



Good Government Through the National Digital Information and Infrastructure Preservation Project (NDIIPP)

[Speaker: Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives]

This is MN's state capitol – designed by Cass Gilbert and finished in 1905- it's the symbol and the heart of government in MN.

It's also home to MN's legislature. The legislature, house and senate, crafts the laws that frame what we do – everything from the state's budget to mosquito control. Every state has a legislature and the work of every legislature is absolutely critical.

Because of that, the laws as well as the processes that create them have to be documented, recorded and preserved. What you might call a “paper trail.”

Historians use those records. Lawyers, judges, government entities of all kinds rely on them. Citizens, advocacy groups, the media: Laws and legislative records are the touchstones of everyday life. They are the foundation for government accountability and transparency.

Until relatively recently, all that meant a lot of paper. Now, increasingly, the processes and the products of the legislature are digital.

Basically, technology is transforming how government works, just as it has changed the way we listen to music, take photos and talk to one another.

That's all good – the use of technology in government creates some tremendous advantages and efficiencies. It also creates some challenges, especially for archives and libraries, which have been the repositories of all those paper records over the years and whose job is to make them accessible to the public.

Now we need a digital trail.

[Speaker: Bob Horton, Director, Library, Publications and Collections]

The MHS has preserved the records of the legislature since the territorial years, before MN even became a state. Those collections are available to all researchers at the History Center in St Paul.

But all our practices, all our skills and experience, are focused on paper. Now, with the help of a grant from the Library of Congress's National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP), we are in a position to learn how to preserve digital content.

The mission of NDIIPP is to develop a national strategy to collect, archive and preserve the burgeoning amounts of digital content, especially materials that are created only in digital formats, for current and future generations.

NDIIPP is based on an understanding that digital stewardship on a national scale depends on public and private communities working together. The Library has built a preservation network of over 130 partners from across the nation to tackle the challenge, and is working with them on a variety of initiatives. Each project will share tools, services, standards and best practices to help every state manage its digital heritage.

In late 2007, with NDIIPP's support, MN started a collaborative project to preserve and provide access to the digital records of state legislatures. Our partners include CA, IL, KS, MS, TN and VT, as well as the CA Digital Library and the National Conference of State Legislatures. In MN, our key partners are the Revisor of Statutes and the Legislative Reference Library.

[Speaker: Margaret Anderson Kelliher]

This is important work. As information technology becomes part of everyday life, government has to adapt the policies, laws and practices designed for paper records and processes to the digital world. This is especially critical for legislatures: the routines of bill drafting, publication and communication increasingly take place in a networked environment, relying on digital content and electronic media. The 19th century used the printing press; the 21st uses the Web.

These changes support citizens' expectations for more transparency, access and accountability; they also offer the promise of more cost-effective and efficient business routines. The Minnesota Historical Society, with its partners in this project supported by the Library of Congress, will address two fundamental aspects of the transition from paper to digital: how to preserve and how to provide access to the records of the electronic legislature. We will make sure that the digital records of the 21st century are even more useful – and preserved for just as long – as the paper records of the 19th.