

Excerpts from Larry Reger's oral history interview conducted by Anne Kingery-Schwartz on March 30, 2012

[NCAC] I went to the National Endowment for the Arts in the spring of 1970 and I stayed there until the fall of 1978, and I had several positions. The Arts Endowment Chairman at that point was Nancy Hanks. In 1972, Nancy launched a major effort in the Museum Program to support conservation and renovation projects enabling museums to preserve and care for their collections more effectively. This comes from a report that the Arts Endowment did and reminded me of the date, and that program was actually announced at a National Council on the Arts meeting in Winterthur. And in developing that effort Nancy felt very strongly about conservation and the principle parts of that program were to support conservation projects, specifically; to support and encourage regional centers and to support; and encourage training of conservators... We produced a report called *Museums for a New Century*, and that was issued in 1984. And as a result of that report, and we also began a lobbying effort, actually even before that, but it was clear that conservation was very, very important. And so we used that as a way of responding to requests from Congress for information. We had friends on Capitol Hill who would ask us for information, which is distinct from lobbying when you go up and you asked to be seen. We then prepared at the American Association of Museums a pamphlet, and this was also done in 1984. It's called "Caring for Collections: Strategies for Conservation, Maintenance and Documentation." And I think it's fair to say that this was the first time that the term "caring for collections" was popularly used because it was a report that was widely circulated... And this report, *Caring for your Collections* had a really, I think, profound effect on what my next position, which was Heritage Preservation. ... And it was a daunting challenge whenever asked what I did, if I said I was the President of the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property, number one, I get a cocktail party or a reception or whatever, the name was too long and no one really understood what cultural property was...

[NIC NAME] I was hoping that we could change the name of the organization to something shorter and hopefully somewhat more descriptive. I was invited to the opening of the Degenerate Art Show at the Smithsonian. And the Degenerate Art Show was the art that the Nazi's called degenerate.. A friend of mine who runs his family foundation had provided major support for this, and they were probably no more than 50 people at the dinner before going to see the exhibit. And so I sat down at the table and the chair next to me was empty, and the people, we were beginning to eat our salad, and this woman walked in, and she sat down and you could tell that she was very extroverted. She said "What do you do?" and I said "I'm the president of the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property." And her eyes widened and she looked at me kind of astonished and she said "You sound like you run an agency from one of those old Eastern-bought countries of the Soviet Union," [Laughter] and so, I'm not always good on the uptake, but this time I was somewhat—I thought I was reasonably good. And I retorted that, "My mother always taught me if I was gonna criticize I should have a constructive alternative or admit that I didn't." And with that she went back on her chair, laughed out loud, people sort of turned around, looked to see what was going on, came back down, sort of right in my face and said "I guess I don't have a better alternative, we're going to do fine." Well, it turned out not long thereafter she became Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. So, I use that as a way of trying to illustrate to people why I felt we needed to change the name. The changing of the name, we had these boards were we had all these different words, and we had a board meeting and you could move the words around. And it was very difficult trying to find a name but we finally came up with Heritage Preservation. So now we're not infrequently confused with the Heritage Foundation.

[CAROLYN ROSE] When I arrived at Heritage Preservation, Carolyn Rose was the chairman.. Anyway, Carolyn, was just an absolutely wonderful person and vision and can-do. She was the one to talk about the possibility of my being associated in some way with NIC. .. We finally arranged to meet, and so I agreed to come to NIC. At that point, the offices were located at the Arts and Industries Building in the Smithsonian in two basically pretty large closets, but they really were closets. There was seating for, in my recollection is, four people, two in one office, two in another, very tight quarters, and, like you, no windows. [Laughter] So you understand that. There were people who were interested on the Hill in conservation, and so they asked—they knew that I was in this new position and they wanted to know what I was doing and I told them and they suggested that we testify, which is always good. Carolyn was again a visionary because I would've been much more conservative about what we might present, but anyway we drafted some testimony, which I will put here, which was given on March 22, 1989. Also we prepared something called "Charting a National Agenda." It was the first effort to begin to try to not quantify, but in a qualitative manner, to say what—for example, it's broken down by historic preservation, anthropology, archives and libraries, fine arts, history and natural sciences. And then across the top is public awareness, professional information, professional training, research, preventive care, and treatment... And needless to say this was something that Carolyn, we worked with our board and we talked to other people, but it conveyed a sense of where we thought things were in a general, broad way.

The testimony presented on March 22, 1989 was directed at the National Endowment for the Humanities, which, at that point, had a preservation and access program, but that program did very little with three-dimensional objects. It was mainly library archiving. And the chairman of the committee who had oversight for appropriations for NEH was Sydney Yates, and he was very interested in conservation. He was very interested in Humanities. He was very interested in the Arts Endowment, and then when the Institute of Museum and Library Services got started. Anyway, we presented this testimony and lo and behold, the congress gave the Humanities Endowment a substantial amount of money...So we proposed in that testimony something called the National Heritage Preservation Program, and it was to support collections care training programs distinct from training of conservators and to support training of conservators, as well as, providing major support to museums that had collections of material culture, that was the emphasis. And I'm proud to say that Congress adopted that.

One of the things about this testimony that was so amazing was that the people who testified were Tom Nicholson, who was director of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, Ray Thompson, director of the Arizona State Museum and Peter Fetchko, Director of the Peabody Museum in Salem, Mass. And Tom was in our working group putting this together. We brought together a working group and had a meeting at a Smithsonian Conference Room, and the actual beginning of this idea was it was for anthropological collections, and Tom said, "You know, this really needs to be broader, and we should make it for collections of material culture." And it was exactly the right thing to do. He said "One, collections of material culture are in great need. And two, you frankly expand your political base, both being very important." Tom brought, and I have the actual testimony should somebody want to read it. Tom brought a Buddha head with a bronze—with semiprecious stones and a, you know, a conservation box and he also brought another conservation box which was probably, is that about two, three feet? Yeah, two feet by about one, one and a half feet and only about four inches high. And so he puts it down, and the committee room, people were not sitting on a dais—it's a big table, quite wide, and so he had those sitting next to him. He unveils the Buddha head with these semiprecious stones and everybody oohs and aahs and says, "This is a very important piece and it has conservation problems,

Bronze disease, etc. However, what I'm going to show you next is infinitely more important and valuable." And so he takes this foot-and-a-half by foot box and places it so that, at that point, there are only two members of Congress, which was not unusual by the way, but they were the two most important members of Congress, the chairman and then the ranking Republican, they had to actually get up to look at it, and it was a textile from an extinct South American civilization, and he said, "Among our collections, we have these textiles, and this is the only thing we know about these civilizations." And Mr. Yates, the chairman then says that they have at their home a pre-Columbian textile with a bird motif, the textile that Tom brought had a bird motif, and so they had this instant kind of like what is the bird motif and these civilizations, you know, and it was that kind of serendipity, you never know what's going to happen. I mean, sometimes things can blow up if it doesn't work. In this case, it worked very well. That really, I think it's fair to say, got the attention of key members of Congress.

[MUSEUM ASSESSMENT PROGRAM] The report "Museums for a New Century" and the "Caring for Collections Report" that I've referred to before really generated a rationale for a specific thrust, if you will, for the IMS, Institute of Museum Services. And that was important because we wanted the overall appropriation to increase, but Congress likes to have their own thing. So, we presented testimony saying that conservation was very important, and that we needed to have some money for conservation, but at the same time the overall appropriation needed to be increased... so we get money for conservation at IMS based on our testimony and based on those books. ...So that started also something called The Museum Assessment Program, well this isn't—well I'm still at the American Association of Museums, and I mentioned the Museum Assessment Program which is more popularly known as MAP because then it has impact on when I come to Heritage Preservation/NIC.

[HP MEMBERSHIP] Heritage Preservation is not an association in the usual way that people define an association, in the sense that associations usually represent a group of people. We have about 200 members. Our membership income, at least for the last 20 of the 24 years, has never been much more than 5% to 3% of our income, but that's not what's really important. What's really important is that virtually everything we do is available to anyone, so it's not as if we are having an annual meeting that where people are, you know, conveying information. Our annual meetings are frankly more about bringing people in from the outside, especially agencies and on Capitol Hill, and doing some educating. Our members care about us because they—many of them are large museums, libraries and archives with very sophisticated people in preservation and conservation. They know that our goal is to reach out to medium-sized and smaller places, and we use our members, who have very sophisticated knowledge and experience, and work with them as to how we can design, whether it's publications, now it webinars, it used to be some workshops.

[CAP] We felt that there needed to be training. Initially our focus was on training for, again, small and medium-sized places that couldn't afford and probably didn't need a full-time conservator. But they needed training, and I use the term nurses. So they know when to call in the doctor. So we did five curricula. They're called "Training for Collections Care and Maintenance." I suggested the curriculum ... Several programs started as a result of that. The two that were the most robust were one that took place at Winterthur in the summer, and the other [at the Campbell Center for Historic Preservation Studies] in Mount Carroll, Illinois. . Conservators were brought in to do the training. So we focused on that. Then, actually, one other major study we did was "Preserving Natural Science Collections:

Chronicle of Our Environmental Heritage,” which I thought was a very good title, since I came up with it. Then we got support from the History of Museum and Library Services, Institute of Museum Services still at that point, beginning in 1990 for our Conservation Assessment Program or CAP, which when I describe CAP to people, it’s like going for your yearly physical. It looks at the entire institution, it’s not looking at specific collections but the overall. And if the collections are in a historic building, which is defined as 50 years or older, you can get an architectural assessment. We send out, twice a year, we call it CAP-abilities, a newsletter, to participants to try to say—keep them interested and, you know, people change and boards change and we’re now doing what’s called re-CAP after seven years. If you meet certain criteria you can do a second CAP. Sometimes nobody, virtually no one that was there when the original CAP was done is there, especially the staff. We have a lot of CAP reports stored off-site and not infrequently we have to reproduce those because they’d only have a copy. One of the really critical things in my mind, significant, rather than critical, is that the Institute of Museum and Library Services has continued to fund this since 1990.

When I came to Heritage Preservation there were two of us, and I was working with one of the very early Apple Computers and did a budget, and one of the board members discovered it was off \$41 and some cents or some figure and they said they could never trust another budget. Another board member declared that, this person declared that their goal was to see that we were eliminated. But that changed very rapidly. Virtually every project or program that we have done has come out of board and member thinking.

[CARING FOR YOUR FAMILY TREASURES]Jane Long ... was working on the first book for individuals that I know of [about] what individuals could do to take care of their collections. I’m very proud of this book because if you look at the people who wrote chapters, these are still people who are unbelievably respected in the field, I mean, well, Joyce Hill Stoner is one of them, you know, Brian Considine, Meg Craft, who is currently the president of the AIC, Terry Drayman-Weisser, Peggy Ellis. A gentleman who was on the Reagan and first President Bush President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, he became interested in conservation and so, his name is Arthur Shultz. He retired as the CEO of Foote, Cone & Belding, a large public relations firm in Chicago. For 32 years his principal, personal client was Hallmark Cards. Art said that, as a member of the committee, they got interested in conservation because of Art and he held two forums, one in Chicago, one in Los Angeles. And he said, “Conservation is the most undersold product I’ve ever run into in my life,” so after he was off the committee we asked him to be on our board, and he came to the meetings. But, they were not the most exiting discussions that he’d ever sat through. So after one of the early meetings, he walked up to me and he said, “I want you to tell me just one thing you want done that you think I can be helpful with, and let’s see if we can get that done.” So I sort of panicked, and I said, “There’s never been a book for individuals and what they can do to take care of their collections.” So he said “That’s a great idea. We’re going to get that done,” because he happened to know Franklin Murphy, who was head of the Times and Mirror Corporation, which owned Abrams Publishing... Bill Leisher at that point was Chair and I’m trying to think who else. Anyway, Art walked over to Bill, and he said, “There’s never been a book done for individuals. We’re going to get this done. You do the chapter on paintings.” And I think, was Debbie on the board at that point, Debbie Hess Norris? Anyway, somebody else—who did textiles? Anyway, there were other board members there who wrote chapters, and “You’re going do the chapter on this. You’re going to do the chapter on that.” We didn’t fill all the chapters but we got some of them. My recollection is that then there was this little huddle of people, and I forgot who came over to Art and said, “That’s such a great idea. However...” and Art says “Don’t you worry about that...” He says, “You write it, I’ll get it done. We’re going to do this.” And so Art and I went up to see Paul Gottlieb, he said,

“This is a fantastic idea. We’re going to publish this book for you. You get it done!” ...And subsequently we did “Caring for Your Family Treasures,” a much more condensed book.

[Heritage Emergency National Task Force] There were two major disasters, and I hope she mentioned it, the Loma Prieta earthquake and the Midwest floods and we found ourselves with a very small staff and our board, and we, the staff felt we should do something to be helpful. And we’re running around and basically by the next board meeting we really realized we haven’t done anything else except trying to help respond to these incredible emergencies. Other associations were doing the same thing. AAM, ALA, AIC, Association of State and Local History, and the Getty by the way... So we had a, what we call The Summit, and this was actually in 1994, and the Getty provided very significant funding for that. Here in Washington it was at the American Institute of Architects Conference Room ... but the number three person at FEMA was very much interested in culture and collections. He actually got to know Barbara Roberts and Jane Sienna, who, Barbara, I think, at that point, wasn’t working for Getty, or may have been working for Getty and Jane Sienna who was definitely working for Getty. There was an emergency group meeting in Colorado in the summer and then there was the... And so Barbara and Jane met Richard Krim and became friends. And so James LeWitt at that point, was the director of FEMA, and the Deputy Director, who’s name I have to insert, happened to be Jane Sienna’s cousin. He had been the Director of the Tennessee State Emergency Manager Agency and James LeWitt had been Director of the Arkansas. So, we got them to come and there was some question about the regulations. What, if any, kind of support could there be for recovery of damaged collections? And so Mr. LeWitt came, and they’d cleared up the regulations, and so he announced that, “It’s always good you come, we have good news, you know, you’ve got a grant, you’ve got this.” But then he says to people, “You can help me,” and I swear people like turned around and sort of looked to each other, “How in the hell can we help FEMA?” And basically he said, “After people have their safety, their health, shelter, clothing, the next thing they turn to are things they care about. Whether it’s a Bible or Koran, a wedding dress, a teddy bear, obviously photographs because it helps them feel that there’s still something of them that they can hang on to, the memories, the things they cherish.” So we Heritage Emergency National Task Force. Jane founded it, was the director of it and as part of that we also did quite a number of programs in support of getting grants, in support of the overall efforts of the task force. But FEMA has always been a co-sponsor, and I think, if it’s not unique, I can guarantee you they do not officially co-sponsor during many things like this Caring for Collections has two principal components. One is the slow and relentless, and the other is the swift and catastrophic. The slow and relentless is a huge, and obviously lots of people working on it, but the swift and catastrophic—the slow and relentless tends to be collecting institution by collecting institution, they should work together more for regional, like storage facilities, whatever. But the swift and catastrophic is very often something that will just sweep across the entire geographic area and can affect a library or museum, archive all at once. So we have been the secretariat of it. The members, it’s all volunteer, it’s not incorporated. Just to run through a couple of programs on that, the Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel, we gave more than 47,000 away when NEH sponsored it, gave us the grant. We’ve now sold almost 50,000; it’s like ubiquitous. It’s been translated into six languages and reproduced. It’s really quite amazing. The Field Guide to Emergency Response, which has this great DVD, and it’s as important for training as emergency response. It’s a great training tool to show people.

[ALLIANCE FOR RESPONSE] One of the really brilliant things is what we call Alliance for Response. Jane Long was writing a funder and giving a variety of ideas and this was not like the first on her list, but the whole idea is to get the cultural community to get to know emergency managers and first

responders because they're the people who have expertise and can come in and help you do a risk assessment. They're the people who are going to be on-site. They're the people who are writing the regulations about what it is that, in case of emergency, will get a priority. Slowly Alliance for Response, which are forming these metropolitan and state networks and hopefully regional, at some point. I think we've got 17 of them now. Slowly those are growing.

[SAVE OUTDOOR SCULPTURE] Early on, Arthur Beale, who preceded Carolyn Rose, did a major study on acid rain and how it affected, especially bronze sculpture. The Smithsonian Museum of American Art was in the process of developing, as part of its database of outdoor sculpture, and so we joined forces with them, and neither of us had any money. I call them the orphans of the cultural heritage world because they're not in or owned by an institution, organization, agency whose principal or one of their principal missions is preservation and conservation. They're owned by cities; they're owned by churches; they're owned by schools; they're owned by corporations. As part of Save Outdoor Sculpture, we did not include any outdoor sculpture in a collecting institution, museum, library, or archive. That was it. We worked with the Smithsonian to try to get those in the database. What we did was with Save Outdoor Sculpture was to, again, we were asked by Congress, what is a pressing need? And so we presented testimony, and significant funds were appropriated to the Smithsonian American Art Museum to do this program. I think it's fair to say, as we do, that it is the largest volunteer cultural heritage project ever conducted. Volunteers were trained in major metropolitan areas and states, and then the rest [were] covered by state-wide programs, to go out and identify outdoor sculpture, and there was an assessment of condition and an assessment of who did it, the history of it. There was an International Bronze meeting in Baltimore and so Arthur Beale asked me to go the last day and we had no money, we had a name, no money and asked me to say something about it. And so I get up and I'm, you know, very jaunty about it and I'm saying, "This is really important because this is part of our cultural heritage that no one really pays attention to in a sort of uniform way." About a week or so later, Arthur calls me and says, "I've got a couple of calls and people are really concerned about this. You can have volunteers out there, and, you know, they can't do a condition assessment." We knew that, but they can do something, vis-a-vis condition. Working with the best people in the field we can make it as simple as possible but it will give some indication. So there was a subsequent meeting, and I just did a rough cost of what it would cost to have conservators do this. I think it was like \$45 million or something. People didn't think we should do it. I said, "Look, I've got a deal for you. We don't have any money, and if we get money, even so within 90 days of getting money anybody steps up and says we'll do this project, I'll give it to you. I'll ask the board that we just give it away." I said, "There's so many wonderful ideas out there that need to be done. We'll give it to you." There are 32,000 entries at the Smithsonian-American database that people use. Conservators have gotten a lot of work.

[RESCUE PUBLIC MURALS] Another program, which is somewhat different but again in the same category, Rescue Public Murals, that's a more nuanced program because murals are much more delicate, both because they're on walls that very often are just torn down, But the program has two prongs and we've not raised major funding for this, but we're working on it. One is to actually restore and frankly, in some cases, repaint very significant murals. The other is documentation and we're working with Artstor to do that documentation. But that's the only two areas, I think it's fair to say, where we get involved with specific kinds of collections rather than with collecting institutions and then our efforts to just reach the general public. .. "Connecting the Collections" ... is the most robust program to promote the importance of conservation and collections care in museums, libraries, and archives.

Several millions of dollars were invested in this. When the new director [of the IMLS] was nominated, Anne Radice—Anne-Imelda Radice. Debbie Hess Norris was our board chair and I went to meet with her and we met at a hotel and Anne pulled out the Heritage Health Index, and she said, “This is what I’m about.” It is something that we were the principal partner in this program. It was multifaceted: there were symposiums, there was web access, there was a bookshelf. IMLS, in their Connecting to Collections part of their website, there’s a guide, online resources, and many webinars.

I don’t think that there’s any question that the Heritage Health Index has made a very important, and I hope significant, impact on the importance of conservation and collections care. It’s the first time that there is statistically valid information on the condition of collections

[NAME CHANGE TO HP] When we changed our name from the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property to Heritage Preservation, you would’ve thought that we were trying to rewrite the declaration of independence. I mean they were people that were just appalled, not many, and it was a good discussion. They were invested in the name and the—the NIC. I said “No one knows what NIC means outside of us. Well we’re going to lose that.” And I have to give Dennis Fiori, who’s now at the Massachusetts Historical Society. He said “Well, use it right under your name, just National Institute for Conservation.” Actually, some people even wanted to keep Culture and Property. It doesn’t work in our country. It works in Europe, probably England, I don’t know, but it doesn’t work here. Cultural property lost everybody.
