



# The Bindery Within the Library

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AS KENNETH GRAHAM SAYS in his delightful essay *Non Libri Sed Liberi*, "as a general rule, the man in the habit of murdering bookbinders . . . only wastes his own time and takes no personal advantage."<sup>1</sup> Thus it is not our intention here to murder anybody, not even those who let "the weary weeks lapse by and turn to months, and the months to years, and still the binder bindeth not."<sup>2</sup> Rather, we seek to approach that long-standing question: when is a library justified in setting up its own bindery? And if by chance we reach a general rule, then the most we will admit to is making the pistol, not shooting it.

A search of the literature reveals several somewhat categorical answers to our question. J. T. Gerould, speaking for college libraries, states: "The installation of a bindery is not to be recommended. Except in very unusual circumstances and in very large libraries, it is at once less expensive and more satisfactory to have the work done outside."<sup>3</sup> Wheeler and Githens say: "A definite warning must be given against the idea of setting up a complete bindery in any public library except one of the very largest, where the volume of specialized work may warrant it." Yet in 1930, the New-York Historical Society admitted to a "long-felt want of a bindery,"<sup>4</sup> and in 1948, Wesleyan was still enthusiastic about the bindery it established in 1934.<sup>5</sup>

A cursory survey indicates that the number of binderies in libraries has not increased markedly over the years. The American Library Association Survey of 1924 reveals that, at that time, twelve public libraries maintained their own binderies.<sup>6</sup> They were Boston, Detroit, Kansas City, Minneapolis, New Orleans, New York (Reference Department), Omaha, Pittsburgh, Portland (Oregon), St. Louis, Seattle, and Washington. This survey is silent on binderies in other kinds of libraries. In early 1952, a trade magazine established that "true bindery departments" existed at Boston, Detroit, Kansas City, Milwaukee, The author is Chief, Preparations Division, The New York Public Library.

Minneapolis, New York (Reference Department), Pittsburgh, Queens Borough, St. Louis and Seattle, a total of ten.<sup>7</sup>

In the same year, J. B. Stratton determined that six college or university libraries operated their own binderies or had their binding done by their university presses.<sup>8</sup> More recently, the Library of Montana State University at Missoula discovered that four institutions had library binderies (Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Utah State Agricultural College) and that four had binding done by associated press binderies (Oregon, Stanford, Colorado, and Washington State).<sup>9</sup>

Against this remarkably stable situation, it is interesting to consider the development of the commercial library binding industry during the same period. A check of the advertisements in the 1924 issues of *Library Journal* reveals ten binders, all located in the northeast except for two in Chicago. The *Thomas' Register* for 1924 lists thirty-two binders throughout the country, but makes no distinction between edition and library binders.<sup>10</sup> Again, the concentration is in the northeast. In early 1955, the Library Binding Institute reported forty-eight members in twenty different states, mostly located in the eastern half of the country.<sup>11</sup> The 1955 *Thomas' Register* gives a "limited list" of seventy binders, not differentiated.

Concurrent with this growth, we need to keep in mind the establishment of the A.L.A. Committee on Bookbinding in 1923, of the Joint Committee of the Library Binding Institute and A.L.A. in 1934, and the development of the "guide of fair value" and the "minimum specifications." A more recent landmark is the promulgation of fair trade practices for the library binding industry by the Federal Trade Commission.<sup>12</sup>

Historically, in view of the rapid growth in the number and size of libraries in the last thirty years, part of the answer to our "general question" emerges in that most libraries have not felt justified in establishing their own binderies, but have relied on the services of the trade.

However, A. L. Bailey found ten advantages to "having a bindery in the building,"<sup>13</sup> here given in abbreviated form:

1. It is more convenient. . .
2. There is less chance of losing books. . .
3. There is no chance of damage to books in transit. . .
4. Repairs which are too difficult for the ordinary library staff member to make can easily be done in the library bindery . . .
5. The books need not as a rule spend so long a time in the bindery . . .
6. There is a certain amount of competition which works to advantage if part of the books have to be bound outside. . .
7. The librarian can at all times inspect materials

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on hand and see the books in the process of binding. . . 8. When the work reaches a certain amount it can be done at reduced cost in the library, since the ordinary profits of the bindery will accrue to the library. . . 9. It is much easier to make experiments with new materials or new processes. . . 10. A Bindery in the library can do much work . . . which needs skilled workmen. Such work frequently remains undone . . . because it seems unwise to send it outside the library. . . . Such are some of the benefits, but only the larger libraries which bind many thousands of volumes can take advantage of them successfully from the financial standpoint."

In considering the question "Does Our Bindery Pay?" Wesleyan University reported faster service, a better quality of work and more comprehensive service.<sup>5</sup> This bindery was not set up primarily to save money. However, for the year 1947-48, work which would have cost an estimated \$9,080.87 if done outside, was completed within the library for \$8,064.14 covering both labor and materials. No charges were included for rent, janitor service, light and heat, or insurance.

Echoing Bailey, the New-York Historical Society finds that "the bindery is, however, the only satisfactory solution to the problem of avoiding the risk involved in sending valuable books and papers out of the building to be rebound."<sup>14</sup>

James Cranshaw argues that "the home bindery offers a quicker flow of binding, a larger variety of styles, opportunities for wider ranges of stock, cheaper bookbuying, and experimental work of many kinds. . ." <sup>15</sup>

M. F. Tauber summarizes the advantages as: "The presence of such a bindery allows for personal supervision and the application of special methods to the needs and conditions of the institution. Moreover, it has been found that, under certain conditions, the bindery within the library can reduce the costs of binding. Finally, the materials in process are always within reach, and, theoretically, readily accessible to the users."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, given a certain amount of binding to be done, arguments have been presented that a bindery within the library is more economical, faster and safer, results in better quality, allows for experimentation and special work, and keeps material in process available for use.

The primary factor of cost is a very complex one. There are not only operating costs, but the initial investment in equipment. And meaningful operating costs should include charges for space, heat and power, maintenance, and insurance.

Rough calculations suggest that for a bindery capable of binding

or rebinding approximately 35,000 volumes a year, an initial investment of \$40,000 is needed. This contemplates the use of an oversewing machine, a power cutter, and some technique of line-casting for lettering. If hand setting for lettering is used, this figure could be cut almost in half but there would be considerable danger that material would pile up at the "finishing" stage. The annual charges for supplies and salaries would probably approximate \$75,000. To meet this output, a staff of roughly eighteen people would be needed: six collaters, one oversewing machine operator, four forwarders, two finishers, two typesetters, and one or two supervisors. After thirty years, much of the equipment would need replacing.

Of course, for a bindery capable of binding or rebinding as few as 5,000 volumes a year, the initial investment might be as little as \$5,000. Here, hand-sewing would be used, and the lettering hand-set. Supplies and salaries for a required staff of five might approximate \$20,000 a year. Equipment replacement would not seem to be a problem.

In these two theoretical binderies, we could hope to achieve a unit cost of \$2.12 in the larger and \$4.00 in the smaller, leaving out of our calculations any out-of-the-ordinary work which could be done. We can check our theory against the unit cost of roughly \$2.41 at the Minneapolis Public Library which reported 32,544 volumes bound or rebound at a cost, for both materials and salaries, of \$81,126.20 in 1953.<sup>17</sup> For the same year, The New York Public Library Reference Department achieved a unit cost of \$3.76 (40,339 volumes for \$151,953.24).<sup>18, 19</sup> Since this is a large research library, much specialized work is done and the ratio of periodicals to books is very high.

The "Guide of Fair Value," revised December, 1948 and included in L. N. Feipel and E. W. Browning's, *Library Binding Manual*, gives a range of from \$1.11 to \$2.01 for binding books and \$2.65 to \$4.35 for binding magazines, depending on height.<sup>20</sup> A limited sampling of present prices charged by commercial binders reveals \$1.70 as the average for books and \$3.80 for periodicals.

Accordingly, it would seem that binding within the library is not certain to be economical. Gerould states that, "The overhead costs of running a bindery decreases as the volume of work increases; and, unless the binding appropriation is in excess of \$10,000, it is more economical to have it done under contract with some firm that specializes in this type of work."<sup>21</sup> J. L. Wheeler and A. M. Githens are emphatic in saying that, "Better work—more promptly done and at lower prices—can be obtained from commercial library binders, using standard A.L.A. specifications which secure work of almost perfect uniformity

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at scales arrived at by competitive bidding.”<sup>22</sup> Certainly Gerould’s \$10,000 is too small now, even if valid in 1932. It may well be that an annual binding load of 35,000 volumes is the critical amount, which we have translated here into an annual binding budget of \$75,000.

In 1953, a subcommittee of the District of Columbia Chapter of the Special Libraries Association reported, based on a survey of thirty-one libraries, that binding by the Government Printing Office costs 265 per cent as much and takes 237 per cent as long for completion as required by commercial binders.<sup>23</sup> While the Government Printing Office is not a bindery in a library, these findings are startling indeed, and not unrelated to our problem. This investigation would seem to support the Wheeler and Githens view that “the library, without the competitive commercial incentives to economy, such as adequate supervision and speed-up, is entirely out of the running on the bulk of re-sewing and rebinding.”<sup>21</sup>

Obviously, the question of whether a bindery in the library will be faster than an outside bindery is a complex one with the answer certain to vary from place to place. While a book in any bindery is a frozen asset from a library point of view, adequate binding requires a certain amount of time, wherever it is done. Wesleyan reports that material moves through its bindery in from two to three weeks, and that in an emergency, binding can be done in forty-eight hours.<sup>5</sup> Ernst Hertzberg has suggested that an even flow of material to an outside binder is a big factor in securing better service.<sup>24</sup> Feipel and Browning reiterate the importance of neither too little work or too much rush.<sup>25</sup> To the extent that speed is the result of efficiency, and the opportunity for efficiency increases in relation to the size of the operation, the large outside bindery can usually be expected to do better than the small internal operation.

Time in transit is a factor in the length of time material will not be available for use, particularly when the bindery is located in another population center. However, the growth of regular and irregular-route motor freight carriers suggests that this consideration is far less important now than it may have been in the middle 1920’s. Air freight and air parcel services may provide a solution to in-transit time when speed is of great importance.

The number of library books lost in commercial binderies must be small in relation to the number lost in other ways. The question of possible loss is of obvious importance where rare, antiquarian material is concerned.

Modern techniques of packing, if utilized, will protect books in

transit. However, Wesleyan notes savings in packing for shipment and in transportation charges when binding is done in the library.<sup>5</sup> R. F. Drewery comments on these same savings as well as on other clerical and technical operations which may be eliminated when the bindery is internal.<sup>26</sup>

On the score of quality, the A.L.A. and the Library Binding Institute are developing a Commercial Standard for Library Binding.<sup>27</sup> The Federal Trade Commission rules include a number of quality assurances.<sup>12</sup>

There is evidence that binderies in libraries have resulted in experimentation. H. M. Lydenberg and John Archer at The New York Public Library tested the durability of various types of binding materials as well as the responsiveness of various preservatives used on bindings.<sup>28</sup> Stanford has experimented with the new adhesives in making shelvable units of pamphlets and magazines for which regular binding is not required. Stratton reports other developments at Colorado, Oregon, and New York University.<sup>29</sup>

As to availability of material, Gerould notes that:

"It is a convenience, of course, if the books and periodicals which are being bound can be produced to satisfy an emergency demand. The period of maximum use of a volume of periodicals is exactly that in which it is being bound; but if the loss of parts is to be prevented, the volume should go to the bindery as soon as possible after its completion. The conflict of interest is inevitable. If it is known that, while they are in process of binding, books can be produced, there will be insistent demands for them, occasioning an expensive search and a much greater danger of loss. If the books are unavailable, the demand will less frequently arise."<sup>3</sup>

It should be remembered here that there are some stages in the binding process, whether it goes on inside or outside, when material is not available for use.

Tauber notes that, "The factors which need to be considered in deciding whether or not to establish a library bindery include the amount of work to be done annually, the physical quarters available, the specially trained personnel needed, and the additional financial burden which will result from installing and operating the bindery."<sup>16</sup> These and other organizational problems will remain with the librarian even after the decision to establish a bindery within the library has been made.

Library literature is largely silent on the subject of the place of binding in the organizational structure. The McDiarmids found that

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thirty-one public libraries had binding departments and that one had a "catalog, order, and binding" department. They suggest that binding be part of a larger "Processing Department" in large public libraries.<sup>30</sup> Donald Coney supports this view in theoretical terms.<sup>31</sup> K. D. Metcalf sees binding as part of the "general business and administrative side."<sup>32</sup> By its very nature, binding would appear to belong under either processing or business operations, with the total organizational pattern indicating which is preferable, and with provision for coordination of both processing and business aspects essential.

Wheeler and Githens have developed floor plans for both small and large shops for rebinding.<sup>33</sup> Tauber suggests that, "If the library building was not originally planned to include a bindery, it may be difficult to find adequate space which is well lighted, equipped with the necessary electrical outlets, and provided with suitable connections with the other units of the library."<sup>34</sup>

On personnel, Bailey poses the following questions: Can a good foreman be employed? Is the local rate of wages so high as to make the cost of the binding in the library equal the cost in a good bindery outside the city?"<sup>35</sup> Tauber suggests that "at least one person in the library bindery should be thoroughly skilled in the details of binding operations" and that "in the decision to set up a bindery within a particular library, the potential supply of personnel may play an important part. Selection and training of subordinates in the bindery will constitute an important function of the department head."<sup>36</sup>

Iowa State believes that rising binding costs there are due to a large extent to inability to keep labor, either skilled or unskilled, for any period of time.<sup>37</sup> Stratton notes that some college libraries "may have to stop their own binding because of increased costs of union labor."<sup>38</sup> For several reasons, the establishment of a bindery will inevitably increase the scope and intensity of personnel activities in the parent library.

*Bookbinding and Book Production* reports, that "the monthly salary scale of the Bindery Foremen varies from a low of \$350 a month to a high of \$480, the latter figure resulting from the efforts of a strong bindery union. The average per month proved to be about \$420. Three libraries work under a union scale; two do not. . . ." Science Research Associates record an average hourly wage rate of \$2.07.<sup>39</sup> The Michigan Employment Security Commission records minimum union hourly wage rate of from \$1.46½ to \$2.77½, and weekly salaries of from \$40.00 to \$60.00 in non-union and government binderies.<sup>40</sup>

Although there is a vocational text,<sup>41</sup> and while some schools teach bookbinding as a trade, entry is usually by apprenticeship. In commercial binderies, application for apprenticeship is customarily through the union, with acceptance or rejection by mutual consent of both employer and union, International Brotherhood of Bookbinders, American Federation of Labor. Promotion is through on-the-job training, and the status of journeyman is reached after about four years. Thus, libraries must expect to obtain trained personnel either by attracting employees from commercial binders or by training within the library. Since such jobs are plentiful, at least in the larger population centers, the library can anticipate having to compete for personnel with private industry.

W. H. Baatz notes that, "The Bindery Foreman usually works under a 'Head of Bindery,' or a 'Superintendent of Binding,' or some other professional library staff member. . . . This administrative superior to the Foreman ordinarily does the buying of materials, interviewing of salesmen, plans the general flow of work, budgeting, and relations with other library departments."<sup>42</sup> This poses both an administrative and personnel problem. We have previously discussed the question of the place of the bindery in the administrative structure. Here, we are faced with the necessity for correlating the salary of the "administrative superior" with the pay of the bindery staff. Bindery salaries must also be in line with the pay plan for the whole of the professional library staff.

Certainly the "administrative superior" must be provided, for even an auxiliary enterprise such as binding must contribute toward the achievement of library purposes. Somebody's interest, time and energy is necessary to see that it fully does so.

Tauber notes that, "Careful thought must also be given to the planning of routines and schedules if the maximum advantage is to be derived" from the establishment of a bindery within the library.<sup>16</sup> Inevitably, the establishment of any new activity increases the size and complexity of a library operation. Since development in one direction is usually at the expense of progress in another, it may well be a "general rule" of library administration to avoid auxiliary activities which can be adequately provided by private enterprise. Perhaps our long-range binding interests will be best served by making use of and working with the library bindery trade at our individual library level, thus encouraging further growth and development in a competitive atmosphere.

Bailey emphasizes that "in the first place, local conditions must be

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taken into consideration.”<sup>35</sup> As Tauber says, “The question of whether or not a library should operate its own bindery is still an important one, but one which cannot be settled categorically. On the surface, it would seem that a library of moderate size would gain much by the establishment of its own bindery. The matter becomes more complex, however, when the problems which attend the operation of such a plant are considered.”<sup>16</sup> Here we seem to have a clue to the “general rule” we have been seeking and that rule appears to begin with the words “it all depends. . . .”

However, Tauber warns that, “Only in rare instances will it be wise management to allow convenience to outweigh financial consideration.”<sup>36</sup> As Coney noted some years ago, “accident conditions organization” and so it should.<sup>43</sup> But, unless the decision to establish an internal bindery is carefully considered, we may find, to return to Kenneth Grahame, “the floor strewn with fragments of binder—still the books remain unbound. You have made all that horrid mess for nothing. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

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