

# The Primary Source

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Volume 28 | Issue 1

Article 1

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2009

## Editor's Note

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### Recommended Citation

Price, Peggy (2009) "Editor's Note," *The Primary Source*: Vol. 28: Iss. 1, Article 1.

DOI: 10.18785/ps.2801.01

Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/theprimarysource/vol28/iss1/1>

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## Editor's Note

I chose to devote an issue of *Primary Source* to constructing archival facilities after attending the symposium *From Gray Areas to Green Areas: Developing Sustainable Practices in Preservation Environments*. Speakers from the Getty Conservation Institute, the Image Permanence Institute, Texas' Director of the State Energy Conservation Office and others introduced me to foreign terminology like radiant barrier roofs and thermal continuity. ASHRAE, HVAC, WOFI, and of course LEED made repeat appearances in my notebook. I now know three different types of energy-efficient humidification methods: compressed air atomizer, ultrasonic humidifiers, and high pressure cold water fogging. Architects, engineers, conservators, and cultural resource managers presented talks on the particular challenges historic buildings and collections pose to green design and offered useful solutions for creating sustainable environments for heritage collections. For example, efficient use of natural light saves on electricity, but UV rays damage art and other works on paper. Architects and engineers must devise clever deflection systems to simultaneously bring in sunlight and prevent damage to documents and paintings.

The very narrow temperature and humidity parameters recommended by our profession for the ideal storage environment raise energy costs and require a lot more of it. I learned that buildings use two thirds of the country's electricity and that one standard light bulb equals a quarter ton of coal. What sorts of compromises should we make in order to protect both our collections and the environment? For one thing, perhaps the temperature and humidity requirements are too strict. As one speaker mentioned, if these limits were very true we would have few historical artifacts left in existence. Perhaps we could be more flexible? But for another, we should take steps in the building design phase to combat high energy usage. I will never see a reason not to have an overhang, after this conference, and shaded windows are a must.

While much of the terminology was scientific and the acronyms new, few professionals spend as much time considering the physical structure and ambient environment of the buildings in which they work as those of us dealing with special collections. We worry over a dead roach or a bit of cookie in the hall. Rays of sunlight distress us, a whiff of mold creates, quite simply, panic, and we wonder how the collections will make it through another August like a farmer with a crop. Do we learn this in school? Naturally I found the subject matter intriguing in its purity of focus. Let's talk about how we build our buildings, how we store our things, and how we might do a better job of saving energy in the process. I had a wonderful time.

For all the talk of the best humidification and LEED levels etc. one wonders how we as archivists and librarians and curators, often not the folks in charge of the whole operation, manage to ensure that architects and designers and contractors follow even the basic principles of archival facility construction. Who will insist that a sprinkler system is not the way to go or that the storage areas should not have any windows? I requested papers from those who have been through a renovation or new building construction to find out.

Please enjoy -

Peggy Price  
Editor