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Title:

What, No Backups? Preserving Hardcopies in the Digital Age

Abstract:

Decentralizing and distributing digital copies is a guiding tenet behind the strategic preservation maxim, "lots of copies keep stuff safe." Yet in the United States, retaining original, hardcopies of newspapers as backups following digitization is not a priority. This predisposition to duplicate and discarding encourages cutting bound newspapers to expedite scanning, a philosophy rooted in economic constraints imposed by grant-driven U.S. newspaper digitization funding. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has historically limited fiscal support for hardcopies to preparation for image capture only based on the longstanding premise that microfilmed copy becomes "the object of record." Partnering with Library of Congress (LC), NEH mandates digitizing from microfilm whenever possible, regardless of image quality, and LC has historically supported guillotining bound volumes for copying purposes followed by their disposal. This predilection toward destroying historic newspapers to preserve them has undermined long-term preservation strategies in the U.S.

Newspapers are complicated. The Salt Lake Tribune, for example, produced five editions per day. Which is 'the object of record?' What historic differences exist? Color images 'preserved' with black and white microfilm are forever due to the medium's technological limitations. Ongoing use of original newspapers as "leaf masters" (a term coined by conservator Gary Frost) remains a necessity to overcome intellectual uncertainties and technologically inadequacies. Even in fragile condition, newspaper leaf masters serve as: 1) backups to regenerate screen copies; 2) master copies, to augment, enhance, or correct faulty screen copies; and 3) authentication, to provide forensic evidence about original production techniques.

Undermining the broadly held U.S. misperceptions that once digitized, hardcopy newspapers become superfluous, this paper emphasizes the importance of retaining hardcopy primary source material in perpetuity. Use of custom designed polyester folders, Coroplast boxes, and environmentally controlled storage conditions to store one state's historical newspapers will be discussed.

Biography:

Randy Silverman has served as Preservation Librarian at the University of Utah's Marriott Library since 1993. He has worked in the field of book conservation since 1978 and holds a Master's degree in Library Science. He teaches Preservation as adjunct faculty for Emporia State University and University of Arizona, and conducts disaster preparedness workshops as a member of Western States Preservation Assistance Service throughout Utah, Wyoming, and Montana. Mr. Silverman helped initiate passage of the Annex for Cultural Property to ESF-11 of Utah's Statewide Emergency Plan in 2012. He consults broadly, has 80 professional publications, and has presented professional lectures or workshops in 27 U.S. states and 12 foreign countries. He received the American Library Association's Banks Harris Award for "outstanding achievement in the field of preservation" in 2013.