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LIBR 256 Discussion Post – Physical Preservation

Case two

The president of your University comes to see you one day with the original charter of the college founded in 1769. The Royal Governor of New Hampshire, John Wentworth, provided the land upon which the school was built and conveyed the charter from King George III establishing the College.

As you examine the charter, you see that it has been worn by time. It also has a big ink smear on the upper right corner. He asks you to remove the smear and have the charter mounted on acid-free adhesive board and framed.

1. Would doing these repairs adversely affect the integrity of the document? If so, what would they be?

I would be concerned with the framing because it would limit future research use. However, a copy could certainly be made for research use and the original could be so framed and used as a part of a temporary or permanent exhibition about the University's history. However, would continuous (or even limited) exhibition expose the fragile paper to light or other environmental damage? Perhaps a replica can be exhibited (and identified as such) and the original kept in the closed stacks? The ink smear is a slightly different issue. Does it appear original, or was it an accidental addition from a later date? Does it impact legibility? If it adversely impacts legibility and was an accident, then I would investigate options for removal. Mounting the charter to an acid-free board seems like a reasonable preservation procedure for this valuable document.

2. What treatments would you suggest, if any? How would you go about assessing what those treatments should be?

It's hard to say without seeing the actual document, but I would suggest possibly fixing tears and paper strengthening, perhaps humidification and flattening to deal with dog-eared and crumpled corners, and perhaps deacidification of the paper itself. I would hire a professional conservator to help identify what can be done with the ink smear (if anything) and to determine what affect prolonged exposure to light would have on the document. Also, with the framing, I would ensure that it wasn't air tight to allow for outgassing from the paper. The conservator should be able to provide direction for an appropriate conservation plan fitting the value of this document.