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Preserving Cultural Collections in the West

by Kristen Kern

A CRITICALLY NEEDED PRESERVATION project—WESTPAS—is being instituted to address the unique circumstances of the Western and Pacific United States. To describe the project and its goals, the originators of the project were interviewed—Barclay Ogden, Head of the Preservation Department from the University of California, Berkeley and Julie Page, WESTPAS User Services Coordinator and former Head of Preservation at the University of California, San Diego. Already seasoned from their successful experiences with the California Preservation Program, Barclay and Julie perceived that the need for preservation education and assistance existed in neighboring states and throughout the West’s wide geographical expanse.



Barclay Ogden, Head of the Preservation Department from the University of California, Berkeley and WESTPAS Project Manager, with Julie Page, WESTPAS User Services Coordinator and former Head of Preservation, at the University of California, San Diego.

country are served by regional preservation field services. The Northeast, mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Southwest, and upper Midwest states are served by preservation education and training centers to help meet the needs of libraries and archives in these regions. The Western and Pacific regions need comparable services organized specifically to overcome obstacles created by large geographic distances between cultural centers in many parts of the regions.

WESTPAS = Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service

States:	Montana	Territories:
Alaska	Nevada	American
California	Oregon	Samoa
Colorado	Utah	Guam
Hawaii	Washington	Northern
Idaho	Wyoming	Marianas

See the WESTPAS website for information about the project and upcoming disaster planning workshops: <http://westpas.org/>

For a description of the California Preservation Program’s services and resources, see: calpreservation.org.

What Does WESTPAS Stand For?

WESTPAS stands for Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service, i.e., the 14 Western and Pacific states and territories where the project will conduct disaster preparedness workshops. Specifically, the states and territories are Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming; the territories are American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Marianas.

Why is WESTPAS Needed?

Results of the 2005 nationwide Heritage Health Index survey of the preservation needs of cultural collections indicated that 80% of collecting institutions in the Western and Pacific regions are not prepared to respond to a disaster involving their collections. They do not have a written disaster response plan with staff trained to carry it out. To help address this need, which is similarly experienced throughout the country, some regions in the

The Heritage Health Index found that:

- 270 million rare and unique books, periodicals, and scrapbooks require immediate attention and care.
- 2.6 billion items of historic, cultural, and scientific significance are not protected by an emergency plan and are at risk should a disaster strike their institutions.
- 70% of institutions need additional training and expertise for staff caring for their collections.

For further information on the results of the Heritage Health Index, visit: www.heritagepreservation.org/HHI/index.html

Is There an Overarching Vision For the Project?

Most institutions throughout the Western and Pacific regions are small. Their historical collections of books and documents provide rich insight into the particularity of life in their locales and contribute to an overall understanding of the history of the regions. In addition, they provide to the people who live there a strongly felt sense of place and community. People want to maintain cultural resources in local institutions to have access to the collective memory of their ancestors. There is a powerful pride of ownership of history, which has led to the establishment of many small local organizations rather than a few large regional ones. The vision of WESTPAS is to help these smaller, culturally essential institutions, by providing preservation education, training, and emergency assistance services.

What is the Major Goal of the Project?

The major goal of the first phase of WESTPAS, January 2007-December 2008, is to deliver preservation education and training on disaster preparedness, emergency response, and collection salvage to 600 staff from smaller libraries and archives in the regions and produce written disaster response plans for all participating institutions.

How is the Project Funded?

WESTPAS is funded in a large part through a National Endowment for the Humanities grant. BELFOR, the international disaster recovery service, and, of course, Archival Products, are helping to support the project. Further, all 14 states and territories through their state libraries and archives have provided staff liaisons to the project to help site, schedule, and promote the workshops to libraries and archives in their states.

What Roles Did You Two Play in Developing This Project?

We sought funding (contributed by Preservation Technologies, LP) to conduct a planning meeting of the potential project trainers. From the planning meeting emerged a shared vision for how this group of trainers could work together to deliver preservation education and assistance services to libraries and archives in the Western and Pacific regions. The next step was to prepare a project plan that was awarded funding by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

What is Your Background?

Julie, recently retired from the University of California, San Diego, served as Preservation Librarian at the University beginning in 1989, and Barclay has served in the same role for University of California, Berkeley since 1980. We have worked together for many years on University of California system-wide preservation projects, and since the late 1990s have served as co-chairs of the California Preservation Program (CalPreservation.org), an IMLS/LSTA (Institute of Museum and Library Services/Library Services Technology Act) state-funded preservation education and assistance program that became the organizational model for WESTPAS. Barclay is the Project Manager, and Julie is serving as User Services Coordinator for WESTPAS.

WESTPAS Supporters:

National Endowment for the Humanities

Archival Products

BELFOR

Preservation Technologies, L.P.



Julie Page, WESTPAS User Services Coordinator, with Randy Silverman, Preservation Librarian at University of Utah, in conversation during a group planning session.

Are There Others Who Have Been Involved in Developing the Project?

There are four other experienced preservation professionals who are involved in developing and carrying out the objectives of the project. They are: Lynn Davis, University of Hawaii at Manoa; Kristen Kern, Portland State University; Gary Menges, University of Washington; and Randy Silverman, University of Utah.

What Challenges Do You Foresee in Attaining the Project's Goal?

The primary challenge to the project will be to reach out to many remotely located libraries and archives with very small staffs. Completing disaster response and collection salvage plans also is always a challenge; consequently the workshops have been designed to maximize the probability of participants completing disaster response plans within the project period.

What Will Success Look Like for the Project?

Total success will be all institutions that participated in the training will have completed disaster plans and trained their staff in how to implement them.

What Do You Foresee in the Future for WESTPAS After the Funding Ends?

The need for a preservation assistance service is so compelling in the Western and Pacific regions that we anticipate considerable support for continuing services with a combination of grant and institutional funding.

Afterward

Even though the WESTPAS project has benefited greatly from the expertise gained through the process of developing and sustaining the California Preservation Program, much work has transpired to create the WESTPAS presence. The curriculum for the two-part disaster preparedness and response workshops has undergone several revisions tailoring the agenda, handouts and appendices to libraries and archives across the Western and Pacific states and territories. Discovering and modifying a suitably usable yet compact disaster plan was essential since it is crucial to fulfilling the grant's requirements that every participating institution successfully complete a customized plan. The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) Pocket Response Plan proved to be the perfect model, which was modified for WESTPAS and, with appendices, will serve as the template for the workshops.

At the time of publication, disaster planning workshops scheduled thus far for this upcoming fall include San Marino and Santa Barbara, CA; La Grande, OR; Seattle and Kennewick, WA; Honolulu, HI; Salt Lake City, UT.

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