

# Brittle: Replacing embrittled titles cooperatively

By Brian J. Baird

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## *A cost-cutting preservation effort at the University of Kansas*

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**M**ost condition surveys in research libraries show that a significant percentage (usually about 25%) of a library's volumes have embrittled paper. For these volumes there are usually three treatment options available: reformatting; withdrawal from the collection; or placing the item in an enclosure to provide some additional support and protection. Each of these treatment options are legitimate.

In some cases, withdrawing the volume is the right decision. Other volumes must be kept regardless of their condition because they hold artifactual value. For the majority of cases what is important about the embrittled volume is the information it contains. For materials in this category reformatting is often the best answer.

How a text is reformatted should be a decision based on the access and storage needs of the item. Some types of publications amend themselves well to microfilm such as newspapers and serials. In these cases, the microformat often increases accessibility to the information. Other texts, such as monographic publications, are more accessible if they are reformatted back into book form by producing a preservation quality photocopy. This allows the text to be used in a form that users are comfortable with.

To date, most preservation quality photocopying replacement efforts to secure shelf copies of heavily used works have been conducted individually by libraries. By establishing a cooperative effort for preservation photocopying, research libraries can work together to:

- lower the cost of obtaining preservation quality photocopy replacements by reducing

both the cost of the service and staff time spent processing materials for photocopying;

- ensure that libraries obtain high-quality photocopy replacements by working cooperatively to identify the best possible original volume from which to copy.

For this reason, the University of Kansas Libraries and BookLab, Inc. established the Brittle program in the spring of 1995.

### **How Brittle works**

Brittle is a cooperative effort among several research libraries to obtain less expensive preservation quality photocopy replacements for their embrittled titles. The University of Kansas Libraries have established a moderated electronic listserv named Brittle to which interested libraries are invited to subscribe. The listserv acts as a running list to which libraries can post titles that they are interested in having photocopied. In addition to bibliographic information, the list also provides the names of libraries that want a preservation copy of each title, the estimated cost of obtaining a copy of the title (based on the number of copies being requested), and the date when the title will be removed from the list, as seen in this example:

Dall, Caroline Wells Healey. WOMAN'S RIGHTS UNDER THE LAW: IN THREE LECTURES, DELIVERED IN BOSTON, JANUARY, 1861. Boston: Walker, Wise and Company, 1861. xix, 164 pages.

CALL NO. HQ1239 .D2

Will be listed until 8/30/96

Libraries wanting a copy: K KU, WEL, VVC  
Estimated cost per copy based on the number of libraries wanting a copy: \$39.00 (plus shipping and handling).

Estimated cost savings: \$4.00

NOTE: KU's copy of this title is badly damaged. Therefore, if your library is interested

in obtaining a copy of this title, please indicate if your volume can be sent to BookLab for copying.

Titles remain on the list for one month. Electronic updates of the list are sent out weekly showing new titles added, libraries requesting copies, and changes in price per copy.

After a title has been on the list for one month it is sent to BookLab for preservation quality photocopying. If more than one library wants a copy of a title, the library that placed the title on the list sends the volume to Brian Baird, at the University of Kansas, where it is processed as part of a Brittle shipment. Having materials from Brittle sent to BookLab from a central location reduces the chance of error and helps the process run smoothly, which ultimately reduces costs. In addition to the normal processing procedures of erasing marks, mending tears, and checking for missing text, a special flag is prepared by University of Kansas staff telling BookLab which libraries want a copy of the title and where to return the original.

Generally, within six to eight weeks after a title has been removed from Brittle, BookLab will send a replacement copy and an invoice to each library that has requested a copy of the title. BookLab will send the original volume, a replacement copy, and an invoice to the library that owns the volume sent for copying.

### **Price benefits of participation**

One of the primary benefits of participating in Brittle are the savings that libraries receive in obtaining preservation quality photocopy replacements of their embrittled materials. BookLab offers the following discounts for Brittle customers:

- 10% discount off the catalog price for each duplicate replacement copy ordered;
- the library owning the original volume used for making the replacement photocopy will receive an additional 10% off the price of its replacement copy for each extra copy ordered up to a 50% discount. This is an incentive for libraries to place titles on the Brittle listserv and to encourage others to purchase copies of those titles.

### **Other benefits from participation**

Since July 1995, more than 130 volumes have been ordered from Brittle by 20 university libraries from around the country at a combined savings in photocopying costs of more than

\$870. To date, more than 50 libraries subscribe to Brittle with additional libraries joining almost weekly. Because of the number of participating libraries, the time-consuming task of conducting bibliographic searching of embrittled titles is shared. If the University of Kansas searches a title and determines that there are no reprints available, and posts that title to the list, then other participating libraries simply determine if they hold a copy of the title and then decide if they wish to replace it.

Another benefit of this service is that many embrittled titles of heavily used works suffer from other problems, such as lost or damaged text, mutilation, or underlining, which make it difficult to produce a clean photocopy replacement. Therefore, the members of Brittle work together to identify the best original copy possible, or piece together a complete copy of the work to send to BookLab.

One title that was placed on Brittle demonstrates how helpful this cooperative effort can be. One university placed two volumes of a European scientific journal on the list to be copied. These volumes were out of print, but still covered by copyright, so the library obtained a letter from the publisher granting permission to photocopy the volumes. Another institution was interested in obtaining a copy of the two volumes, but heard through a distributor that reprints were available. The effort of investigating this lead was divided by the two institutions and, in the end, two copies of the volumes were ordered from BookLab with the second institution providing the originals since theirs were in better condition.

These two institutions worked closely together, via electronic mail, to share information, split the work of the very challenging bibliographic searching responsibilities, and then determine which institution had the best originals from which to make a copy. This one example demonstrates the virtues of Brittle and the natural cooperative disposition that exists in the field of preservation that simply needs a medium through which to manifest itself.

### **How to subscribe and participate**

Participation in Brittle is easy. Subscribe to the Brittle listserv by sending an e-mail message to the address [listserv@ukanvm.cc.ukans.edu](mailto:listserv@ukanvm.cc.ukans.edu). Leave the name and subject lines blank. Then send the following message: `subscribe brittle <your full name>`.

*(Brittle cont. on page 95)*

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Also relatively new is the **Stardust Theatre** (also at 2416 Music Valley Drive) where Boots Randolph ("Mr. Yakkety Sax") and Danny Davis & the Nashville Brass perform. These versatile and veteran entertainers perform country, jazz, big band, and pop music.

### **Classical**

For classical music lovers, three scheduled performances will occur during the time that conference visitors are in Nashville.

The Nashville Symphony, as part of its Pops Series, performs with guest artist Burt Bacharach in Jackson Hall of the **Tennessee Performing Arts Center** in 8:00 p.m. concerts on April 11 and 12. For ticket information contact Ticketmaster at (615) 255-9600.

The **Ryman Auditorium** (116 Fifth Ave. No.), as part of its Classical Concert Series, fea-



**The Nashville Symphony.**

tures the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra on Friday evening, April 11. Ticket information can be obtained by calling (615) 889-6611.

On Saturday, April 12, at 8:00 p.m. the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra performs at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center's Polk Theater. For ticket information call Ticketmaster at (615) 255-9600.

### **And still more**

There are many more clubs, restaurants, bars, and concert venues offering visitors a rich musical offering. Those listed here are well-known and/or

favorite places and offer only a starting point for the music lover. The Local Arrangements Committee hopes visitors to the ACRL National Conference in April will check out the Nashville music scene and experience first-hand some of what Music City has to offer. ■

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*(Brittle cont. from page 84)*

To leave Brittle, send an e-mail message to the address [listserv@ukanvm.cc.ukans.edu](mailto:listserv@ukanvm.cc.ukans.edu). Leave the name and subject lines blank. Then send the following message: signoff brittle.

The owner and editor of the listserv is Brian Baird. If problems are experienced with the list, notify him at [bried@ukanvm.cc.ukans.edu](mailto:bried@ukanvm.cc.ukans.edu).

To submit titles to the list, to sign up for a copy of a title, or to make comments, send messages to: [brittle@ukanvm.cc.ukans.edu](mailto:brittle@ukanvm.cc.ukans.edu).

### **The future for Brittle**

In the future, as more libraries become interested in the services of Brittle, subject specific lists can be developed. One example of how this might work is SlavCopy, a listserv established at the University of Kansas Libraries for Slavic materials. Because many Slavic materials are printed on extremely acidic paper, a very high percentage of a research library's Slavic collection is at risk. In addition to the physical problems, Slavic materials can be challenging because of nonroman characters and/or unfamiliar subject areas. SlavCopy allows Slavic librarians to work cooperatively to preserve materials in their subject specialty.

There are also plans, when the lists of titles on Brittle become longer, to create a Brittle World Wide Web homepage so the databases can be searched and links between subject specific lists can easily be made.

Brittle is a dynamic service that will constantly try to progress and adapt to meet the needs of participating libraries. Brittle's primary function is to provide participating libraries with preservation quality photocopy replacements of heavily used embrittled materials at significant savings of both staff time and copying costs. These savings are realized through cooperation.

### **Additional information**

For more information about Brittle please contact: Brian J. Baird, Preservation Librarian, 502 Watson Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-2800; (913) 864-3568; fax: (913) 864-5311; [bbaird@ukanv.edu](mailto:bbaird@ukanv.edu). For more information about BookLab please contact: Sabina Daly, Marketing/Customer Service, BookLab, Inc., 1606 Headway Circle, Suite 100, Austin, TX 78754; (800) 224-1794; (512) 837-0479; fax: (512) 837-9794. ■