



Libraries and Commercial Binderies

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IT HAS LONG BEEN the custom in Europe to publish books in paper covers. Collectors who wanted to preserve their books in hard covers had them individually bound to their special requirements. Binding of books individually was and still is a common business. From Holland, Switzerland, France, Germany, and other European countries binders have come to this country and established firms which continue to do custom binding. Some of these firms have an enviable record of more than fifty years of bookbinding service.

However, in this country binding for libraries rather than for individuals has been their principal source of business and the firms have become known as library binders. Their work is characterized by sturdy custom binding of individual volumes as contrasted with the work of edition binders who bind editions of hundreds of thousands of copies of the same book for publishers or the work of firms who bind blank books for record keeping. Fine binding of rare books and collectors' items is another specialty although some commercial library binders are capable of doing such work.

A commercial library bindery is privately owned and operated for profit. In such a concern private enterprise and individual initiative are brought to the fore and in competition with other concerns often produce the best service at the lowest cost. As will be noted later, however, competition has harmful as well as laudable features not only for business concerns but also for customers. Institutional library binderies are run either by a library or by the institution of which the library is a part, such as a university or by a university press. The manager and employees are on a salary. They are organized to reduce expenses and to improve service to the library. Prison library binderies are sometimes termed institutional binderies though the author prefers to place them in a separate category. These are operated with the dual purpose of saving money and rehabilitating prisoners through useful, creative work involving the use of hands. Laudable as the ob-

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jectives of prisoner rehabilitation may be, the author knows of no library receiving satisfactory service from a prison bindery.

While distinguishing commercial library binderies it may be well to point out that most libraries share with other educational institutions the distinction of being organizations which the public is willing to support with public funds. Service rather than private gain are the wellsprings of successful operation and the enterprise is carried forward by the initiative of salaried employees.

The total annual dollar volume of library binding business amounts to over three million dollars. About 80 individuals or firms engage in library binding in about 40 states of the United States. Fifty of these are members of the Library Binding Institute in 23 states and Canada. About 86 per cent of the library binding in the country is done by commercial binderies, 14 per cent is done by institutional library binderies. The amount of work of prison binderies is negligible. Libraries are the principal source of business for commercial binderies, other sources being schools, bookdealers and individuals.

More than 10,000 libraries located throughout the 48 states and Canada use the services of library binders to bind periodicals, rebind worn books and, largely for the children's department of the public library and school library, prebind books. Large and small public libraries, college and university libraries, school libraries and special libraries make up the 10,000 libraries using library bindery services. The dollar volume of library binding of 210 colleges and universities reporting statistics total close to \$1,500,000.¹ The binding needs of these libraries necessarily differ as they preserve the variety of library material which they acquire. In this situation it is highly desirable though difficult for libraries to cooperate with each other in the solution of their binding problems. It is natural, though possibly not always desirable, that the few competing library binderies cooperate with each other. Real cooperation between the producer and the consumer to achieve the optimum bindery service to libraries is a goal, the achievement of which is worth considerable effort.

In times past without such cooperation the attempts of competing commercial binderies to meet the variety of binding needs of libraries has led to unsatisfactory binding conditions, poor quality of binding, slow service, and even loss of valuable library material by the binders. Part of this was brought on by the excessive individualistic demands on the part of libraries and misrepresentation on the part of competing binderies in their attempts to secure business by cutting prices and lowering the quality of product.

Libraries and Commercial Binderies

Concerted efforts to improve binding were made as early as 1909 when a Committee on Bookbinding of the American Library Association prepared Library Handbook No. 5, *Binding for Small Libraries*. John Cotton Dana published a book, *Notes on Bookbinding for Libraries*, the same year. He listed twelve different types of binding for magazines. Mary E. Wheelock, a librarian in the Cleveland Public Library, is said to have formulated the first specifications for library binding in 1916. These specifications were used by a school library in California to improve the rebinding of school books. The approval of the specifications by A.L.A. was a very influential factor in the acceptance of these specifications.

Just after the first World War in 1919 the Employing Bookbinders Section of the Book Manufacturers' Institute was organized. The decade of the twenties, largely through the leadership of Miss Wheelock, was one of considerable activity, improving binding for libraries. The A.L.A. Bookbinding Committee was created in 1923 as a standing committee. Specifications for binding of reference books were formulated for the guide of publishers. Pamphlets on library binding were published and distributed to librarians. The rag paper edition of the *New York Times*, promoted by the A.L.A. Bookbinding Committee, was begun in 1927. Miss Wheelock was a member and chairman of the A.L.A. Bookbinding Committee for a number of years. Cooperation between the Bookbinding Committee and the Employing Bookbinders Section of B.M.I was begun. Miss Wheelock attended their annual meetings and for five years was named an honorary member of the section.

The depression of the early thirties interrupted this program of improvement in library binding. Competition was keen for the reduced amount of rebinding available from libraries. Prices were cut; wages to binding employees were in some plants as low as 20 cents an hour. The quality of binding suffered.

The National Recovery Administration proved to be the impetus for a more formal cooperative program between A.L.A. and the Library Binders' Group of the Book Manufacturers' Institute. The Code of Fair Competition of the Graphic Arts Industries included the book manufacturing industries. In the part of the Code setting forth the specific provisions for the book manufacturing industries there was a special section for library binders which included the following: (1) Specifications. The standard to govern a Class "A" library book binding shall be the specification of the Book Manufacturers' Institute when approved by A.L.A.² The A.L.A. Bookbinding Committee pre-

sented to the Council the specifications for library binding with a recommended procedure to insure enforcement. The procedure provided for a joint committee of librarians and library binders appointed by A.L.A. and the Book Manufacturing Industry for continuous enforcement of the specifications and such other matters as may arise, requiring cooperation and the mutual interchange of experience. The specifications should be widely distributed and should be made a part of any contractual arrangement with a library binder. Complaints should be sent to A.L.A. Headquarters to be transmitted to the code authority for investigation and action. The report of the Bookbinding Committee was accepted by the Council on June 30, 1934, with the reservation that the Executive Board be authorized to withhold filing of the specification until they be assured that the American Library Association will be permitted on its own initiative to prepare amendments and/or withdraw its approval.³ These reservations were accepted by the Book Manufacturers' Institute,⁴ and on October 16, 1934, the Executive Board voted that the Book Manufacturers' Institute and A.L.A. appoint a joint committee and that the recommendations of the A.L.A. Bookbinding Committee to Council be implemented. The Code of Fair Competition provided basically for wages, hours, and working conditions in the book manufacturing industries. The specifications were not mandatory on the librarians but were mandatory on the library binder if requested by the librarians. There were also non-mandatory price provisions. The non-mandatory price provisions were incorporated in a Guide of Fair Value for Library Binding as passed by the Coordinating Committee of the B.M.I. The Guide was intended to protect the librarian from excessive prices for quality binding which followed Class "A" specifications and to protect the library binder from being asked to produce Class "A" specification binding at a price below cost.

The important new Joint Committee met two days in January 1935 to plan an organized program cooperatively. The board tackled problems of how to insure widespread use of the specifications, to recommend the Guide of Fair Value for Library Binding for approval by the A.L.A. Executive Board, to devise a seal or symbol to be placed in Class A Bindings. A special committee charged to make an early study of methods of reducing the cost of library binding included Pelham Barr, divisional code director for library binding of the Book Manufacturers' Institute.⁵ What the results of such a program started so auspiciously would have been with the government as partner and referee is inter-

Libraries and Commercial Binderies

esting to contemplate but in June of that same year the act supporting the N.R.A. program was declared unconstitutional.

Immediately an article appeared in the *Library Journal*⁶ by Pelham Barr, then executive director, Library Binding Division, Book Manufacturers' Institute. He wrote:

"The Library Binding Industry and its cooperative program with the libraries will not be affected by the recent Supreme Court decision on N.R.A. The program of the Joint Committee of the A.L.A. and Library Binding Division of the Book Manufacturers' Institute was soundly established last January on a basis entirely independent of code activities. . . .

"The only mandatory provisions of the Graphic Arts Code which the library binders used were the labor provisions. Specifications, prices and trade terms, even under code procedures, were based on non-mandatory provisions; their power was derived from their approval by the Joint Committee and voluntary compliance by the binders. The Minimum Specifications for a Class A Library Binding, the Guide of Fair Value and the rest of the cooperative program approved by the Joint Committee, therefore, continue in effect.

"Immediately after the decision, the binders began to pledge themselves, in writing, to continue the minimum wage and maximum hour provisions of the code and not to employ child labor.

"Librarians therefore have the assurance of the library binding industry that the standards of quality and fair dealing established during the past two years will be maintained."

The differences of the problems of the library binder from those of the other members of the Employing Bookbinders Section of the Book Manufacturers' Institute were now recognized. The Library Binding Institute was formed independent of the Book Manufacturers' Institute.⁷ The able Pelham Barr became the executive secretary.

After the removal of the government as partner and referee a diligent search by the author has found no instance where important binding matters considered by the Joint Committee, other than binding specifications, were referred to the A.L.A. Council or Executive Board for review or approval. Nevertheless, the next decade saw great strides taken toward the improvement of library binding service. Binders recovered from the depression, maintained plants with better working conditions that were more efficient and produced a better quality of binding.

The period from 1936-1941 might be termed the golden period of improvement of library binding. The Joint Committee concerned themselves with twelve general areas which were: Specifications,

Guide of Fair Value, Exhibit of Good Binding, Manual for Buyers of Binding, Certification Plan, Standardized Magazine Lettering, Standardization of Cloth Colors, Suggested Document Forms, "Excessive" Truck Calls, Misuse of Shipping Containers, Relief Mending Projects, and Binding in Library School Curricula.⁸

Certification of library binderies was given first priority. In order to be certified, library binding must:

1. Prove that it can maintain standards of quality by producing bindings in conformity with the Minimum Specifications for a Class A Library Binding, and pledge itself to deliver such bindings whenever specified.

2. Pledge itself to maintain the standards of wages and hours prescribed in the Graphic Arts Code and not to employ child labor.

3. Pledge itself to abide by the legal principles of fair competition and fair trade and not to engage in fraud, misrepresentation or similar practices detrimental to the interests of its customers.

4. Protect the property of its customers with adequate insurance.

5. Prove its general business reliability through the testimony of those who do business with it.

6. Agree, through membership in the Library Binding Institute, to make itself amenable to investigation by the Joint Committee and to such disciplinary action as may be legally within the Committee's power.

A provisional list of sixty binderies were placed on the certified list. Certification was open to any library bindery in the United States. All certified binders submitted work to a Board of Appraisal to determine if the binderies were capable of doing Class A work. The other qualifications needed to meet the approval of the Certification Committee made up of librarians only, a sub-committee of the Joint Committee.

The work of the committee was well publicized to librarians and binders through pamphlets, articles, and news notes in the *Library Journal* and other publications. Librarians wrote for the list of certified binders and were pleased to find firms with whom they were doing business on the list. As may be expected, abuses of the new plan were made. Some binders presented the Guide of Fair Value library binding as the fixed price list. Such circumstances were resolved through the efforts of the Library Binding Institute. The library members of the Joint Committee were also members of the A.L.A. Bookbinding Committee and worked in close cooperation with them. The work of the Bookbinding Committee and its Joint Committee received com-

Libraries and Commercial Binderies

mentation from the executive secretary of the A.L.A. C. H. Milam said: "The Bookbinding Committee, and particularly those members of it who serve on a joint committee with the Library Binding Institute, has dealt constructively but conservatively with some of these delicate problems which arise when a professional and a commercial organization attempt cooperation."⁹

Unfortunately, because of constitutional limitations of A.L.A., committee members could not serve continuously more than five years. The able, early members of the Joint Committee, who had worked out the cooperative arrangements with library binders, were replaced by other representatives of the Bookbinding Committee at the beginning of the second World War.

The war period was another trying time for libraries and library binders. Skilled employees left to work in war industries. Binding materials were non-priority items and were in short supply. Because of the program of specifications and through the efforts of the Joint Committee, certain materials were permitted to be substituted and the quality of library binding was maintained. The end of another five year period with another change of A.L.A. Committee membership almost coincided with the end of World War II. Some of the original bindery members of the Joint Committee were still serving.

Following the war with a backlog of library material to be bound and in the face of increasing prices the Guide of Fair Value was raised in July and again in November, 1946, and was raised periodically through the late forties. "Extras" were added to the base price and by 1948 the cost of binding for libraries had increased over 100 per cent with the product under the Minimum Specifications for Class A Binding remaining just about the same.

Nobody was surprised that in times of rising prices the Guide of Fair Value went up. The anti-trust division of the attorney general's office in 1951 checked on trade associations which had begun under the NRA code and continued. After attorneys went through the files of the Library Binding Institute a complaint was filed against the Institute on May 10, 1951. The defendants, while denying the substantive allegations of the complaint, consented without trial to the final judgment which was made May 23, 1952. The Library Binding Institute was restrained from fixing prices, limiting any person in the furnishing or the selling of library binding services, and from allocating markets for library binding services. The Guide of Fair Value for binding services was discontinued. The members of the Library Binding Institute could talk costs but not prices.

The Minimum Specifications of Class A Library Binding have become the accepted standard for a library binding. By adhering to these standards inferior binding has largely disappeared from the library scene. It is a sturdy binding, good for hard-used books like the reserve books in a college library or high circulating fiction or children's books in a public library. The books may circulate a hundred times a year. Minimum Specifications for Class A Binding is an economical binding for such books. Much library material is not of the rapid circulating type. If it is to be preserved, packaging it like a book is the best way even though it may be used once in a year or less. The cost per circulation of a rapidly circulating rebound book may be .025 cents per circulation, but the cost of a rebound item which circulates once a year may be \$2.50.

The obvious solution is more than one type of binding, and at the A.L.A. Mid-Winter Conference in 1952 members of the A.L.A. Bookbinding Committee asked the then executive secretary of L.B.I. to work out specifications for a less durable, not as expensive binding to be used for the less-used library material.

They were disappointed at the lack of enthusiasm of the Library Binding Institute for an additional specification for less-used library materials even though many commercial binders supply such a service to their customers and some university binders bind up to 50 per cent of the material for the library in a board binding at about one-half the cost of buckram binding. Before the Minimum Specifications for Class A Library Binding are made commercial standards, another look needs to be taken at the program of commercial binders as was done when the NRA Code was set up to re-evaluate the program and its effect on libraries and to plan for the future to attack the persistent problems of library binding.

The Joint Committee of A.L.A. and L.B.I. was first a subcommittee of the A.L.A. Bookbinding Committee. As time went on the Joint Committee became more active and the Bookbinding Committee less active. The author was a member of the Bookbinding Committee in 1946 and for five years no meeting was held. When the A.L.A. Bookbinding Committee again became interested in the area of its concern the overlapping of functions of the Bookbinding Committee and the Joint Committee came to the attention of the A.L.A. Committee on Boards and Committees. Both committees were abolished after two years consideration and a single Board on Bookbinding for Libraries was formed. The Board members have longer tenure and continuity of program is possible. Under the former arrangement, the library mem-

Libraries and Commercial Binderies

bers of the Joint Committee changed frequently whereas some of the binding members had a tenure of twenty years. In addition the executive secretary of the Library Binding Institute considered himself to be the administrative assistant of the Joint Committee.

The Library Binding Institute has carried on a publicity campaign to tell all libraries that one specification of library binding, which is relatively high priced, is the best thing for all possible needs for library bindings. They are in the process of a campaign to increase the amount of money spent for binding by libraries. This is not to be wondered at for the Library Binding Institute is a trade association whose purpose is to serve the interests of its members. However, the long time interests of library binders will best be served as they serve the needs of libraries in the binding of books and periodicals.

In the late forties during the time of rising binding prices some individual libraries, in cooperation with their library binders, reviewed their library binding programs. Several which made advances used two or more specifications for library binding. A notable advance was made at the University of Illinois, where critical examination of their bindery procedures was begun in 1948. In cases where more than one copy of a periodical was bound, the question was raised whether additional copies needed to be bound. Instances were found where specifications for a file provided for a more sturdy binding than Class A binding, when the latter would have served just as well. In cooperation with their commercial binder a very fair, flexible binding contract was made, based on a mutual regard for each party's fairness, integrity, and competence. The contract provided for a scale of prices which could be changed at the end of the first year if the binder found that his costs had increased, due to increases in costs of wages, materials and taxes. Likewise, prices could be reduced if the binder discovered that in operating under the contract savings could be made. The contract provided for three different specifications and two simplified practices. The base specification was Class A binding. Simplified practices from these specifications provided for no collation and/or no lettering when requested by the library. There was a specification for a binding more superior to Class A. There were specifications for a board binding for less-used materials which needed to be preserved. A detailed scale of prices was drawn up for each specification and simplified practice, including "extras." The experience under this contract was that the binder was able to make substantial savings in his operations and was able to reduce on his own initiative the prices of binding to the library. This program has continued, though in more recent years a

slight advance in prices needed to be made. At the present time at this large university library the binding program has become current, and the library binder has the grateful thanks of the library for his cooperation. This is a dramatic example of what can be achieved in this field when real cooperation flourishes with mutual understanding and consideration of the problems of each party.

The new Board on Bookbinding for Libraries is in the process of organization. The new Board has the opportunity to make a fresh attack on the library binding problem, still a serious problem in libraries in spite of the advances by library binders in the last twenty years. It has the opportunity to gather together and make known the best experience of libraries in working towards an optimum binding program. It can try to work out non-monopolistic arrangements where there is enough competition between commercial binders so that private enterprise has full play and not unfair competition to the point of bringing about an inferior quality of binding where quality is desired.

The Board can examine the Minimum Specifications for Class A Library Binding to determine if they are minimum, if they are specific, if they are being used as a basis for competitive bidding and quality binding or if they are being used as a selling device and if Class A is a term more properly applied to quality of workmanship than a product, especially if there is no Class B. And if in adhering to a single specification of binding, monopolistic practices are being followed.

The Board has the opportunity to work out specifications to fit the variety of library binding needs of libraries and if they do this work well, it will give to commercial binderies new opportunities of service which are now being missed.

One of the dramatic advances in business since the second World War has been in the packaging industry. What can be applied to the packaging of paper to give a cover on two sides and an edge and leave three edges uncovered? This question opens up a whole area which offers the possibility of preserving the printed page in less expensive manner by devising materials which can be used with less labor and provide quicker service at less cost. Adhesive binding used successfully in England and proved durable in U. S. Bureau of Standards tests has not caught on in this country. It had little chance against Minimum Specifications of Class A Library Binding which specify sewing.

By study, seeking the best experience of librarians the new Board has the opportunity to present the problem of binding in libraries in

Libraries and Commercial Binderies

such a way that commercial binderies will be helped in solving those problems. This forms the basis of a more real cooperation than existed when librarians unquestioningly accepted the help of an association whose main function was to further the trade interests of the members. A new balance of operating procedure is needed to make progress towards a solution of the binding problems in libraries which involve quality of binding, cost of binding, and speed of service. The old and honored art of custom binding needs to be re-examined to serve modern libraries.

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