



# Strategic Maneuvers:

## How the Preservation Lab Helped Move Special Collections Storage at the Public Library of Cincinnati



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### ABOUT THE LAB

Beginning in January of 2012, the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County (PLCH) and University of Cincinnati Libraries (UCL) began a long-term collaboration to provide conservation and preservation treatments in an equally-managed, staffed, and funded preservation lab situated on the University of Cincinnati's main campus.

Since the lab services two institutions, we call ourselves the Preservation Lab! Forgive the hyperbole!

[www.thepreservationlab.org](http://www.thepreservationlab.org)



Oversized posters poorly stored

### THE PROJECT

Faced with poor storage conditions stemming from a roof leak, the bi-institutional collaborative Preservation Lab was asked to assist the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County (PLCH) with building a new rare book storage cage and moving the special collections.

For the Public Library, the scope of this project was to quickly move more than 1300 oversized rare books, 4 flat files of unhoused posters, and eighty 5' x 8' posters to a new location within one month in order to begin construction of a new roof.

### CHALLENGES

- Coordinating stages of move with facilities and two other departments' schedules
- One month notice for project planning and a timeline to complete move in 4 weeks
- No budget for move—elbow grease and existing supplies would be the two major resources
- Security and material tracking during the move
- Moving oversized items through narrow stacks and around tight corners
- Moving fragile items over a great distance (comparable to roughly 3 city blocks)
- Navigating through secured/locked areas

### OPPORTUNITIES

The special collections department at PLCH recognized that the move was also an opportunity to improve the collection's storage conditions and their overall organization. Because every item was going to be touched, it was both an opportunity and a necessity to review the material's condition and establish a handling protocol.

To help prepare for the upcoming move, the special collections department called upon the Preservation Lab to participate in the move planning team.



### INITIAL PLANNING

Initially the PLCH administration had anticipated that the Preservation Lab staff would physically move the collection to ensure that proper handling procedures would be performed consistently.

Though this assumption is understandable, it was not feasible. Half of the Preservation Lab staff, the UCL funded staff, could not have participated. UCL has highly specific job descriptions, while PLCH's are more flexible. This work clearly fell outside of the UCL staffs' areas of responsibilities.

Splitting the team by affiliation would have been disastrous to the lab's cohesion, but more importantly the physical task of moving would not have been the best use of our team's time and expertise. So the Lab proposed a new plan!



Unprotected brittle documents

### OUR PROPOSAL

- The full lab staff would help prepare for the move by:
- training handling and moving strategies to the PLCH staff assigned to physically move the collection;
  - creating quick, temporary protective enclosures for the most fragile of items;
  - flagging items in need of special handling and future treatment by the lab
  - physically moving the 80 oversized posters that were the greatest challenge;
  - conducting mold remediation on a small portion of the collection; the bellwether that the roof was bad!



8 ft long posters were carried in small groups with cardboard tubes



Previously hung oversized posters had collapsed inside encapsulations

Maneuvering tight corners

### TRAINING

Conservator Ashleigh Schieszer met with the special collections staff monitoring the collection move to discuss how best to move the collection—both to protect the staff and the materials. A handout was provided with detailed instructions; here are a few highlights:

- Materials should be placed only on carts or other flat, elevated surfaces;
- Protect corners and edges of books when moving books on a truck by making sure the bindings never hang over the edge of the cart. If a binding is too large support it with large cardboard sheets or metal shelves;
- Even if you can lift the weight of a book, large folios require the support of two people to prevent brittle boards and leather from breaking.
- Please notify a member of the Cincinnati Room staff if you find damage to paper or bindings which prevents safe handling.

### TEMP. ENCLOSURES

Many of the oversized books had detached boards or were degrading with red rot. These materials were in danger of losing pieces or soiling nearby materials (and the movers). The lab wrapped these items in paper secured with linen tapes or placed them in archival boxes reused from a prior UC project.



Re-stacked shelving!



Clean & purpose built for special collections storage

### ON THE FLY EVALUATION

While working on site, preservation worked with the curators of the collection on high priority items that should come to the lab for further work. These materials were flagged for future treatment on-site in the lab.

### POSTER MOVE

Due to the value of the posters to the PLCH collection and the difficulty in handling them because of their size (60"x96") and method of encapsulation, the preservation staff flexed both their physical and mental muscles and carried out this portion of the move.

Conservator, Ashleigh Schieszer, devised a procedure of draping the posters over large map tubes. Because the posters were taped to the inside of the polyester film, they could not be safely rolled and transported through tight spaces. This processes had several benefits, including decreasing the potential for creasing the polyester film and/or paper, providing abundant support during transport, and reducing the footprint of the sheets.

### MOLD

One of the signs that the roof had failed was a slow leak that resulted in a small mold bloom. Luckily the leak and the mold mostly found taped corrugated boxes. The boxes were disposed of and the materials inside were HEPA vacuumed on-site.

### SUCCESS

After our initial meeting with PLCH, the focus of the preservation lab's role shifted from moving the books to surveying the collection, conducting mold remediation, housing the fragile collection items before moving, educating staff on handling and storage, and monitoring the environmental conditions in the new space. The right job for the right department and staff!



Oversized posters fully supported with low cost solution

**NEW and IMPROVED!**