

PRESERVATION EDUCATION FOR LIBRARY STAFF AND PATRONS IN NIGERIAN LIBRARIES

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Abstract

"Since the past fifty decades or more, librarians have realized the fragility and the danger that the bulk of library materials would disintegrate, if not properly cared for" (Straford: 1999).. It was predicted that without proper preservation exercises ninety percent of the books printed in the twentieth century would be decayed beyond use by the first few years of the twenty first century. Fortunately, today's librarians, curators, and bibliophiles have become more and more aware of the need for the proper handling and treatment of the varied objects in their care, in other words, preservation and conservation. Librarians and archivists have understood that the surest way to preserve books is to treat them as you would human beings, who are sure to sicken if confined in an atmosphere which is too impure, too hot, too cold, too damp, or too dry.

INTRODUCTION

A library has always been considered a special place for reading, study, or reference, and librarians have always been charged with the care and management of their books. The word "Library" has now expanded to include computer disks, films, documents and works of art and much more. The duties of librarians have also expanded. As always, they now need to include knowledge of preservation practices, and that is what this book is about.

Libraries have always been treasured and cared for to a greater or lesser degree. Their first need, of course, was a plan of organization for access. Four millennia ago, in Mesopotamia, librarians stored their clay tablets so that they would be available for reference. Clay tablets were virtually indestructible, so their chief preservation dangers were only wars or plunder. Over the centuries tablets changed to animal skins and rolls of papyrus and finally animal skins and papyrus rolls changed to caudexes, that is, the book format we know today.

In the Middle Ages, preservation mostly consisted of chains attached to books. This could be found chiefly in monastic libraries for security, metal boxes would be used to prevent abrasion of leather covers and before the general use of paper, fastenings of different kinds were also used to preserve the information on parchment and papyrus from climate changes and insect infestations (Eden: 1997).

PRESERVATION VERSUS CONSERVATION:

Every librarian faces a considerable quantity of materials books, prints, maps, microforms, computer accessories and many other records in various state of deterioration in his or her collections. There are yellowed and brittle newspapers, books with torn off spines or pages, curled photographs, scratched computer compact disks, faded film slides or molded microfilms. The librarian needs to know what he or she should do with each sickly object (conservation) and more importantly, what he or she should have done in the first place to have avoided such situations (preservation).

The librarian is responsible for the preservation of the collections, seeing to it that they are housed in the best possible conditions, determining what material may require special facilities to prevent or retard deteriorations and those which should be restored back to status quo.

There is some confusion about the meanings of the words 'conservation' and 'preservation'. The primary meaning of conservation is "the act of preserving back to life, library materials that are decayed, injured or violated" (Edward: 2011). Conservation emphasizes on the physical treatment of specific items or collections. In short, conservation means restoring deteriorated library documents which otherwise would be lost. It is the job of the conservator to repair and restore deteriorated materials to the state where they could be put back into circulation and use.

Preservation on the other hand is "the act of safeguarding, protecting or keeping in safety or security from harm, injury, decay, or destruction of library and archival collections" (Edward: 2011). Preservation encompasses all the steps and activities needed to ensure that the holdings of a library or archive remain in the best possible condition for as long as possible. This includes concerns about storage methods, the buildings, the library environment, security, and other aspects that broadly affect every item in the collection. Preservation also includes safeguarding not only physical materials but also information. To this end, reformatting, photocopying, replacement and the use of protective containers are employed to extend access to information that might be lost once a paper or electronic books or documents deteriorate.

In a large library system such as the Library of Congress, Bibliotheque Nationale and other such libraries, the Preservation Officer may have a large staff of people, 'including conservators and scientists, who work within a preservation Division. In such a case, the Preservation Librarian is an informed administrator with a knowledgeable staff of assistants. Such a person is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the preservation section and for planning the long-range objectives of a preservation program. The Preservation Librarian needs to be aware of the techniques and procedures followed by the conservator but will not do the actual restoration of books and documents or other library materials.

SITUATION IN NIGERIA

This paper "Preservation Education For Library Staff and Patrons in Nigerian Libraries" was written because of the lukewarm attitude of both library science students and library practitioners in Nigeria to this very important library activity. Extremely few libraries in Nigeria have a department wholly responsible for the preservation and care of documents. In libraries of Europe, the Americas, Asia and even some African countries like Botswana, South Africa, Egypt etc., Preservation and Conservation is an extremely important issue in their libraries. These countries believe that once documents are not looked after, one by one all the treasures of their libraries would in the end be lost and one of the laws of librarianship which says 'Every Reader his Book' and the issue of 'Access' would be defeated. If Nigerian libraries continue with this inert attitude towards preservation they could end up with empty libraries, documents ravaged, eaten up and destroyed by dust, pest, un-conducive temperature and by human beings as well!

On the other hand, libraries in Nigeria still suffer from under funding and as such, that makes fiscally very difficult for them to establish all necessary departments in their libraries, including a department of "Preservation and Conservation". Still, it is hoped that graduating students will take up this challenge and encourage the establishment of 'Preservation and Conservation' section in their libraries when they take up library work. . Our new library graduates are our lifeline into making our libraries fully functional libraries with all the relevant departments established and properly funded and functioning!

PRESERVATION EDUCATION FOR STAFF AND PATRONS INTRODUCTION

When library users come into a library, their primary goal is to obtain information (Crosby: 2000). Most library users who are seeking for specific facts or figures are often only vaguely aware of the physical characteristics of the books, serials, computer files microforms and other such formats on which the information they seek are kept. It is very relevant that preservation librarians are aware of current access practices that could be harmful to their collections and remedy them. It is also necessary that patrons are also aware on the formats on which they probably could find their information this will minimize deleterious actions that many patrons do to find what they need in the library. Both library staff and their patrons need to be trained and educated on safer methods of seeking, finding and handling information materials.

STAFF TRAINING PROGRAM

The key to the preservation of library collections is a staff training program in which all staff members are taught to respect the library materials in their care and keep an eye on how their patrons also use the library collection. Such training program would include instruction manuals, user education, library orientation, brief discussions with all new staff members on the care of the collections, or a special training program targeting those directly responsible with circulation and preservation activities. Another important task for the library staff especially the preservation officer is to raise patrons' awareness of proper handling techniques of books. Prepare a preservation booklet, flyer, bookmark, or other handouts with some basic rules of the use of library materials. Illustrations are very helpful and help maintain a light, friendly library with little friction between staff and users.

Some Basic rules in a library brochure should include banning of food and drink inside the library. In modern libraries, cafeterias are provided for the use of staff and users, food and drinks would be served and eaten there and the danger of spillage and staining of documents is thus evaded.

Information on smoking should be included in the brochure but separate 'No Smoking' notices should be pasted in all reading and collection areas. Nowadays, libraries do not even need to go to that extent because the global war against smoking includes a ban on smoking in public places which includes the insides of libraries. Libraries often designate special areas where users and staff could go and smoke. The library should guide users to where that designated place is located.

INSTRUCTION FOR LIBRARY USERS

Pictures and drawings should be incorporated guiding users on how they should remove books from the shelves. Pictures should show how a book in the middle of a shelf or in an overcrowded shelf should be removed. Pictures of books damaged through such actions should also be included in the brochure.. All these notices and directions, consequences of different offences etc. should be illustrated on the library brochure, newsletters and other similar library publications. For example a page could contain the following instruction on a single leaflet or as part of the library brochure distributed to new user, thus:

Example of what the instruction could contain is shown below. It could contain much more depending on the type of collection and users a library has, but the following are basic examples:

1. Sample of Instruction Notice for Patron (Balloffet: 2005)

INSTRUCTION FOR THE LIBRARY USER

- Leave food and drink outside the Library.
- No smoking inside the library.
- The spine of a book will break if books are pulled out wrongly. Please see the consequence of this action on page XXX of this brochure
- Books should be properly removed from the shelf. See illustration on page XXX showing how a book should be removed from a tightly arranged shelf.
- When removing a book from the middle of the shelf, adjacent books should be pushed from left and right, leaving the book you need free to pull out. See illustration on page XXX for this example
- If there are no bookends available to support books, prevent them from sagging by placing a few books flat on their sides next to the last book. See illustration on page XXX for example.
- Highlighters and any other writing materials must never be used to write or highlight any part of a library book.
- Patrons should show damaged materials to a staff member; patrons must never attempt to repair damaged library document.
- Use care when photocopying: do not press down hard on a book that has a stiff binding. The library has a commercial photocopier.
- See illustration on page...of this brochure showing example of the wrong method of photocopying a book.
- When in doubt of anything in the library, ask for assistance.

This type of notices should be given to library users as they come into the library or pasted in popular places around the building.

STAFF TRAINING FOR PRESERVATION PRACTICES

Every new staff of the library (unless on transfer) would be ignorant about some library procedures and are most liable to continue doing wrong things unless they are first taught. That is why it is necessary for all new employees get a copy of

the flyer, brochure or booklet on what to do and what not to do in performing library work. These documents should have an introduction first with an explanation of why the procedures are important for the new staff to follow. In addition, the library should develop a set of instruction for staff members who actively handle books or other library materials like circulation staff who shelf and shelf read daily. These instructions include all of the topics covered in the handout discussed earlier as well as shelving lessons. It could be a sort of a manual for the staff of the library both new and old. Among other instructions, the following shelving instruction could be included in the staff training:

❖ **Shelving Training and Instructions for Staff:**

- Staff should be trained to shelf books standing up straight on the shelf; the spines even with the front edge of the shelf. Staff should be taught never to allow books to sag when shelving i.e. place the fore-edge down and the spine looking up
- Staff should be told not to place books on top of a row of other books but if the shelf is full, the books should be shifted to another fresh row. If a book is too tall for the shelf, then the librarian should take that book to a senior library officer and explain the situation.
- As mentioned earlier, books should never be shelved on their fore edges, which mean the edge opposite the spine. .
- Librarian should always take damaged books to his or her supervisor. See picture of such books kept in a separate area for sorting and transfer to the conservator.
- All librarians must be observant and report all irregular conditions such as problems with air-conditioning, leaks or flooding, any detection of mould, presence of insects and rodents.
- Library doors and windows should always be properly closed after closing hours.
- Unauthorised persons in areas not open to the public and pilferers must be reported to the security officers of the library immediately and promptly.

These and other rules and regulations of the library in its effort to preserve its collections must be followed religiously by all staff, and once we have educated the library staff to be aware of the proper procedures for the preservation of library materials, we have taken a giant step forward in the preservation of our collections. Library staff must understand and appreciate how certain negative attitudes of both staff and patrons affect library collections and hasten their deterioration (Norman: 2001) In Prevention is the responsibility of the library staff and this should be stressed to all of them, from the most senior to the most junior. Books should be shelved standing up straight on the shelf; the spines even with the front edge of the shelf (See Picture below)



Patron Education for Preservation Practices

Personal Aid for Patrons

"A common problem with most library staff in Nigeria is that they are seldom happy to get up from their desks and help solve users' problems" (Samson: 2009). As a result, patrons often go into the library without proper knowledge of the quickest method to access what they want and how best to handle documents without injuring the documents and the library itself. That makes it necessary for libraries to design and distribute preservation flyers, bookmarks and other such instructional gadgets to users of the library. These publications would inform the patron on what he or she should do or not do while using library documents thus minimizing the chances of unintentional deleterious actions by the library user.

Whenever possible, supervisors should enlist the aid of junior staff to keep a discreet eye on patrons and be ready to help with problems. Most libraries, especially academic and school libraries present "Library Orientation Week" during when new several activities would be carried out to guide new users on how the library works and what users can do or cannot do inside it. The Preservation Officer has to use this opportunity and include preservation tips during these sessions.

Bookmarks

Libraries should encourage the use of bookmarks. This is very rare habit among book readers in Nigeria and our libraries very rarely keep and encourage their readers to use them. The few libraries that do, small pieces of acid-free paper should be left on reading tables and other areas used by patrons so that they can use them as bookmarks. These slips of paper don't cause distortion to the text and if accidentally left in the book for a long period, will not cause staining to the pages. Some libraries, especially academic libraries in Nigeria now provide bookmarks printed with information about library hours, regulations, collections, and so on. These bookmarks should be printed on acid-free card and distributed widely to students and academic staff.

Library Tours

Occasionally, senior librarians are assigned to give a tour of the library to groups such as Friends of the Library, Local political figures, visiting faculty members, new group of patrons and so on. This is a good opportunity that the library preservation officer should use to mention ways that the library is working to preserve its collections.

CONCLUSION

Library staff should emphasize to users that collections in good condition can be used but materials that are allowed to deteriorate will eventually be lost (Eden: 1997). The importance of proper care for rare or valuable items is usually easy to demonstrate, but it is not always easy to prove that all materials also need good conditions to continue to be useful. In dealing with the public, the staff of the library should demonstrate that preservation of the collections is a very high priority and one that can only be accomplished with the collaboration of people who use the materials. Every library user must be made to understand that preservation is the surest means of eternal access to library documents to them now and to many more in the long future - and this is true for every type of library!

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