

Saving history one sheet at a time

Written by Hawkeye Caucus
Friday, 29 June 2012 10:26

Preserving fragile historic documents requires control of a range of environmental variables, including temperature, humidity, and light. But what about the surface on which the priceless papers rest?

The United States government has turned to the University of Iowa Center for the Book for the answer. The center is a unique program that combines training in the technique and artistry of bookmaking with research into the history and culture of books.

In 1999, the National Archives commissioned the Center for the Book's Timothy Barrett and his UI papermaking facility to fabricate soft, unbleached, acid-free paper on which to lay the parchment originals of the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence. The facility worked for months to create cotton paper in which every fiber was perfect.

This year, the Archives again turned to Barrett and the Center for the Book to provide a friendly base for a 700-year-old copy of the Magna Carta during public display in the nation's capitol. The document, which went on display in February, is one of just four surviving originals and the only one in the United States.

DID YOU KNOW?

Papermaker Timothy Barrett, the Center for the Book's 2009 MacArthur "Genius Grant" winner, was recently profiled in the New York Times Magazine.

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/magazine/timothy-barrett-papermaker.html?_r=2&ref=magazine

QUOTE/UNQUOTE

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Tim Barrett: "Sometimes I worry about what a weird thing it is to be preoccupied with paper when there's so much trouble in the world, but then I think of how our whole culture is knitted together by paper, and it makes a kind of sense."