



Article: Challenges and Strategies in the Preservation of Photographic Collections: Here, There, and Everywhere Across the Universe (Abstract)

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CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN THE PRESERVATION OF PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS: HERE, THERE, AND EVERYWHERE ACROSS THE UNIVERSE

DEBRA HESS NORRIS

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Photograph collections, from salted paper prints to cellulose acetate film-base negatives, housed in museums, libraries, archives, historic sites and scientific repositories are at risk nationally and internationally. In the United States, results from the Heritage Health Index (HHI) confirm the urgent need for improved storage conditions, site-specific disaster plans and emergency response training, increased preservation staff, and sustained funding for collections care. HHI revealed that there are 727 million photographic items being cared for by U.S. collecting institutions. More than 40% of these collections are in unknown condition whereas 21% are in need or urgent need of preservation. There are more than 57 million film-base negatives created before 1950 (and therefore in immediate need of low-temperature storage); black-and-white prints account for the greatest number of photographic items, after microfilm/microfiche.

Photographic preservation challenges are not as thoroughly documented but clearly present in museums and libraries – large and small – throughout the world. From libraries in Africa to museums in Asia, resources and opportunities for proper photograph preservation and conservation training are lacking and public awareness must be strengthened.

This presentation will summarize the results of the October 2009 Salzburg Global Seminar. This seminar, sponsored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services convened an international group of 55 cultural leaders, conservation and preservation specialists who work with museums and libraries worldwide, representatives of conservation training programs and professional associations, as well as cultural policymakers to develop effective strategies to optimize collection conservation, increase funding, and intensify public awareness. The primary goal of the Salzburg Global Seminar was to develop effective ways to promote the practice of conservation and to implement best collections preservation practices within a wide variety of cultural contexts.

The proposed presentation will connect conservation challenges associated with photographic collections in the United States and beyond with the outcomes from the Salzburg Global Seminar to suggest possible preservation and educational strategies and to promote increased international collaboration and partnerships.

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