

CONSERVATION PROCEDURES

7.1 Guidelines for Library Binding

NEDCC Staff

NEDCC

Andover, MA

CHARACTERISTICS

Because books differ in value and in the way they are used, it is important to select an appropriate type of rebinding when they become damaged. Library binding, one type of rebinding, is a good choice where economy and durability are the objectives. It is appropriate for books that are significant primarily for the information they contain and that do not have value as objects. Books that have artifactual or associational significance in addition to informational value should be sent to a professional conservator for treatment. (See NEDCC's Preservation Leaflet [7.7 Choosing and Working with a Conservator](#) for more information.)

The goals of library binding have changed since the advent of industrialized book binding. Until the later 20th century, library binders strove to produce sturdy, economical, serviceable bindings. As librarians and users began to take a fresh look at the physical quality of library materials, however, and became concerned with the openability of a book and photocopying problems associated with oversewing, the goals of library binding broadened. In 1984 Jan Merrill-Oldham identified the following desirable characteristics of a library binding:

- 1) The binding should be as conservative as possible, altering the text block minimally;
- 2) the binding should be as non-damaging to the text block as possible and should not shorten its useful life;
- 3) the bound volume should open easily to a 180° position to facilitate non-damaging photocopying; and
- 4) the bound volume should stay open when resting face up on a flat surface so the reader has both hands free and can take notes easily.¹

Today, good openability and minimal intervention as well as durability and low cost are the primary goals of library binding.

STANDARDS

The result of this broadening of goals was the development of a revised edition of the Library Binding Standard. The current

standards for library binding, which are detailed in [ANSI/NISO/LBI Z39.78-2000 \(R2018\)](#) – Library Binding, were developed by the [Library Binding Council](#) (formerly the Library Binding Institute), in conjunction with the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The current Standard includes specifications regarding the use of permanent and durable materials, and legitimizing and perfecting a variety of binding methods.

In response to the librarian's need for explanation, discussion, and historical context, *Guide to the Library Binding Institute Standard for Library Binding* was published in 1990 and updated in 2008 as *Guide to the ANSI/NISO/LBI Library Binding Standard*. This Guide is intended to enable readers to use the Standard to its fullest advantage.²

CONTRACTING

Both the Standard and the Guide should be followed when contracting for library binding. Contracts with library binders should specify methods and materials appropriate for the range of materials in a library's collections. They should be as detailed as necessary. Two sample contracts are reproduced in the resource guide, *Managing a Library Binding Program*.³

Each bound volume returned by the library binder should be inspected to insure that the quality of the work is acceptable and specifications have been met. This is of critical importance in maintaining a high quality product. Guidelines for inspecting bound volumes appear in the *Guide to the NISO/ASNI/LBI Library Binding Standard*.

GUIDELINES FOR SMALLER INSTITUTIONS

Even though the Standard and Guide should be consulted no matter how limited the amount of binding being contracted, sometimes this is not possible. This is more likely to be the case in very small institutions—such as small museums, historical societies, and historic sites—where the amount of binding being done is minimal, staff time is severely restricted, and staff members' knowledge of binding is limited. The following

guidelines were drawn up with the needs of these institutions in mind. They are intended to assist library staff members in specifying binding so that basic standards of quality will be met and inadvertent damage avoided. **It is important to remember that there are exceptions to every rule and that there will be books for which these guidelines are not appropriate.**

These guidelines may in some cases cause the cost of rebinding to be higher than usual because of the extra time, handling, and special attention that they necessitate. This higher price, however, is usually not prohibitive for institutions doing a small amount of rebinding, and it results in a superior binding that lengthens the useable life of the book.

When questioned informally, several library binders indicated that their firms would take measures such as these if requested to do so. You may need to search for a binder who is interested in this type of work. In selecting a binder, choose one who is certified by the [Library Binding Council](#). That way you will be sure the binder is familiar with these procedures as well as with current trends and new techniques.

- **No trim.** The binder should not trim the edges of the book unless they are damaged or pages are uncut. The preservation of margins is important, and a no-trim policy insures that folded plates as well as images and text that bled to the edges of pages will not be trimmed.
- **Sewing.** Original signatures and sewing should be preserved in all fragile and special volumes. Ask that these volumes be "recased" whenever possible. Where original sewing is badly deteriorated in an important book, ask to have the book resewn through the folds using the original sewing stations if possible. This is an expensive option. Another is

to have a box made for the book instead. Books that cannot be recased or resewn through the folds should almost always be double-fan adhesive bound rather than oversewn. The binder may be given the authority to decide when oversewing is necessary (usually because of extreme thickness or heaviness of a text block). The technique, however, should be used only very rarely. If it is used more often than that, seek advice from a consultant who can evaluate the binder's decisions.

- **Paper repairs.** For paper repairs, a paper-based pressure-sensitive tape with acrylic adhesive should be used rather than a household-type plastic-based tape. Although use of Japanese paper and starch paste repairs is a standard conservation procedure, the need for such repairs, which require a high degree of skill, signals the need for conservation binding rather than library binding. Ask the binder what materials will be used in repair work and, if you are unsure of the quality, ask a conservator if these materials are appropriate. Remember that repair tape is not suitable for books that have artifactual or associational significance, but only for books valuable solely for the information they contain.
- **Endpapers.** Materials that are durable and chemically stable should be used throughout the binding process. Of greatest concern are the endpapers, which come in direct contact with the first and last pages of the book. Endpapers should be alkaline and meet [ANSI Standard Z39.48-1992 \(R2009\)](#) – Permanence of Paper for Publications and Documents in Libraries and Archives. Ask the binder to return old labels, bookplates, and anything else that may be of special interest.
- **Questions.** Urge the binder to call you whenever questions arise regarding materials or procedures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Jan Merrill-Oldham, Paul Parisi, and Robert deCandido in the preparation of this preservation leaflet. Written by Sherelyn Ogden, 1999 and updated by Bexx Caswell-Olson, 2019.

RESOURCES

1. Jan Merrill-Oldham, "Binding for Research Libraries," *The New Library Scene* (August 1984): 1, 4-6.
2. Jan Merrill-Oldham and Paul Parisi, *Guide to the ANSI/NISO/LBI Library Binding Standard*, (Chicago and London: American Library Association, 2008).
3. Jan Merrill-Oldham, *Managing a Library Binding Program*, Jutta Reed-Scott, Series ed. (Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, Preservation Planning Program, 1993).

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

© 2007. Revised 2019. NEDCC Northeast Document Conservation Center. All rights reserved.