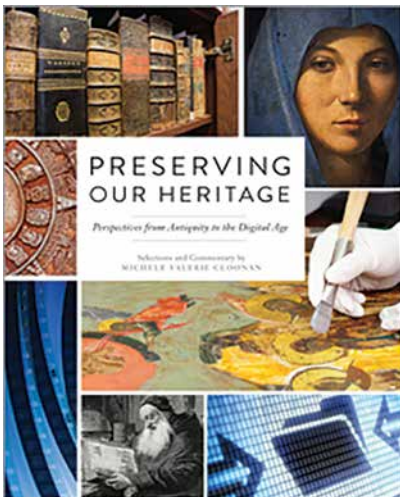


Discovering the Universe of Preservation History and Practice

Stephen E. Haller, CRM



Preserving *Our Heritage* is a lengthy, fairly comprehensive examination of a range of practices and challenges regarding information preservation for almost three millennia. This undertaking and the book's sheer size may seem initially imposing, but its organization and added features greatly facilitate navigation for specific or extensive study or as a reference resource.

The legion of contributors offers a rich collection of resources for students, instructors, and professionals in not only the library field, but also for allied areas of archives, muse-

ums, and others responsible for or concerned with the preservation of cultural heritage.

Organization

Before considering the 11 major chapter headings for the 95 essays in the book, readers should note some particularly helpful features beyond the standard preface and table of contents. A 14-page, briefly annotated "Preservation Timeline" (ca. 750 BC – 2013) provides very useful context for the scope of this work. Although there are appropriate endnotes throughout the essay sections, descriptive "Contributors" and "Credits" sections are also included. The work concludes with two separate indexes: an "Author and Title Index" and a "Subject Index."

Cloonan brings together numerous essays from respected experts who represent and/or are knowledgeable about a wide range of disciplines and practices comprising preservation as she presents them in the major chapters for each component.

These major sections allow for more than linear access to extensive sets of information for the variety of individuals making up the book's intended audiences. Each of the 11 major "chapters" begins with a solid

Preserving Our Heritage: Perspectives from Antiquity to the Digital Age

Editor: Michele Valerie Cloonan

Publisher: ALA Neal-Schuman

Publication Date: 2015

Length: 736 pages

Price: \$98

ISBN: 978-1-55570-937-2

Source: www.alastore.ala.org

overview and proceeds with a number of essays on the chapter topic.

Chapter Content

Chapter 1, "Early Perspectives on Preservation," sweeps from Biblical times through the late nineteenth century with practical and intriguing glimpses of the nature and challenges of what was almost more like survival of cultural memory rather than intentional, systematic preservation (with some important exceptions).

Chapter 2, "Perspectives on Cultural Heritage," pauses for writers to define and further explore the notions of memory and heritage.

The next chapters provide what most readers would expect to find

in such a work, as the contributors delve into the primary components of modern or recent institutions, practices, and management. Chapter 3, “Preservation in Context: Libraries, Archives, Museums and the Built Environment,” includes 21 essays to extensively describe the preservation efforts and concerns over time in the four disciplines. The tension of preserving objects and/or the information they contain is well covered, up to and including the volume of information challenges of the digital age.

Chapter 4, “Collections Development and Management,” is somewhat mistitled, since it primarily focuses on preservation practices and the difficulties in prioritizing what to preserve and various “how to” approaches for both physical and digital materials. In many settings, collection development also encompasses subject area and acquisition strategies and policies.

Chapter 5, “Risks to Cultural Heritage: Time, Nature, and People,” begins to place preservation challenges within a risk management framework, ranging from natural to manmade disasters, and making choices on what to protect and/or preserve.

Chapter 6 “Conservation,” provides a survey of practices over time, as well as a level of technical detail

by some well-known contributors (e.g., Paul Banks’ “The Laws of Conservation”). The concept of “reversibility” is revisited, as is the impact of availability of high quality digital surrogates.

Chapter 7, “Frameworks for Digital Preservation,” offers eight essays to provide a thorough and interesting view of the considerable past thinking about this evolving challenge. Unfortunately, only two of the essays were written within the past eight years, perhaps disappointing a reader hoping for more practical, current practice or solutions.

Chapter 8, “Preservation Policy,” examines a number of high-level policy approaches to preservation programs and prioritizing by describing technical and public policies (including examples of cultural policies).

Chapter 9, “Ethics and Values,” includes 16 essays that range from codes of ethics at institutional and key professional associations and to a number of cultural heritage considerations from the indigenous people and international perspectives (e.g., UNESCO) regarding preservation, protection, and treatment of material.

The essays in Chapter 10, “Multicultural Perspectives,” expand somewhat on the previous chapter, especially regarding sensitivity to

a number of often conflicting issues within current museum practices.

Chapter 11, “Sustainability,” again focuses on conservation’s role, but it also brings the reader’s attention to the need to also regard the larger (non-institutional) communities and environment where cultural heritage institutions live and do their work.

Offers Something for Many Readers

The compiler’s concluding “Epilogue” encourages readers to continue to build on this “anthology” – especially the always-evolving “digital media” implications and practices for an equally challenging notion of what “preservation” will mean.

This massive work is both a comprehensive resource and retrospective examination of topics of interest to several types of cultural heritage organizations and professionals. Although it covers a large universe of preservation history, practice, context, and recommendations, many readers will be able to easily find content within chapters relevant to their own situation or discipline. **END**

Stephen E. Haller, CRM, can be contacted at stephen.haller@usm.edu. See his bio on page 47.