

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Saving Manuscripts Has Always Challenged Preservationists

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This month I started reading Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*. It is about a book finder, Poggio Bracciolini, who in the 1400s seeks out the ancient manuscripts transcribed in monasteries over the previous thousand years. He recovers a great number of classical Latin manuscripts, many decaying and at risk, in German, Swiss, and French monastic libraries. In particular, he locates and arranges for a transcription of Lucretius' poem *On the Nature of Things*, a literary work that inspired humanists and others during the Renaissance and certainly contributed to modern thought.

One amusing passage describes the extent to which monasteries went to protect books that had become scarce and valuable during the Dark Ages. On occasion scribes would place a curse on such manuscripts. "For him that stealeth, or borroweth, and returneth not, this book from its owner," one wrote,

let it change into a serpent in his hand and rend him. Let him be struck with palsy, and all his members blasted. Let him languish in pain crying aloud for mercy, and let there be no surcease to his agony till he sing in dissolution. Let book worms gnaw at his entrails in token of the Worm that dieth not, and when at last he goeth to his final punishment, let the flames of Hell consume him forever.

Soon after, the invention of the printing press led to much wider dissemination of books, which for five hundred years remained the main form of distribution of ideas. In the second half of the twentieth century, the development of computers portended the technological shortcut to the sharing of ideas and the publication of books—a change that defines our lives in the early twenty-first century.

Of course, saving books and other manuscripts and printed materials remains a challenge for libraries and archives today. The Forest History Society, though a small nonprofit educational and research organization, plays a significant role in such preservation for the forest and conservation community.



Bracciolini's discoveries and transcription efforts enabled the distribution of manuscripts that changed the world. Similarly, in preserving, making accessible, and helping researchers interpret forest and conservation history, the Forest History Society is aiding the evolution of public discourse about natural resources management and policy.

The Forest History Society is the national archives for, among many other organizations, the Society of American Foresters, the American Forest & Paper Association, the Association of Consulting Foresters, the American Tree Farm System, and American Forests, the oldest citizens' conservation group in the United States, with records that extend back to 1875.

With a multitude of other individual, company, and organizational collections, including the U.S. Forest Service National Headquarters History Reference Collection, the Society is the foremost location for students, teachers, journalists, and others to start their research. The breadth of these complementary collections enriches their research experience, and the Society's professional staff—librarian, archivist, historian, and forester—help them hone their ideas and dig deeper into the history and its meaning. No organization or location can provide more immediate public access and outreach to such a range of materials about the historical relationship of humans and their forests.

This is why our staff and leadership are taking the recent electrical fire at the Society's headquarters with utmost seriousness and attention. Although our archives were not affected, the extent of smoke in the administrative parts of the building has forced the Society's staff into temporary quarters for several months. With your help we will emerge from this disruption stronger than ever. Even before the fire, our board of directors had been working toward securing new facilities for the Society. The planned new building will provide expanded areas for preservation of materials, new spaces for students and researchers, and additional capacity to accommodate new technology and formats of materials that we will be asked to preserve in the future. We hope you will support this effort and partner with us in these pursuits. □