

Californians Connecting to Collections: Preserving the Heritage of California

PARTNERS



CalPreservation.org

Helping preserve libraries and archives



CALIFORNIA
STATE LIBRARY
FOUNDED 1850



FUNDER



This project is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Contents

- 1) Executive summary
 - 2) Rationale for preserving California heritage
 - 3) Building a statewide service to meet preservation needs
 - 4) Vision for a statewide heritage preservation service
 - 5) Securing support and funding
- Appendix 1: The California Connecting to Collections Project
Appendix 2: California surveys to identify preservation needs
Appendix 3: Organizations invited to participate in the Connecting to Collections planning meetings

1. Executive summary

The Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in 2007, through its nationwide “Connecting to Collections” initiative, challenged each state to develop a plan to address the preservation needs of its cultural heritage collections, including historic sites, buildings, art, historical artifacts, scientific specimens, books, and documents. In 2008, five California heritage organizations - the California Association of Museums, the California Preservation Program, the California State Library, California State Parks, and Historic Monterey (a multi-agency heritage organization) - collaborated on a statewide project (hereafter called the “Project”) to create a vision for preservation of California’s heritage collections and a plan to address their preservation needs.

From 1991-2005, California undertook six statewide preservation needs surveys of different types of California heritage collections, and in October 2008 held two statewide meetings of representatives of California organizations of heritage professionals to discuss major collection preservation needs. (See Appendices for details.)

The most commonly identified needs were preservation information, education and training, consulting, and statewide promotion of care of collections. Meeting these needs will help to ensure the survival of California’s heritage, giving rise to a vision and plan for a statewide preservation service.

Since preservation needs are shared by all types of institutions in the California heritage community, meeting them collectively provides opportunities to combine resources to achieve strength and cost effectiveness. Further, a shared statewide preservation service offers opportunities to dramatically improve communication across the different types of geographically dispersed cultural heritage institutions in the state; most have not benefited from information sharing and collaboration outside their segment of the heritage community.

A statewide preservation service designed to meet the needs of the whole California heritage community will be built on preservation services already being delivered to some segments of the community. Additionally, the invaluable resources of technical expertise in major California heritage institutions and organizational expertise in California organizations of heritage professionals will be used to make development of a high impact, cost-effective statewide heritage preservation service a realistic goal.

2. Rationale for preserving California heritage

California is rich with heritage institutions, thousands of museums, libraries, archives, historical societies, and historic sites and buildings containing millions of cultural artifacts and documents. California also is disaster prone with many potential problems: earthquakes, mudslides, tsunamis, mold and insects, floods and fires. The state's museums, libraries, archives, historic sites, and historical societies, and especially those with small collections and even smaller staffs, are at risk because they are isolated by geographic distances, because staff lack appropriate preservation information, because funds are extremely limited, and because there's no readily available source of preservation assistance. Preserving collections of historical documents, artifacts, buildings and sites costs time, effort, and money.

Every Californian gains by investing in their heritage institutions because California's history serves its citizens well. California history embraces a society of many communities and ethnicities, capturing in its diverse records and collections the stories of cultural change and adaptation. It serves as a microcosm of American society and promotes tolerance by dispelling stereotypes. Through this inclusive perspective, California history informs, inspires, educates, and entertains.

California history informs:

- public policy and law
- the present about the past in order to avoid repeating costly mistakes of the past
- how current society came to be, providing a sense of connectedness to place and culture
- how our physical environment is evolving (e.g., climate change)
- about California's role in the nation

- as pioneers of the development of many industries for the nation (e.g., film, technology, housing development, agribusiness)
- as a key link to Pacific Rim and Latin American countries
- as a leader, i.e. what happens in the nation often happens in California first

California history inspires:

- by instilling appreciation and wonder
- by being an epicenter of many global trends-identity-phenomena
- through the creations of its writers, artists, and craftspeople
- through the accomplishments of its leaders (e.g., in technology and environment)
- through creative solutions to the state's challenges

California history educates:

- By teaching American democracy
- By teaching with physical and virtual worlds to improve understanding of abstract concepts and ideas
- By using historical objects and sites to connect people with place and time
- By appealing to the interests of citizens of all ages and backgrounds

California history entertains:

- through heritage tourism, contributing to the state's economy
- through California pop culture, its images, myths, and speech patterns
- through the television, film, and music industries

California heritage institutions also serve Americans nationwide by preserving millions of archaeological, historical, paleontological, zoological, geological, and botanical objects that originated off of federal lands managed by numerous agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service and various agencies of the Department of Defense. Housed in more than 50 institutions across the state, these federal collections are not owned by the California institutions where they are housed but rather are held in trust for the American people for the purposes of exhibit, interpretation, scientific study and public education for present and future generations.

3. Building a statewide service to meet preservation needs

Service components

The Project's statewide meetings with representatives of California organizations of heritage professionals in October 2008 established priorities for addressing preservation needs and discussed how they might be addressed for the benefit of California's many

heritage institutions. (See Appendix 4 for a list of invited organizations, and <http://www.calmuseums.org/c2c.html> for ideas generated at the statewide meetings.)

Providing safe conditions for collections and marshalling public and private support for collections care were seen as primary goals. All of these goals require information and training tailored to meet the different needs of small and large institutions. After soliciting recommendations and suggestions at the statewide meetings, three clusters of preservation services were identified:

Information

- a dedicated website of California-focused preservation information
- current information on equipment and supplies
- documents useful for preservation planning
- model disaster response plans
- data on preservation needs statewide
- public awareness communications

Education and Training

- best practices for collection care
- assessing and managing risks to collections
- disaster preparedness and response
- fundraising and grantwriting for care of collections
- training for staff and volunteers

Consulting

- 24/7 number for advice on disaster response
- email/telephone reference on preservation issues
- collection needs assessments
- building risk assessments
- preservation program planning
- grantwriting and fundraising

Examples of suggested heritage preservation service initiatives:

- **Preservation “road show”** to travel to various communities across the state to provide collections care training while simultaneously raising awareness about how local libraries, archives, museums, and historical societies preserve the heritage of the region. Specifically, this program features: (1) workshops for staff members and volunteers caring for collections; (2) weekends of public programs, such as behind-the-scenes tours and workshops on preserving family photographs, records, and artifacts; (3) “adopt an artifact”

program to highlight specific preservation needs; and (4) meetings with local elected officials and media representatives.

- **California preservation website** to host California-focused schedules of education and training opportunities; resource kits and templates; current sources of equipment, supplies, and expert assistance; preservation grant opportunities; and links to standards and best practices.
- **Practical toolkits** to provide cross-disciplinary “bundles” of resources on specific topics in response to the needs expressed at the regional meetings. Suggested toolkit topics included developing an emergency plan, grant-writing for preservation projects, preservation education for board members, developing relationships with elected officials, and collection assessments. The toolkit contents would include reference books, instructional videos, technical leaflets, and examples of successful projects. The contents would be drawn from existing products that target the archival, library and museum communities. Toolkits would be unique due to their combinations of resources representing the best ideas and tools from different disciplines and their emphasis on California. The toolkits could include introductory texts to inspire the user and suggest methods for getting started.
- **Preservation reference service** (email and telephone) and 24/7 hot line for collection emergencies to provide immediate information assistance when needed and to help institutions plan and evaluate options for improvements to safety and care of collections.
- **Education and training workshops** to meet needs identified in assessments and to assist institutions learn how to prepare and manage grant-funded preservation projects, such as workshops on writing disaster response plans, grantwriting, assessing collection needs, digital preservation, collection repair, and contracting for conservation treatment services.
- **Collections Circuit Rider**, a preservation professional who travels a regular circuit of locations on an ongoing basis to provide services and training concerning the care of collections.

Service Infrastructure

Much of the organizational infrastructure needed to deliver preservation services statewide already is in place, but not in any one organization or institution:

- Statewide preservation training services for some sectors of the heritage community already are in place at a modest level; the California Preservation Program serves the library and archives community, and the Balboa Art Conservation Center serves the museum community. Each of these organizations, as well as others, could be reviewed for their potential to reach larger percentages of the cultural heritage communities.
- California has statewide organizations representing different segments of the community of heritage organizations that maintain ongoing communication with members and undertake educational programming on their behalf: the California Association of Museums, the California Library Association, the California Association of Research Libraries, the Society of California Archivists, the California Council for the Promotion of History, the California Preservation Foundation, and California State Parks. All of these organizations could be enlisted to help identify the preservation needs of their members and organize education, training, and information dissemination.
- California is fortunate to have world-class institutions that research and teach cultural heritage preservation principles and practices. Large institutions in major metropolitan areas, the Getty Conservation Institute, and University of California, for example, have deep expertise that can be tapped for teaching assignments and assistance in emergencies involving the collections.

With these elements of an infrastructure to deliver services statewide already in place, a statewide heritage preservation service will be developed and managed by a steering committee made up of representatives from the communities served. The steering committee will be charged to:

- continuously assess the preservation needs and progress of the heritage community
- develop and evaluate activities and initiatives of the service
- raise funds to underwrite the service
- communicate about the service to members of the community
- contract with consultants and service providers to deliver preservation services
- contract with a fiscal agent to provide financial services

The five heritage organizations that facilitated the Project (California Association of Museums, California Preservation Program, California State Library, California State Parks, and Historic Monterey) will serve as a start-up team to pursue funding and an organizational structure for a heritage preservation service, and initiate its activities. After the start-up phase, a call will be made to organizations in the heritage community

to create a steering committee to succeed the start-up team and develop a plan for sustainability.

4. Outcomes for a statewide heritage preservation service

The most lasting outcome of a California heritage preservation service will be a culture of preservation management, where institutional resources are committed to preservation and the sustainability of the service is ensured by support from institutional managers addressing their preservation needs. Preservation management will become another new management skill, much as online communication technologies and institutional marketing recently have been added to management skill sets.

To ensure progress toward this outcome, a California heritage preservation service will assist institutions:

- initiate public awareness and/or fundraising initiatives for collections care
- make measurable improvements to conditions for storage of collections
- develop disaster response plans for collections
- assign responsibility for collections care to members of the staff

Multiple educational opportunities will be needed to reach a broad audience with different timetables for addressing their preservation issues. Growing a culture of preservation management will take time; a decade of training will be required before today's front line managers assigned responsibility for preservation become tomorrow's administrative and budgetary decision-makers. Slow though it may be, the strategy of growing a culture of preservation management works; many institutions that began with a staff member participating in a workshop or a seed project to preserve a single object now have staff with ongoing assignments to manage the preservation functions.

5. Securing support and funding

This draft vision has been reviewed by participants attending the October 2008 regional meetings and by organizations of California heritage professionals. Comments have been incorporated into revisions that are being used to guide development of a statewide preservation service.

Grants and gifts, including contributions of staff expertise from institutions and communication services from professional organizations, will fund some activities of the heritage preservation service because many of the institutions that most need preservation assistance are relatively small with few resources other than their

collections. Partial cost recovery will be explored for some training and on-site consultations. Membership/service/subscription fees will be considered on a sliding scale. On behalf of the heritage community, the start up team (the five Project partners identified above) will explore applications to funding agencies for implementation grants (For example, following completion of the statewide planning grants, IMLS intends to offer implementation grants for a few model statewide plans. When the grant program is announced, the start-up team will submit an application for funding for California.)

Several potential obstacles to support and funding have been identified and will be addressed. For example, a steering committee with members representing statewide organizations of heritage professionals will ensure that heritage institutions of all types, sizes, and in all locales have a voice. The large size of California could create a challenge to delivery of service; by drawing on trainers, consultants, and existing preservation service providers throughout the state as needed, a preservation service will be able to provide relatively local assistance. The very different needs of small institutions from large institutions creates a challenge to trainers; with multiple trainers and consultants from which to choose, the service will match expertise and institutional experience with audience needs. Many institutions, both large and small, have very limited funding with which to pursue their missions; emphasis will be placed on teaching and implementing the most critical preservation measures. The vagaries of funding are an obstacle to maintaining service levels; by using trainers and consultants on a contract basis, the service will grow and shrink in response to funding opportunities and limitations. As institutional funding grows, service levels will stabilize.

Appendix 1: The California Connecting to Collections Project

In 2007, the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funded California to develop a plan to address the preservation needs of its cultural heritage collections, including historic sites, buildings, art, historical objects, books, and documents. Five heritage organizations, the California Association of Museums, the California Preservation Program, the California State Library, California State Parks, and Historic Monterey (a multi-agency collaborative organization) agreed to facilitate a one-year project (March 2008-February 2009, with IMLS funding to support costs) to create a shared vision among heritage institutions in California and to develop a statewide plan to address collection needs. Following IMLS guidelines, the Project was designed to address the four recommendations of the Heritage Health Index (HHI), a nationwide survey undertaken in 2005 by Heritage Preservation, a national preservation advocacy organization located in Washington, DC:

- provide safe conditions for collections
- develop emergency plans
- assign responsibility for collections care
- marshal public and private support for and raise public awareness about collections care

To achieve its goals, the Project had four objectives:

- Host two statewide meetings for representatives of regional and statewide organizations of heritage professionals to discuss preservation needs and elements of a plan to address the HHI recommendations. (October 2008)
- Draft a shared vision for a program to assist California heritage organizations address the four recommendations of the HHI, and a development plan, including organizational infrastructure and funding, to provide the education, training and assistance needed by heritage institutions to achieve these goals. (October-November 2008)
- Conduct a series of feedback sessions at annual meetings of California heritage professionals on the draft plan. (November 2008-February 2009)
- Assess interest in the plan from potential funders, particularly California funding organizations and key elected officials and state policymakers whose support could be integral to plan implementation. (December 2008-February 2009)

Appendix 2: California surveys to identify preservation needs

Between 1991 and 2005, California heritage professionals conducted six statewide preservation needs assessment surveys, followed in 2005 by the nationwide Heritage Health Index survey of preservation needs. The California surveys were:

- Balboa Art Conservation Center, 2002, with responses from 93 California museums
- California Association of Museums, 2005, with responses from 134 California museums, 125 of which have permanent collections
- California State Parks, 2003, with responses from 99 state parks, representing 473 facilities housing museum collections.
- California State Library, 1998, with responses from 280 California libraries, archives, and historical societies
- California State Library, 1991, with quantitative data from 43 California libraries and archives representing 193 million books and documents
- Society of American Archivists, 2003, with responses from 500 California archivists

The data in all the surveys were consistent and led to the following broad recommendations:

Provide safe conditions for collections. Nearly 60% of California heritage institutions need to improve storage for collections to reduce risks of damage and loss. All the surveys called for education on preservation topics that would lead to safer conditions for collections.

Develop emergency plans. An alarming 60-90% of California heritage institutions do not have a disaster response plan for the collections, staff trained in emergency response, and salvage supplies. Different sectors of the heritage community indicated different levels of disaster preparedness, but all parts of the community indicated a need for considerable help to achieve comprehensive readiness. Demand for training in disaster preparedness was common among the surveys.

Assign responsibility for collections care. Many smaller institutions in particular have not assigned to a staff member responsibility for collections care. The primary reasons for not assigning responsibility are too few staff--each staff member already wears many hats-- and lack of knowledge of best practices. Consequently, the need for education in collection care is great; 38-90% of responses requested education.

Marshal public and private support for and raise public awareness about collections care. Lack of resources often was cited as a major reason for inadequate care of collections. One of the surveys found that only 40% of institutions undertake collection care with funds from the operating budget; only a dismal 15% have received grants for collections care; and only 10% have endowment funding for preservation. Nonetheless, interest in education and training was notable; 40-45% of the responses requested training in fundraising, grantwriting, and outreach.

**Appendix 3:
Organizations invited to participate in the
Connecting to Collections planning meetings**

^Southern California Meeting Participants

*Northern California Meeting Participants

American Association of State and Local
History

ARLIS, Southern California Chapter^

Art Libraries Society of North America^*

Association of Moving Image Archivists^

Balboa Art Conservation Center^*

Califa*

California Arts Council*

California Association of Museums^

California Association of Research Libraries

California Association of Zoos and
Aquariums

California Cooperative Library Systems^*

California Council for the Humanities^

California Council for the Promotion of
History

California Exhibition Resources Alliance

California Historical Records Advisory
Board^*

California Historical Society*

California Indian Basketweavers Association

California Indian Storytellers Association

California Library Association*

California Mission Studies Association^

California Preservation Foundation

California Preservation Program^*

California State Archives*

California State Assembly Committee on
Arts, Entertainment, Sports, Tourism,
and Internet Media

California State Historic Preservation Office

California State Library^*

California State Parks^*

Conference of California Historical
Societies^*

County Records Managers Association of
California*

The Getty Foundation ^

Historic Monterey^*

Institute of Museum and Library Sciences^

James Irvine Foundation

National Trust for Historic Preservation,
Western Region

Registrars Committee - Western Region ^*

Society for California Archaeology^*

Society of California Archivists^*

Special Libraries Association*

United States Bureau of Land Management

Western Association of Art Conservators^

Western Museums Association*