

Practical Preservation and Conservation Strategies for Libraries. By Brian J. Baird. Illustrated by Jody Brown. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018. 136 pp. Appendix, Glossary, Index. Softcover. \$35.00.

Material preservation is a concern not just for large academic and public libraries, but also for smaller organizations such as historical societies, museums, and corporate archives. *Practical Preservation and Conservation Strategies for Libraries* gives these organizations a handbook for understanding library preservation decisions and how they can apply them to their own organizations. It is “practical” in that it provides hands-on directions for carrying out some basic preservation and conservation actions such as in-house book repairs. The topics presented in the book are well balanced and include examples of different techniques that illustrate the financial and personnel investment decisions involved in preservation so readers can make the best decisions based on the needs of their organizations.

Baird’s introductory chapter provides the sort of essential information associated with the preservation and conservation of paper and digital documents most individuals learn in library science courses: the more copies exist, the more likely one will be available; environmental controls help maintain materials and thus their information; disaster planning is necessary to ensure information can be recovered; reformatting digital resources and preserving paper ensure the information they contain is available to future generations. It is a thorough and informative primer for readers who may not have been previously exposed to the topic. While the majority of the chapters focus primarily on preservation of paper-based collections, the final chapter does touch on digital preservation and best practices for in-house digitization.

The text reads much like a library science course or workshop. This is not meant as a criticism, but as a compliment. Baird brings to the conversation useful examples and tidbits that one would expect to hear as part of a class discussion, such as those aside comments that instructors or other students would share based on their experience. For instance, the author suggests that individuals visit a commercial bindery (although these are increasingly on the decline) to see the workings of the machinery and to understand different binding types and materials to better communicate with vendors. Also, when completing a disaster plan, Baird recommends consulting with the local police and fire departments and to ask them to review and provide feedback on the plan. He also suggests meeting with those in charge of managing the environmental system for your building and learning how temperature and humidity conditions can best be maintained by understanding how the system works. I never thought about reaching out to all these different individuals, but it makes sense that educating oneself in the many different ways external factors can affect a collection facilitates informed decision making. Communication and networking are also subtle themes throughout the book. For example, there is no need to re-create plans or procedures that have already been established or can be borrowed and modified for your organization.

Chapters 3 and 4 (“Use Patterns” and “Collection Development,” respectively) offer library staff guidelines for creating a simple sample condition survey that, when

implemented and monitored over time, can provide libraries with insights into the categories of books their patrons most frequently use and that may be better suited for sturdier bindings at the time of initial purchase. Baird directs readers how to prepare the survey, explains the sample size needed to get the most benefit out of it, and describes how to create it in an easy-to-use database format. These directions remove the guesswork and burden of preparation time from library staff so they can immediately begin to create and implement such a survey.

Readers are most likely to frequently reference the practical chapters, “Library Binding” (chapter 6) and “In-House Book Repair” (chapter 7). If one has not had a course in book construction (which I have not), the discussion of the various library bindings explains the ways books can be put together and also provides the foundation for understanding how to perform some simple in-house repairs. Baird provides a list of materials and step-by-step instructions for spine replacement, spine repair, and page tip-ins, accompanied by useful illustrations. He also offers warnings about where things can go wrong and how to avoid such pitfalls. Such advice from a seasoned veteran reflects the lecture-style format that makes the book a helpful reference. Most organizations are not able to employ staff specifically trained to perform preservation tasks. By following these simple exercises, a staff member could become skilled in making in-house repairs less expensively and quicker than a commercial binder and thus return materials faster to the shelves for patron access. Some books, however, will require professional binding. In such cases, Baird suggests that readers contact their state or local academic library, which may already have an account with a bindery that provides them with large-volume discounts that they may be willing to make available to smaller organizations.

The final chapter of the book focuses on digital preservation and addresses many of the concerns that readers might have about the availability of electronic formats over time. Libraries are in the unique position of having to rely on publishers and vendors for continued access to electronic resources. Journals from 1918 can still be found on the shelves, but will journals from 2018 still be available in 2118? It is up to the publishers to ensure the preservation of the materials they make available to libraries today so that they remain so to patrons in the future. As some libraries do carry out their own digitization projects with materials in their collections, Baird provides a straightforward review of the standards that must be maintained in digitization projects, such as creating high-resolution scans and standards-based metadata, and implementing protocols for storage and migration of digital objects. I wish the author had included the same guidance in the digital preservation chapter as he provided for developing a condition survey or repairing a book in previous chapters. Many individuals undertaking digitization projects may understand metadata but do not know where or how it is recorded. They may not know how to create and validate checksums, or understand the need to develop a review schedule to monitor accessibility and migration as necessary over time. Baird could have put his colloquial, jargon-limited writing style to good use in creating a chapter to teach those less comfortable with digital formats the basics necessary to enhance the accessibility and sustainability of in-house digitization projects.

The book also includes an appendix listing useful websites and vendors, as well as a glossary. This compact preservation course can be easily accessed at any time and should be a reference shelf standard for librarians and archivists, particularly those who work in small institutions.

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