Paul N. Banks' electronic records

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Abstract: This poster presentation explores Paul N. Banks's electronic records as an early instance of a creator's deliberate personal digital records management and preservation efforts. Banks (1934-2000) was a book conservator and educator who worked at the Newberry Library, Columbia University, and the University of Texas at Austin (UT). He is considered the founder of professional library conservation and preservation administration through his development of the first degree-granting library preservation program in the United States, which started at Columbia in 1981. For the past year, the authors have been processing Banks' professional archives, which is a mixed media collection comprised of 75 bankers boxes and includes monographs and serials, artifacts, off-prints, handwritten notes, and electronic materials. During the concurrent processes of digital archaeology and assessing the paper-based materials, the authors have begun to better understand Banks' intellectual curiosity and philosophy as a leader in the heritage preservation field.

Although the majority of Banks' life work was dedicated to saving material culture, his own personal archiving practices show that his concern for sustainability carried over to the electronic realm. Electronic and paper evidence reveals Banks researched and tried experimental software, hardware, and file formats. He maintained multiple iterations of electronic files and engaged in media migration. Along with information technologists in the 1990s, Banks was already considering the challenges and impact of making digital preservation decisions such as prioritization and determining significant properties. Informed by his conservation training, Banks continues to offer today – through his writings, research, and recordkeeping practices – a holistic and self-reflexive perspective on digital preservation.

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