

ILA/ACRL Newsletter

vol. 18, no. 3, Summer 2008

Working Together in the Face of Disaster

Collaboration was the theme this summer as libraries in Iowa prepared for and recovered from the flooding. The summer edition of the ILA/ACRL Newsletter highlights these collaborative efforts, and also offers advice and resources for libraries in preparing their own disaster plans.

Disaster Planning

by Linda Nelson, Scott Community College

A comprehensive plan, which describes the procedures the library staff must follow before, during, and after a disaster, should be a part of your library's most important documents. Devising a detailed disaster plan is good asset management and it will minimize loss of materials and equipment. Below, you will find websites, a blog and a book containing information and examples of current disaster plans.

The [ALA website](#) contains directions, information, an online Disaster Planning Tool, and more.

[The Disaster Recovery Journal](#). Requires onsite free registration. Summer 2008 issue contains sample plans, outlines, and other plan writing sources.

[NN/LM Emergency Preparedness and Response Tool Kit](#). Includes Disaster Plan templates and samples, a list of emergency contacts, and a guide to Service Continuity Planning.

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works:

["Emergency: If you're First..."](#) and

["Salvage at a Glance"](#)

Library of Congress. [Emergency Drying Procedures for Water Damaged Collections](#).
[Disaster Planning](#) Technical Leaflet 3.

[Emergency Salvage of Wet Books and Records](#) Technical Leaflet 37

[Disaster Planning Blog](#)

Book

Halsted, Deborah D. Disaster planning: a how-to-do-it manual for librarians with planning templates on CD-ROM. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, c2005.

Vogel Library teams up with Waverly Public Library to Provide Information to Flood Victims

On June 9th, as the flood waters were rushing into Waverly, the Waverly City Hall was evacuated and all employees were moved to a temporary disaster command post at Waverly Public Library. Due to this move, WPL was inundated with both city employees and those seeking information about flooding and recovery assistance. Knowing that the WPL didn't have as many public access computers, Vogel Library staff decided to provide assistance by staying open later in the evening and to open on the first weekend after the flood to allow public users computer access to check in with relatives, print pictures or apply for government assistance. The collaboration didn't stop there. Vogel Librarian, Kim Babcock Mashek, decided that the flood information the city was providing needed to be organized more efficiently and easily accessible via the Internet, and used her Web 2.0 skills to create a flood wiki along with assistance from the WPL. The wiki has been a great one-stop information portal for many in the city and has helped the WPL field flood-related reference questions. The wiki is currently updated by Kim and also Sarah Meyer-Reyerson, the director of WPL. Both will continue to post updates until the end of August, and at that point they hope that a city employee will begin to update the wiki regularly. The wiki can be viewed at <http://waverlyflood2008.wikidot.com>.
Submitted by Kim Babcock Mashek, Wartburg College

A Cooperative Flood Recovery Effort: African American Museum of Art

Article by Randy Roeder, University of Iowa

Disaster Strikes

On Friday morning, June 13th, 2008, the Cedar River crested inundating 1300 blocks of downtown Cedar Rapids. Cultural institutions including the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library and the African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa were devastated. Farther south, on the Iowa River, twenty buildings on the University of Iowa campus were threatened with flooding and the situation had become so dire that officials deemed it advisable to close the campus to all but essential personnel for a week. Although collections at the University of Iowa remained dry, the archives of the Johnson County Historical Society flooded. This combination of events provided an opportunity for a five-institution collaboration that illustrates the benefits of a collaborative approach to disaster recovery.

Staff from the two Cedar Rapids museums, the University of Iowa Libraries, the State Historical Society of Iowa and the Johnson County Historical Society worked together to salvage collections and lower the costs of recovery for the flood damaged collections. Although the task at hand was enormous, the personnel of the affected institutions had undergone disaster training - a circumstance that eliminated much of the "ramp up" time often required in situations such as this. The group met and selected Steamatic, a business headquartered in Alsip, Illinois, as their

disaster recovery company. It was a move that lowered administrative overhead costs by sharing Steamatic staff and such equipment as freezer trucks.

The affected organizations were also able to share in the services provided by consultants brought in to assess and clean hard-to-handle-collections. Textile conservators from the Chicago Conservation Center were called in as was a wood conservator from Des Moines.

African American Museum of Iowa



"The museum's manuscript collection, although flooded and damaged, remains salvageable because the archival storage containers did not disintegrate."

On Wednesday June 18th, staff and volunteers were allowed back into the African American Museum. Doors were swollen shut and had to be pried open; the building was dark, and there was no electricity; a healthy bloom of mold covered many surfaces. The damage was severe. Exhibits were destroyed, George Washington Carver items on loan from the National Park Service were heavily damaged, and five feet of water entered the collection storage area. Steamatic brought in a generator and lighting equipment, and as volunteers began carting waterlogged items from the building, curator Susan Kuecker triaged the damaged material with detached, unemotional professionalism. Though the decisions were difficult, the goal was simple: save the best and ignore the rest.

Preservation staff from the University of Iowa, the State Historical Society and a former Iowan currently with the University of Alabama washed and cleaned those items requiring immediate attention. Dry items were sent to the Masonic Library for storage. Wet items requiring freezing were loaded onto a Steamatic freezer truck. Items which were not to be frozen received preliminary treatment and were sent to the University of Iowa Oakdale Campus. The museum's manuscript collection, although flooded and damaged, remains salvageable because the archival storage containers did not disintegrate. Manuscript boxes were simply loaded onto a freezer truck with contents intact. The Museum's photograph collection did not fare as well. A large number of one-of-a-kind photographs were damaged beyond repair-in some cases, their emulsion washed off the paper.

One thousand photos that survived triage, two hundred textiles and 15 works of art were sent to the Chicago Conservation Center. DVDs and CDs were washed and set aside for local treatment

by conservation staff at the State Historical Society and at the University of Iowa Libraries. A wood conservator was brought on site to do initial assessment and provide advice on drying out. (continued)

A Cooperative Flood Recovery Effort: National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library and Johnson County Historical Society

Article by Randy Roeder, University of Iowa

(continued)

National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library



Certainly the image of the peaked roof of the Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, surrounded by muddy, swirling water will be one of the enduring memories of the flood of 2008. Although staff were able to remove a part of the textile collection and some other treasures in the days leading up to the flood, a rapid rise and higher-than-anticipated crest meant that most materials remained in the building. The destruction to museum buildings and collections was massive. City officials, perhaps overly cautious, were reluctant to allow staff back in to salvage the collections. Access was denied until June 19th. As a result, mold development was substantial.

Once again, Steamatic set up generators and lighting equipment. The sights that presented themselves were uniformly grim. The library took 5 1/2 feet of water. The strong current had deposited even more mud that it had at the African American Museum. Hundreds of volumes had been swept onto the floor and were buried in muck. They were unidentifiable and could not be assessed until cleaned. Books on the upper half of the shelving units had swollen to the point that they could not be pulled of the shelf. Staff and volunteers soon learned that the most efficient way to remove them was to knock one or two sacrificial volumes loose by pounding them out with a rubber mallet.

With so many library resources needing cleaning, it was decided to wash the bulk of the material, pack it on the freezer trucks, and do the triage after the items were returned from the Chicago drying facility. Numerous LPs and 78 rpm sound recordings - a highlight of the Library's collections - presented a problem in that freezing is not recommended. The records, along with a number of other "no-freeze" items were shipped to the University of Iowa Oakdale campus for drying and cleaning. Flatwork - maps, posters, paper artwork and the like -- were transported to the conservation lab at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City.

Textile conservators from the Chicago Conservation Center came on site to clean fabrics. The shared wood conservator was invaluable in assessing the specialized needs of a substantial collection that ranged from items of furniture to weaponry.

Johnson County Historical Society



The Iowa River crested on June 15 several feet lower than originally predicted. The city of Coralville experienced record flooding and substantial damage to businesses located on 1st Avenue and Second Street. The basements of a number of structures that were near the flood area flooded-- not from surface water but from underground seepage. The basement archives, located in an 1876 school house, took on several feet of water.

Compared to the situation in Cedar Rapids, the water was clean and the damage was relatively straight forward. The bottom shelf of materials - most in book format - were soaked. The items were packed out, boxed, and loaded on to Steamatic freezer trucks, to be taken to a Texas drying facility.

Lessons learned

The staff at the affected institutions was able to respond to the situation quickly because of disaster preparedness training. Although no amount of coursework seems adequate to prepare an individual for an event of this scale, familiarity with preservation concepts allowed staff to anticipate the steps to be taken to put their organizations on the path to recovery. Panic-driven decisions were minimized, and collection officers had an understanding that resources many would consider to be lost could indeed be salvaged.

The flooded organizations were able to save on the cost of salvaging their collections. The salvage company was able to use its staff with less downtime, one Steamatic supervisor handled all three operations, fewer freezer trucks were needed and fewer trips were made to the drying facility in Texas. Outside preservation consultants were able to reduce travel expenses by servicing several clients in a single trip. Local preservation consultants from the University of Iowa and the Iowa State Historical Society were able to coordinate their efforts and develop a strategy for local treatment of items that were not suitable for freezing.

The fact that University of Iowa Libraries and the Iowa State Historical Society did not flood allowed their preservation staffs ample time to work with the affected institutions. Had this not been the case, the flooded organizations would still have realized substantial benefits by taking a cooperative approach to their recovery. Coordination would have been much more difficult as each institution would have been preoccupied with the immediate task at hand. Alternative arrangements would have been required to care for those collections not suited for freezing, and the costs for treating these items would have been greater.

Sandbagging at the U of I

Article by Duncan Stewart, University of Iowa. Written June 10th, 2008

I am not a reference librarian, but did answer one call yesterday. I responded to the University of Iowa's cry for volunteers to sandbag around its buildings along the Iowa River.

I went over to the parking lot at the School of Music and by found half of my colleagues from the University Libraries there filling sandbags. Most librarians like to squirrel old stuff away; those in special collections even get paid for it. So it was fitting that a special collections librarian and the university archivist were there shoveling sand to preserve university buildings.

When the plaintive email asking for volunteers went out from the Provost's office I pictured myself knee-deep in mud, heroically stacking 100 pound sandbags to keep the new art building from getting wet and rusting. But truth be told, we worked on solid ground, filling bags, nibbling granola bars, and drinking pop provided by the University.

I saw the one library staffer stagger by, carrying a pallet of full sandbags, and then a forklift that had broken down. My friend in Acquisitions kept up my flagging strength with the promise of a real can of possum meat when he next travels home to Georgia. Several of my fellow catalogers finished their shift and took the most direct route back to the library-swimming downstream amidst the logs, houses, and other flotsam.

Though many claim that all UI librarians live in a prescribed area on the east side of Iowa City, in fact there is no law demanding this. One librarian barely escaped with his family on the last barge out of Manville Lows.

There truly is a silver lining to every cloud. I promised to help our film librarian and her husband lay a wooden floor in their new condo, but I didn't offer to arrive by canoe. The new place is off Foster Road, and comes equipped with an emergency life-raft, but you can't carry a loaded nail-gun in an air raft. Dang!

In all seriousness, library staff have turned out in droves to sandbag everywhere from Hancher to the Iowa City Animal Shelter. The Music Library has been evacuated, and we are hoping that we won't need to sandbag the Main Library itself.

A Final Note...

Thank you to the Newsletter Committee and to the non-committee members for their contributions.

Kate Hess, Newsletter Chair