

**DRAFT Minutes of the ALA Mid-Winter 2010 RBMS Discussion Group:
Curators and Conservators
The Sheraton Boston, Back Bay Room A, Sunday, January 17, 10:30 am – 12:00 pm**

Present: Susi Barbarossa, Laura Bedford, Sid Berger, Heather Caldwell, Donia Conn, Beth Doyle, Gary Frost, Donna Hirst, Doris Hamburg, Martha Horan, Beth Kilmarx, co-chair, Kenneth Lavender, co-chair, Leslie Reicher, Holly Robertson, Tim Thibault, Elizabeth Walters, Diane Warner, Deborah Wender, Deborah Whiteman, Cherry Williams.

Discussion Leader: Michele V. Cloonan, Dean, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Simmons College.

Co-chair Kenneth Lavender called to order the Curators and Conservators Discussion Group at 10:35 am. Lavender welcomed the attendees to the meeting, and requested discussion topics for the group's next two ALA meetings. Lavender then introduced the discussion leader: Michele, F. Cloonan who would speak on and discuss two important topics: What is the future of conservation (Is there life after Texas?) and Opportunities for broadening the context of collections (Curators without Walls).

The first topic to be discussed at this gathering: Opportunities for broadening the context of collections. One of the first issues discussed was whether Special Collections should be like great museums, or if libraries should go out into their respective communities and build their collections from their community. Today's economics are pushing the latter approach as libraries cannot purchase the materials as easily as they once did.

Conservators are becoming more involved with collections as they are being acquired and exhibited. Conservators have to care for a variety of materials in their collections, and they are often presented with collections containing paper, cloth, leather, wooden items in addition to having to preserve digital and electronic records. In Europe, there is a holistic approach to conservation, and it incorporates digital conservation into the library school curricula. This approach is slightly ahead of library schools in the United States. In the past, conservators concentrated on books but now recognize the need to shift some of the emphasis on to digital records.

The question asked by attendees was how to include or make the shift to digital preservation in the library programs. Library schools have a limited time frame to educate and train their students, and such programs do not offer the courses needed by professionals. In order to get the necessary training, conservators need to turn to continuing education programs such as web based classes and workshops. An issue also raised is the need for hands-on training programs. As Cloonan stated, there is a need for an infrastructure like the RBS (Rare Book School) for preservationists/conservators. The closest training program to that offered by RBS is the School for Scanning.

Cloonan asked the group about the digital projects or work being done at their individual institutions. There were a variety of answers, some conservators dealt with items on an item to items. In these cases, items were brought to the conservator for reformatting without a prior

meeting with the library's curators and conservators in order to determine a digital protocol. Often, there is a pressure to digitize, and to get items up on web pages as quickly as possible. At other institutions, there were numerous staff members involved, and the digitization was more collection dependent.

Curators and conservators are faced with the growing issue of making sure collections are processed and maintained before they are digitized. Frost pointed out that there can be an interdependence of print and screen, and digital preservation will drive the preservation of the whole collection. Cloonan noted that administrators are often not clear on the difference between preservation and conservation, and that archivists are well ahead of their colleagues with digital preservation. Concerns about quality control and the risks of misinformation were raised about the digitizing materials and tossing the originals. Curators and conservators need to be part of the digital solution. New jobs are evolving with the new technology such as Digital Archivists and Metadata Librarians, and these positions are taking traditional skills and putting them into the digital world. There is restructuring occurring in the libraries, and curators and conservations need to make sure they are in the digital world.

The discussion then segued into the second topic: **Is there life for conservation after Texas?**

Cloonan led off the discussion by stating that the U of Texas at Austin program had a fault line as the program never had tenured track positions or tenured faculty. There were different deans and there was no clear ownership of the program, and now the resources to keep and maintain it are no longer available. Other library schools may bow to the pressure and step in to establish a program similar to that at Texas. When Columbia closed its library school, RBS moved to the University of Virginia. It would be a challenge to restart the program elsewhere, funding resources are a critical issue, and it's becoming more and more difficult to raise funds from the private sector.

There is a need to incorporate conservation internships and classes into the undergraduate degree program. Many professionals stumble into the preservation/conservation field after graduation. People discussed the need for diversity in the conservation/preservation field, and how to get more people interested in pursuing it for graduate study. It's an expensive field of study, and there was some discussion on the ethics of funding library courses by non-academic library companies. Cloonan stated that there needed to be ethical limitations, similar to the limitations of doctors and drug companies. There are about 20 library schools that receive free access to databases however the corporate providers are starting to push back by claiming they can no longer provide free access. In sum, the group saw the need for conservation programs that have tenured positions and full time faculty members.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 pm.