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Article: Pamela W. Darling: Library and Archives Conservation Education and the Path to Columbia University

Author: Ellen Cunningham-Kruppa

Source: Book and Paper Group Annual 41, 2022

Pages: 17-22

Editors: Kimberly Kwan, Managing Editor, and Roger S. Williams, Assistant Editor

Editorial Office: bpgannual@gmail.com

ISSN: 2835-7418

The *Book and Paper Group Annual* is published once each year by the Book and Paper Group (BPG), a specialty group of the American Institute for Conservation (AIC). It was published in print from 1982 to 2021, and transitioned to a digital publication in 2022. All issues are available online at <https://culturalheritage.org>.

Print copies of back issues are available from AIC. All correspondence concerning back issues should be addressed to:

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Washington, DC 20005
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Pamela W. Darling: Library and Archives Conservation Education and the Path to Columbia University¹

On the morning of August 31, 1981, Columbia University's School of Library Service (SLS) gathered in Butler Library's Harkness Theatre for its annual new student orientation. Associate professor Paul N. Banks (fig. 1), director of the newly established Conservation Education Programs (CEP), sat with his faculty colleagues. Three graduate students specializing in Library and Archives Conservation and seven in the Administration of Preservation Programs in Libraries and Archives sat in the audience. After the long struggle to attain this moment, Banks relished the culmination of a long-cherished dream.

Indeed Banks had been a chief actor actively working towards formalized education for library and archives conservators since the 1960s. As the 1970s progressed, the ground for realizing a formal education program became increasingly fertile. Broadly signaling the growth of conservation interests in the US, the early 1970s saw the establishment of the AIC and the National Conservation Advisory Council, promulgating collaborations and standards with the authority of high-level sanctioning bodies. With regard to research libraries, the rapid growth of the educational and cultural sectors during the Cold War years resulted in a vast research library infrastructure that required ongoing care and tending to thrive. The range of initiatives aimed at library and archives collections preservation in the US multiplied at national, regional, and consortial levels. In 1973, the six state libraries in New England cooperated to create a shared conservation facility, originally named the New England Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), to meet the paper and parchment conservation needs of all nonprofit groups in New England.² By 1976, nine accredited library schools offered a course on the topic of preservation. According to one estimate, during the 1970s organizations such as the NEDCC, library schools, libraries, professional associations,

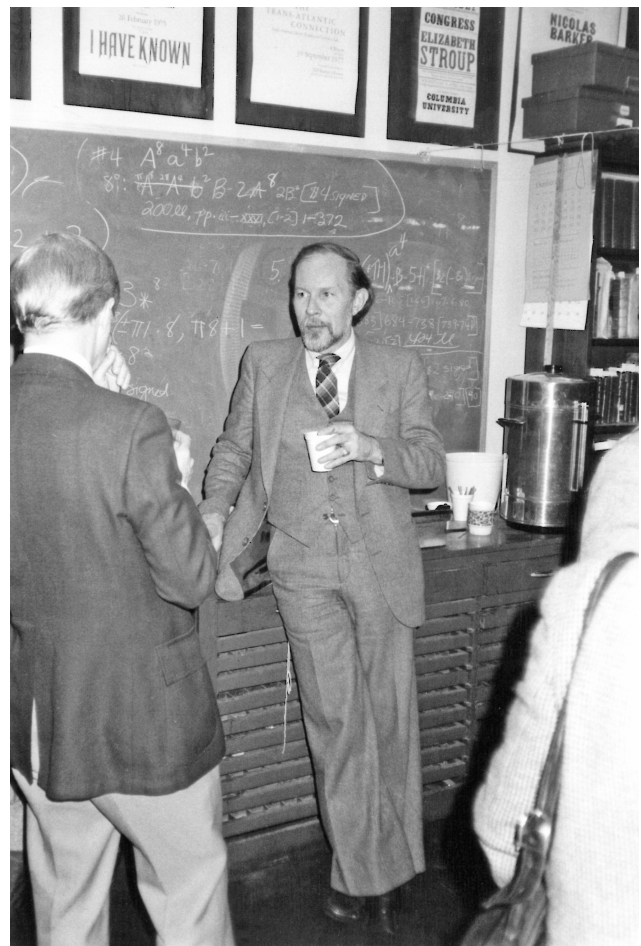


Fig. 1. Paul N. Banks in the School of Library Service Pressroom, 1981. Courtesy of Rare Book School, University of Virginia.

and the like offered roughly 100 symposia addressing preservation subjects (Darling and Ogden 1981, 19). Federal funding for preservation initiatives in research libraries also took root in the mid-1970s via the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) (Darling and Ogden 1981, 21).

¹Papers presented during the Book and Paper Group Session, AIC's 50th Annual Meeting, May 13–18, 2022, Los Angeles, California



Fig. 2. Pamela W. Darling, ca. 1970. Courtesy of Pamela W. Darling.

While Paul Banks rightly deserves credit for his visionary drive to establish for the library and archives field some form of formal education—and certainly the program at Columbia would not have been possible without his enormous drive, commitment, vision, and deep knowledge—he did not get to Columbia alone.

PAMELA W. DARLING

Pamela W. Darling (fig. 2) has been a somewhat hidden figure in the Columbia story. By all evidence, it is unlikely that the Conservation Education Programs would have been established at Columbia without her influence, her adeptness and ease in partnering with Banks, and her vision for educating and building the nascent field. If her role was critical, why is she and her work to establish the field of conservation relatively unknown? Clearly, one reason is that historical accounts so often give due to the most visible and vocal actors—in this case, Banks. Moreover, it is no surprise that men have been much more thoroughly documented because they have routinely assumed high leadership positions, from which women were historically excluded. In recent decades, however, a massive corrective to the historical record has ensued, with increased focus on what is commonly referred to “secondary figures,”

“historically underrepresented groups,” and “hidden women,” and to the hidden collections and records that have not been privileged in the telling of predominant, hegemonic narratives.

There are other reasons conservators may not know about Darling’s role in the early years of this field. One is that her career in library and archives preservation was relatively brief—from 1973 to 1986. She left the field to pursue a doctorate of theology, and her record in our field ended—now almost 40 years ago. Clearly, however, her significant role in the Columbia story is widely unknown because the records documenting her involvement are difficult to access. Columbia’s SLS records comprise 395 linear feet and span approximately 70 years. When the author contacted Columbia a decade ago, the records the author requested were largely unprocessed, located in an offsite storage facility. The contents of the records storage containers in which the documents were housed reflected the original state and order of the records as they emerged from office file cabinets. While the evidence of Darling’s influence in the Columbia CEP story was scant in corpus, it was revealing. It was from those traces of records that a fuller story began to emerge.

The Research Libraries Group (RLG) is key to understanding Darling as an actor in the early preservation administration milieu. In 1974, four of the nation’s largest research libraries (New York Public Library and Harvard, Yale, and Columbia universities), officially formed the RLG, which officially incorporated in 1975. In the effort to connect the nation’s library catalogs online, the RLG directors’ primary concern was that the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC), formed in 1967, focused too predominantly on relatively homogenous English-language college collections. The directors wanted to form their own bibliographic network, which they eventually did, naming it the Research Libraries Information Network (Rogers 1988, 42). However, these libraries also held some of the oldest collections in the nation, including substantial numbers of rare, special, and archival collections. The directors were well aware of deteriorating paper in their book stacks. While many newer research libraries had air conditioning, none of the RLG libraries did. The metropolitan and/or industrial locations of the libraries left their collections subject to high levels of ambient pollution, combined with temperature and humidity conditions that varied substantially season to season.

The RLG’s mission encompassed broad consortial interests, and it viewed preservation as key to the consortium’s ability to provide services to scholars into the future. Perhaps somewhat unwittingly, the RLG directors made a key move to professionalize a broadly defined preservation field. In a sense, they enacted an informal consortial training program by appointing card-carrying librarians to newly created line positions—preservation administrators—charged with determining what kinds of organizational structures, systems, and funding would be required to preserve their collections. While

these librarians knew little about preservation at the outset, singly and collectively they built their knowledge and set out to create multifaceted preservation operations. Moreover, the status of their respective institutions and the sanction of the RLG consortium provided them the voice of authority needed to lead the nation's research libraries into a better informed, organized, and comprehensive preservation dimension. They had clout in the research library world and, unlike conservators like Banks, they held the recognized certification of a graduate degree in library science. Through their work for RLG, their respective institutions, and in particular through the American Library Association, the new preservation managers promulgated best practices and policies for preserving research library collections. It is within this inventive and highly knowledge-needy consortium that Pamela Darling became a strong voice for educating preservation professionals.

Who was Pamela Darling? Born in 1943, Darling received her B.A. in English from Northwestern University in 1965 and soon after entered the Order of St. Helena. There she served as a novice before undertaking graduate studies in the School of Library of Service at Columbia University in 1969, receiving her MLS in 1971. After graduating, she completed a lengthy postgraduate internship at the Library of Congress. By 1973 she was heading back to New York City to marry Richard L. Darling (fig. 3), who served as dean of the School of Library Service from 1970 to 1984, and whom she met when she was a student. In June 1973 the New York Public Library (NYPL) hired Pamela Darling as Head of the Preservation Program Office. She worked alongside John Baker, who had been recently appointed Chief of the Conservation Division of the Research Libraries (Cooke 1989, 6). A year later in 1974, Columbia University Libraries, under Warren J. Haas's leadership, hired Pamela Darling as the libraries' inaugural Head of Preservation.

Darling's pursuit of education for the new field began at NYPL. Just four months into her tenure, she introduced her husband to the idea of incorporating conservation in the SLS

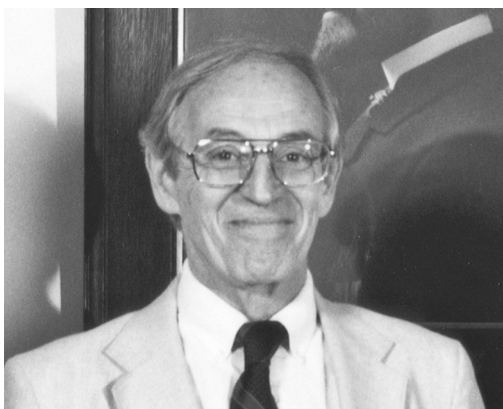


Fig. 3. Richard L. Darling, 1987. Courtesy of the Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

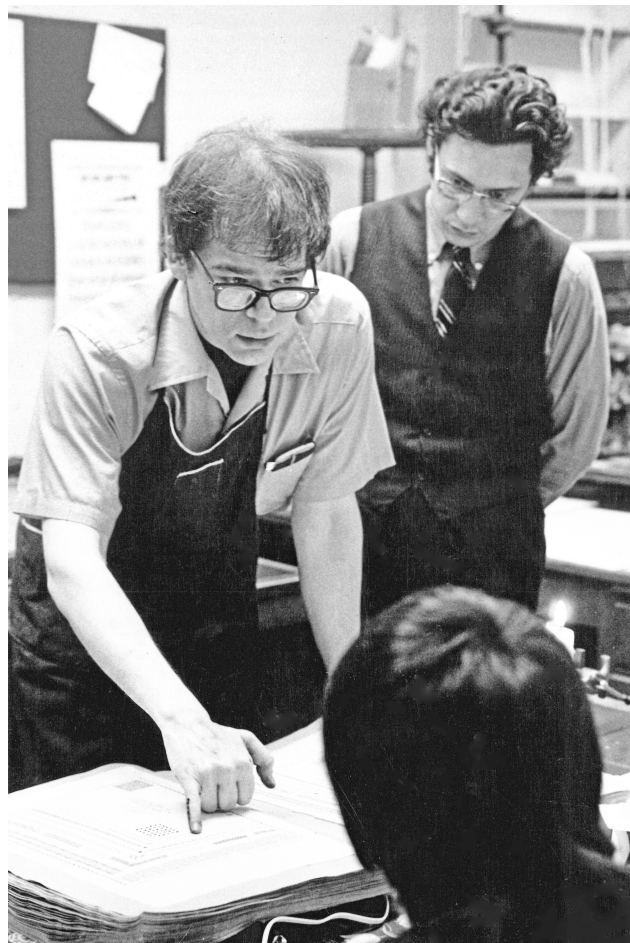


Fig. 4. Terry Belanger (left), ca. 1974. Courtesy of Rare Book School, University of Virginia.

curriculum. Drafting a memorandum headed "For the Record" and including Dean Darling as a recipient, she wrote that Terry Belanger (fig. 4), a new hire in the SLS eager to build a program in rare book librarianship, had met with her on September 17 to "explore the possibilities between NYPL and Columbia for setting up a program for training in conservation." They discussed the desirability of having an introductory course in conservation that covered both administrative and technical topics, but they had even larger ambitions: "Building on this, there might then be additional courses or workshops with a more technical orientation, in binding, repair and restoration, photoreproduction ... and so on" (Darling 1973).

Pamela Darling's ideas about educating a new field were stirred by an immediate and long-term need for conservators who possessed interdisciplinary knowledge and high-level skills—and for administrators who could build and manage comprehensive programs. The RLG institutions felt these needs all too urgently. While NYPL established a small conservation lab in 1970, it was not staffed to any extent. This

was not unusual; just that year, Yale, which had no lab, hired Jane Greenfield as its first staff conservator. As of 1975, only two of the four RLG institutions (NYPL and Columbia) had relatively broadly scoped organizational units responsible for the development and implementation of preservation programs (Research Libraries Group 1975).

Banks and Darling did not know each other in fall 1973, but they soon became working colleagues through the American Library Association's (ALA) Preservation of Library Materials Committee (PLMC). Beyond Darling's newness to the field, there are other reasons why she and Banks had not met before. They worked in similar professional realms, but ones that were not yet fully collaborating with one another. The cross-pollination of the two fields was fairly nascent in 1973. The few book conservators in the US found their professional colleagues in the new AIC, and even more prominently in the Guild of Book Workers. The new RLG preservation managers worked primarily with each other and through the ALA's PLMC. Conservators ran among conservators; the handful of preservation managers—all librarians—cohered in their mandate to build preservation programs for their individual libraries and the RLG consortium. Hence, Darling had no idea that Banks developed and taught in 1971 the first graduate library and information science–based course on conservation in the US at the University of Illinois—the exact course she envisioned in her memorandum to Dean Darling. While Pamela Darling and Belanger noted that they “could not think off-hand of anyone with the breadth of background needed to put together the kind of basic course that must be the first step in developing a thorough program,” John Baker, Darling's supervisor who was copied on her memorandum, could. He knew Banks (Darling 1973).

By 1974 in New York City, the library conservation scene was gaining momentum in no small part due to Pamela Darling's and John Baker's initiative. Invited by Baker, in May 1974 Banks spoke on the topic of the library environment to the Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO), a large consortium chartered by the New York Board of Regents in 1964 (Baker 1974). Susan Thompson (fig. 5), an assistant professor in the SLS actively interested in the topic of preservation, attended the talk and afterwards spoke with Dean Darling about “the conservation program.” She wrote to Banks: “[H]e says he would like very much to know more about what you think such a program should be and about the possibilities of funding. Needless to say, Columbia itself has no funds for expansion, but we are interested in the idea of offering training for conservators” (Thompson 1974). In response, Banks, armed with the range of data, curricula, and proposals he had prepared in recent years for the Council on Library Resources (CLR), sent a version to Thompson, suggesting that perhaps there could be coordination between NYU's Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts and Columbia (Banks 1974).



Fig. 5. Pamela W. Darling, 2014. Courtesy of Pamela W. Darling.

A year later, the RLG Preservation Committee convened for the first time in spring 1975; Edwin Williams, Harvard's longtime associate university librarian, chaired the committee, alongside member representatives John Baker, Pamela Darling, and Gay Walker (Yale University). They were a tight, focused team mandated to build preservation programs with a primary focus on coordinating the microfilming of brittle collections. Of the range of topics the committee tackled, Darling consistently articulated the need to institute formal training to build the new profession. By the time the committee met in May, she had drafted an early planning report suggesting that by spring 1976, a year later, a task force addressing joint training programs should author “a detailed long-range plan, including subjects and skills to be included, cost estimates and resource people, and a recommendation on the appropriate mechanism for implementing and sustaining an on-going training program” (Darling, May 1975). Darling commented that Columbia's SLS expressed interest in cooperating on the development of preservation education programs, suggesting that RLG might wish to invite a representative from the school to serve on the task force. By winter 1976, with no task force in sight, she penned a memo to the committee elaborating her thoughts on a potential consortial project:

The possibility of combining preservation program development in the consortium context with the development of a full-scale educational program in library conservation in cooperation with RLG's 'member library school' is especially appealing. The shortage of trained people is a critical part of the preservation problem, not only with RLG but in the profession at large. Such a program would therefore meet a tremendous need, would be attractive to foundation support, would enhance RLG's prestige, etc.” (Darling, February 1975)

While the RLG did not create a training task force, Darling, leaving no stone unturned, pursued other avenues. In a project

she and John Baker guided, METRO hired Banks in 1976 to conduct a feasibility study on the potential for establishing a cooperative conservation center for New York City's libraries. Given that Banks would be in the city in summer 1976 to undertake this study, Dean Darling hired him to teach a course for the SLS, "Preservation of Library Materials," and gave him an office in the school as his base for teaching and research.

In the METRO study, Banks outlined a training program for conservators, one he proposed would be associated with the envisioned METRO cooperative conservation center. Since there were few conservators in the country educated to handle the kinds of treatments libraries might send to the center, Banks suggested, expediently, that a METRO conservation operation liaise with a library and information science program. While he was unclear on exactly how such an educational undertaking might work, he suggested "elements in the city" that might, together, comprise a program, including "the history of the book and descriptive bibliography courses at the Columbia University Library School, the general conservation and materials science knowledge available at NYU's IFA-CC...." (Banks 1976, 5). As Banks stated in his report, outside of Washington, DC, New York City was the most logical place for a conservation center given its large aggregation of rich research library collections (Banks 1976, 2). Combined with forthcoming NCAC reports outlining the educational needs of library and archives conservators, the METRO report documented that New York City provided fertile grounds for such an educational initiative.

Pamela Darling, excited by Banks' ideas, wrote to Richard Darling in November 1976: "Dreadful money matters aside, there could be real benefit to SLS from this." Referring to "our" programs, she proposed a significant role for Columbia's SLS:

I would dearly love to have the consultative/educational phase of this plan located here, combining the resources of the Libraries and the Library School. If Paul Banks were director (I have the distinct impression he'd like to be) we would have a tremendous resource and support for accelerating the development of our own programs.

If METRO decided to go ahead, I hope we might be in a position to make an early offer to be the host institution.

If METRO decides against it, we should pursue through RLG. (Darling 1976)

Her desires clear, Pamela Darling's ideas and passion for the topic found resonance with Dean Darling.

In 1977, the SLS solidly staked its interests in preservation education. On the heels of the METRO study, Susan Thompson and the Darlings wrote a federal grant to hold a four-week preservation institute in the SLS. Funded by the U.S. Office of Education under Title IIB of the Higher Education Act,

the institute was designed to "prepare experienced librarians to plan, organize, and administer comprehensive preservation programs in the libraries in which they are employed" (School of Library Service, Columbia University 1977). The institute took place in the SLS from July 10 to August 4, 1978, and 12 mid-career librarians from across the US attended (Patterson 1979, 3).³ Directed by Thompson, and with Banks and Pamela Darling as the primary instructors, the four-week course, in effect, substantiated intellectual links between the conservation field, library preservation administration, and the LIS discipline, while also demonstrating the SLS's interest in and ability to educate in this new intellectual arena. Moreover, it brought New York City-based preservation professionals together as instructors, demonstrating not only the wealth of resources in the SLS, New York City, and a train ride away, but also their interest in working together in a new undertaking.

Convinced of a possible role for conservation and preservation education in the SLS and armed with enough documentation to assert the SLS's claim on the new specializations, one month after the workshop concluded Dean Darling submitted a successful planning grant proposal to the NEH to conduct a study for the establishment of training programs in the SLS for conservators and preservation administrators (School of Library Service, Columbia University 1978). Banks, working with Pamela Darling and SLS colleagues, designed a new curriculum for educating library and archives conservators and PAs. With primary funding from the NEH and the Mellon Foundation, the SLS unfurled the dual-track Conservation Education Programs and courses began in fall 1981. Darling taught the preservation administration course in the new curriculum from 1982 until 1986.

Pamela Darling left Columbia in 1980 to assume a two-year position at the Association of Research Libraries as Preservation Specialist, where she and Duane Webster designed the Preservation Planning Program to aid US research libraries in developing preservation programs. From 1982 to 1985 she was Special Consultant to the National Preservation Program of the Library of Congress. During the last year of her tenure at LC, she was Consultant to the New York State Library's Conservation and Preservation Program (fig. 5).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cathleen A. Baker, editor of *The Legacy Press*, published the author's book (*Mooring a Field: Paul N. Banks and the Education of Library and Archives Conservation*, 2019), which prompted some of the additional research in this paper (*Mooring a Field: Paul N. Banks and the Education of Library and Archives Conservators*, published in 2019). The now numerous monographs recounting the history of the book and paper conservation specialization and related subjects are due to Cathy's boundless energy and vision. As always, thank you to Preservation and Conservation Division colleagues at the

Harry Ransom Center. Special thanks to Dr. Stephen Enniss, director of the Ransom Center, for his encouragement and support of professional development and engagement.

NOTES

1. This article includes revised portions of published work in Cunningham-Kruppa, Ellen. 2019. *Mooring a Field: Paul N. Banks and the Education of Library and Archives Conservators*. Ann Arbor, MI: The Legacy Press.
2. The *New England* Document Conservation Center was incorporated as the *Northeast* Document Conservation Center in 1980.
3. Student attendees were: Hilda Bohem, University of California, Los Angeles; Helen Slotkin, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Sandra Turner, Denver Public Library; Paul Koda, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Peter Hanff, University of California, Berkeley; Virginia Adams, Providence Public Library; Carolyn Harris, University of Texas at Austin; Pearl Berger, YIVO Institute; Robert Patterson, University of Wyoming; Karen Esper, Case Western Reserve University; Robert Schnare, U.S. Military Academy; and, Sue White, Princeton University.

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

ELLEN CUNNINGHAM-KRUPPA

Associate Director for Preservation and Conservation
Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin
Austin, TX
eckruppa@utexas.edu