolkit.” (218–19)


Some of the articles and web pages reported by this bibliography are listed above.


“In June, California Digital Library (CDL), the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), & HathiTrust affirmed their commitment—first announced in January 2020—to take the lead in building on the last decade of shared print efforts to realize an interconnected and open infrastructure that embeds shared print more completely in library services and operations.” Text of the announcement and a link to “the framing document of the collaboration.”


“Unique remarks in printed books remind us forcefully of the individuality of every copy, which in turn evokes the individual who owned or borrowed the book and made those marks in the first place. Set against the sameness of the mass-produced book, and asserting the lived experience of individual persons against the wash of time, marginalia and inscriptions transform the codex from a container of verbal content into a memorial, time capsule, or message in a bottle. (13–14)

“One of the greatest archives of American middle-class reading remains hidden in plain sight, uncatalogued as such and distributed across the library shelves of academic institutions—and now endangered, as readers prefer modern or digital editions and libraries are moving away from commitments to their local print collections. In this distributed archive, it appears that approximately 10 percent of the books printed before 1923 contain inscriptions, annotations, and other marks made by their original owners and readers.” (19; note omitted)

“Proponents of shared print networks and the downsizing of print have, in general, overestimated the extent to which one copy of any book can truly serve as a duplicate for another.” (22)

“How much bibliodiversity does humanities scholarship and teaching require, and how much can our academic libraries afford to maintain? In terms of the future of print collections, these are the central questions of our time.” (138)

“Digital archives are not replacements for the material texts they represent; rather, they are simulations or models. The books on the shelves carry plenty of information lost in
the process of digitization, no matter how lovingly a particular copy is rendered for the screen.” (139)

“Rare books and manuscripts ... would never be discarded just because someone put scanned images of them online. But in the realm of the medium-rare nineteenth-century book, digitization is being used as a justification for declaring ‘redundant copies’ obsolete—in direct contravention of the Modern Language Association’s ‘Statement on the Significance of Primary Records.’” (152)

“The struggle of the humanities in the modern university is completely bound up with the future of the library collections; you will not save one without inspiring strong support for the other, given that both are predicated on the value of the specific details of the historical cultural record.” (152)