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## **Re-Purposing Childhood: Preserving the Juvenile Historic Collection at the University of Michigan-Dearborn**

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### **Abstract:**

*As part of a graduate, preservation course in the School of Information at the University of Michigan, we conducted a preservation needs assessment survey for the Juvenile Historic Collection at the University of Michigan-Dearborn's Mardigan Library. The majority of the collection began its life in the children's section of the Ann Arbor Public Library. In its current home, the collection is used for research by the faculty and students of the university, with occasional exhibits open to the general public. Thus, the children's literature in this university context has been repurposed to meet the needs of students and faculty; and preservation and access must be discussed with this audience in mind.*

*We look at the challenges and opportunities inherent in preserving what are technically considered by the library to be special collections materials - and furthermore, materials that were often well-used by children before acquisition - for the use of university students. How does the value of a collection of children's literature change when taken away from the children it was written for? How and*

*why do we preserve and provide access to materials that have moved from the realm of culture to cultural heritage?*

*By preserving the collection in an academic library, the books in this collection have been given a second life. They are in an environment where they can be easily accessed by a large number of people who will be interested in both the content and the continuing survival of the collection. Drawing on our previous findings about the state of preservation at this library and our recommendations, we discuss how access to and preservation of children's special collections materials is not only a challenge but also an opportunity to support the education of university students, faculty, and the community as a whole.*

**Keywords:** preservation, juvenile, special collections, university

### **Introduction: The Collection**

In the fall of 2013, our team performed a preservation needs assessment of the Juvenile Historic Collection in the Mardigian Library at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. We made multiple visits to the collection and investigated the current use and storage of the collection from the perspective of preservationists. The factors we looked at included institutional documentation (including mission statement, written preservation plan, and emergency plan), handling procedures, storage, climate control, and security. We then made recommendations of how to best ensure the continuing survival and usability of the collection.

The materials in the collection date from the early 1800s through the 1970s. One of the characteristics that makes this collection special is that the vast majority of the collection is kept in open stacks accessible to all users of the library. The remainder of the collection is kept in locked cabinets in a conference room, but is accessible by appointment and is sometimes circulated. When assessing the preservation needs of the collection, our team had to balance the need to keep the materials in circulation as well as maintaining their current condition as well as possible.

The core of the Juvenile Historic Collection is the May G. Quigley Collection, which was named after the first Chief of the Children's Department of the Grand Rapids Public Library. Over the course of her long career, May Quigley developed the extensive collection of children's literature that constitutes the core of the collection. In 2002, the Grand Rapids Public Library came to the decision that their now historical collection could be better utilized in a research library. It was important to them that the collection remain easily accessible and in circulation.

The collection finally found a home at the Mardigian Library at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. The Juvenile Historic Collection grew with the additions of the Balbach Family Gift, the Patricia Bravender Gift, and the Susan M. Steele Gift. It currently consists of about 4000 books and 280 bound periodicals. The collection continues to grow through both donations and active collecting of materials.

The majority of the collection is located in open stacks and is used throughout the semester by both students and faculty. These materials are circulated, but only to students and faculty of the Dearborn campus. Outside visitors may use the materials but are not able to check them out of the library. There is a smaller collection of rare and fragile books (including all of the pop-up books in the collection) that is housed in a closed area. These are kept in locked cabinets in a conference room and at this time are used less frequently and mostly by faculty. The books in both the open and closed collections are periodically used in exhibitions in the library. There are few items in the collection that are so rare as to be irreplaceable. These are all factors that we had to consider when recommending preservation measures for the collection.

### **Our Survey Findings**

At the time we conducted our preservation assessment survey for the Mardigian Library Juvenile Historic Collection, they did not have a long-term preservation plan in place. It was our hope that our survey would be the foundation for the development of a preservation plan that addressed the unique collection of children's literature collected at the Mardigian Library. Also, there are no funds specifically allocated towards preservation or conservation of the Juvenile Historic Collection materials from the library's budget. Exhibitions at the library are used to raise awareness of conservation needs, and donations are solicited from the community at large for specific repairs to damaged or deteriorating items. In addition to this form of income for preservation, there are fines levied against users when items are lost or damaged when they are checked out to offset the cost of repairs or replacement. In order for preservation measures to effectively anticipate and react to the needs of a collection, good planning and clearly defined and enforced policies are required. The Mardigian Library has their work cut out for them in this respect, especially if they are to achieve the goal of making the May Quigley Collection accessible for many years to come. However, the Mardigian Library also has many current practices that are ensuring that the collection will be preserved for many years.

While a great part of the Juvenile Historic Collection is stored in the open stacks on the first floor of the Mardigian Library, the rarest and most fragile books are kept in a closed collection, accessible only by permission. Both parts of the collection, the open and closed, are stored on adequate shelving and there is plenty of empty shelving available for expansion of the overall collection. Books are not cramped or stored in compromising positions, and there are plenty of tables for researchers and users to view the books without damaging them. Clamshell paperboard boxes are used to house books which are beginning to show signs of damage and deterioration, but which are not rare enough to be placed in the closed collection. This is the balancing act that the staff at the Mardigian Library must perform with this collection; access, which was the core stipulation of the donor of the collection and limited handling in order to ensure preservation. In the past, minor repairs were performed by library staff on books which had been damaged in use. However, considering the specialized skill of book repair is not readily available to the staff, protection using clamshell boxes is now the preferred preservation method. In cases concerning rare and valuable books, conservation treatments are contracted out to specialists from the Ann Arbor university campus.

One such case of this procedure was the *Speaking Picture Book*. The *Speaking Picture Book* is one of the rarest and most valuable books of the Juvenile Historic Collection. It is a picture book from the turn of the twentieth century that is mounted onto a wooden box. Each

full-page picture of an animal has a corresponding string, which when pulled, produces the sound of the depicted animal. The mechanisms that produce the sounds are within the wooden box. When this book was initially acquired by the library it was non-operational. A doctor, who was in the audience of an awareness-raising event, took the book to his office and had it x-rayed in order to visually understand what was inside the wooden box without having to potentially damage the book further by opening it. Once the doctor gave the x-rays back to the library, the decision was made to have the book professionally treated by a conservation team at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. The conservators there decided to place a transparent cover over the sound-producing mechanisms in order for users to see how the book produces its sounds. Of course, this is an extreme example; nevertheless, it illustrates the Mardigian Library's willingness to go the extra mile for its unique objects and the desire of the community to collaborate in preserving this treasured collection. The *Speaking Picture Book* is also a good example of the limitations of digitization for preservation of all objects. There are some materials, such as the *Speaking Picture Book*, which simply could never be truthfully expressed in a digital format.

Preservation is more than storage and handling of books; the environment in which the materials are housed is also very important to the long-term preservation of a collection. The Mardigian Library building was built in 1980 and has not been significantly altered or remodeled since its initial construction. The design of the building is adequate for preserving all of its collection, especially in terms of light. Natural light is limited within the building, and the electrical lighting has little impact on the books. There have been few water leaks in the building and its concrete construction ensures protection from most elements. The one significant concern we had when we conducted our survey was the lack of humidity monitoring. The effects of humidity change are potentially dangerous to paper-based products. The closed collection has the added concern of micro-climates, which in conjunction with containing the oldest and rarest paper, has the highest priority for monitoring humidity. Understanding the effects of the environment on the collection speaks to the complexity of a comprehensive preservation plan.

Taking the time out of the busy day-to-day operations of a library to create and implement a preservation plan is difficult for a librarian to do. Additionally, if one is fortunate enough to be working with a collection within a relatively stable environment, it is easy to assume that the status quo, in this case operating without a preservation plan, is adequate to ensure the long-term preservation of the collection. However, we hope that a disaster is not required in order to initiate a serious commitment to developing a comprehensive preservation plan at the Mardigian Library. The Juvenile Historic Collection is an important cultural treasure that is worthy of long-term preservation so that users for generations to come can enjoy and benefit from its uniqueness. It is also our hope that our initial survey will demonstrate the good preservation work and practices already in place at the library, while providing the impetus to continue to develop a more fitting preservation plan for this great collection.

### **Access: Who Are the Users?**

This collection is now housed in a university, potentially removed from easy access to children. University of Michigan-Dearborn students and faculty are allowed to check out any of the books from the collection, but the building is open to the public, so children can use the books on the premises. Access points for students and faculty are also available in the form of two web pages from the Mardigian Library website: <http://www2.soe.umd.umich.edu/quigley/>

and <http://libguides.umd.umich.edu/childrenslit>. The latter was designed by University of Michigan-Dearborn Education Reference librarian Sally Smith for a specific course which will be further discussed below. Yet how often are these books consulted and used by faculty and students in their work? Although we did not gather quantitative data to measure the use of the collection, we did speak with one faculty member who frequently accesses the material from the collection.

Dr. Danielle DeFauw is the primary faculty member currently utilizing the collection. She teaches a Children's Literature, Library Science course at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. When she teaches this course she accesses the open stacks of the collection once a month. As for the closed collection, she indicated to us that she uses it minimally, as it requires much planning and a lot of time. Since she began teaching at the university in the fall of 2012, she has accessed the closed collection only twice. When asked if she felt if the collection was used adequately, she answered, "I rarely feel books are used adequately. I would love to see the collection used more." Dr. DeFauw requires her students to use books from the open collection for two class projects, and although she encourages them to use the collection beyond the minimum required for the class, she feels that students do not use the collection except for the required work. As for use of the closed collection in her coursework, she states, "I am concerned about damaging the materials. There's no way I could get all of my students into that room, and taking those materials out of the room fills me with anxiety." She went on to express the complexity of the balancing act between preservation and access further:

*"Too often, such treasures are stored behind glass that we get to look at, but never experience. I teach my students that when they read a juvenile historic book, they are extending a journey. I love to think about the hands the books have been in from the time they were published. I think of the story of the books themselves tell, not in content, but in nostalgia."*

Dr. DeFauw is currently planning on using the collection for two research projects, one on the evolution of children's non-fiction and another on the history of the Quigley Collection, which is the foundation for the Juvenile Historic Collection at the Mardigian Library.

Although the books from the Quigley Collection are still accessible and in circulation, per the acquisition terms upon donation, we can see that there has been a transition in the user population from children to university students and professors. As students and professors continue to learn from these books and use them in their research, their existence will become more widely known. We are confident that the Mardigian Library's staff and researchers will continue to balance access and preservation of these historic materials so that they will be available for many generations to come.

### **Conclusion: Preserving Children's Literature in Academia**

Much of the literature from the past 10 to 20 years has emphasized the importance of juvenile literature and its collections. It has become an area of scholarly study that goes beyond literary studies to touch other subjects such as sociology, psychology, and history (Uhl 120). In fact, in looking at children's materials in an archival setting (a topic also applicable to libraries), Kenneth Kidd writes that "the development of special collections of children's materials preceded and helped make possible the rise of children's literature as an academic field" (6). Thus, not only does such a collection add value to the library, but Kidd suggests that the

archives also add value to the collection or to the genre in general. Another strong reason for preserving juvenile literature is the correspondingly strong feeling that many have for this kind of literature. As Kidd states, “Reconstructing the history or histories of childhood through children’s materials seem deeply entangled with more personal retrieval or recovery projects” (2-3). These children’s materials stir up private feelings of nostalgia, as we see with Dr. DeFauw at the University of Michigan. Finally, in her broad overview of children’s literature in special collections, Diane McDowell points out that many of the classics that have maintained their presence in children’s hearts to this day are there because people had the “foresight to rescue and protect the originals” (7). In other words, to ensure that historically and literarily important materials last for future generations, preservation efforts are essential.

At the same time, it appears that there is not as much literature on the preservation needs of children’s literature as one might expect for this growing genre (Morris 95), at least not in the U.S. As one might expect, however, the preservation needs for these materials are particularly pressing, not simply because of the needs of current researchers for access to them but also because of how they were handled in the past. Morris writes, “Until the scholarly study of children’s literature arose in the twentieth century, children’s literature was largely considered insignificant and disposable” (97). Looking at this in another way, because scholars have now taken an interest, there is a sense that these materials need preservation. As we discussed earlier in the paper, the fact that children used many of the earlier materials first only makes the books more well-loved and well-worn.

Our original report does not include all possible preservation recommendations. Appropriate and detailed cataloguing, for example, can indirectly help with the preservation and access of materials. Jean Uhl writes in her historical analysis of the American Juvenile Collection at Long Island University, “Researchers can find what they need... without actually handling the book...” (120). The flip side to this, of course, is that when items are well catalogued, more people are likely to know and want them, which can also lead to increased handling.

Despite these areas for further research, our study of the Juvenile Historic Collection at the Mardigian Library has enlightened us on preservation challenges that are both particular to the library and that may be applicable to other libraries. After conducting a survey of academic and research libraries in the southeastern U.S., Vickie Frierson-Adams concludes, “Each library needs to view its juvenile collection in the context of its entire holdings, and make decisions based on what works best for itself, given its own particular needs” (119). Not only is this collection-specific approach useful to think of in terms of the goals for and make-up of the collection, but it also necessary when considering limitations, particularly in funding.

With the Mardigian Library, for example, digitization is not a practical option, even with older titles that Morris recommends as good choices for this process. This is mainly because the lack of funding for this collection and the fact that this collection is not the main focus of the library as a whole. The heavy emphasis on pop-up books, with all of their moving parts and the fact that each page is experienced as a three-dimensional object, also makes digitization much more difficult. Thus, while we included recommendations for digitization in our report, these were only for certain parts of the collection where this could be useful and were suggested as long-term considerations. While digitization can be an important tool for preservation and access, as well as for enhancement of certain features, children’s materials with their often complicated visual and tactile components, can prove especially challenging candidates. It is our belief, therefore, that careful thought and planning is necessary for such

items prior to digitization, taking into consideration cost and what is gained and/or lost in making them virtual.

We acknowledge that with digitization in particular, but also other aspects of preservation (such as building appropriate shelving, measuring humidity with the appropriate tools, etc.) cost is a significant factor. Mary Bogan in setting down guidelines for preservation and security says, “If an institution has a special collection it cannot afford to preserve, that institution should seriously consider finding another appropriate institution that has the necessary resources to provide a home for the collection” (86). Nonetheless, the Mardigian Library and our assessment survey show that libraries can start with small preservation steps while waiting to get funding in the future. In fact, awareness of the preservation issues by the collection’s librarians is half the battle.

Ultimately, we are presenting a case study of one library’s collection. Nevertheless, through it we see the broader challenges and opportunities that lie in preserving children’s materials. While there have been more wide-ranging studies done, such as that of Frierson-Adams, the unique difficulties that the Mardigian has with a collection that places a heavy emphasis on access but for whom digitization is not (at least currently) an option highlights the importance of looking at collections on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, all libraries must face the issues of how to interpret, balance, and take a stand on the various problems of preservation and access.

Furthermore, the nature of our project itself speaks to one successful model for ensuring that collections are aware of preservation issues: that of information or library students donating their time to local organizations. Not only was this a wonderful, educational opportunity for us as students, but it also seemed to be a learning opportunity for the staff with whom we worked.

At this time, a great deal of literature does support the idea that children’s collections are both important and special to academic libraries and appeal to many, intellectually and personally. Our case study helps to emphasize how unique these collections can be, but also how preservation issues may be neglected for them because a lack of time and funds allotted toward them. The next step appears to be to help raise awareness of the particular care needed for these fragile, yet intriguing, collections. Finally, additional research must be done to understand how digitization would work for what are often visually and tactilely complex objects in the collections of underfunded organizations.

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