



Problems of Periodical and Serial Binding

SIDNEY DITZION AND
LEVERETT NORMAN

IN A VERY REAL SENSE the binding of serial publications, especially when they have been periodicals, has circumscribed decisions in almost every other area of librarianship. Librarians generally, and particularly those serving in academic institutions, have long observed the principle that a periodical should not be subscribed to unless there is also the intention of binding completed volumes in book form. The cost of acquiring, recording, temporary shelving, and maintenance prior to such binding is different from that which pertains to other books because of the added time and attention each title must receive before it completes its period of probationary surveillance in the final ceremony of binding. Special problems of serial cataloging and classification also enter into, and are created by, the process of serial preservation by binding. And to add quantity to the quality of serial binding problems, these latter decades have witnessed an expansion of specialized and scientific serial publication to implement explosively expanding frontiers of knowledge.

A book is a book is a book, that arrives at a library usually in its own sturdy shell, gets its bibliographical treatment, and is no longer much of a financial burden to the library's technical processes. But a periodical, or any serial which arrives in unbound form, remains in the dependent state until confirmed by a hard cover. During this period, librarian parents are ever anxious, often over-anxious, that a part may be lost or kidnapped, that an outer garment may be rent, bent, curled, or weather-beaten so as to render said infant difficult or impossible to recognize. Where funds permit, it is therefore advisable to duplicate heavily used material and to bind as soon as possible. Experience has shown, moreover, that an open-shelf arrangement of current serial publications has resulted in staggering losses, creating a very serious problem when issues are reported out of print and unavailable. Non-

Mr. Ditzion is Chief of the Serials Division and Mr. Norman is Serials Assistant at the City College of New York Library.

Problems of Periodical and Serial Binding

commercial publishers of periodicals limit the size of their editions almost to the number on their subscription list. Even in the field of commercial publications lack of space prohibits retaining large numbers of back issues in the offices of publishers. Replacing a single lost issue becomes an expensive and time-consuming process, involving in some cases, years of search through exchange lists and dealers' catalogs.¹

Above and beyond the problems of preservation for binding, large numbers of impoverished librarians worry constantly about where to find funds to bind completed volumes—and with prices so high! So far as can be determined from examining library binding prices over the last decade or so, an increase of from thirty to forty per cent is not out of line with other consumer prices or with most library budgets. The library binding industry seems able to justify price increases, and cost conscious librarians seem to acquiesce in the increases.² Perhaps we should look into the libraries themselves for ways and means of reducing binding expenditures. Of all the cost factors—overhead, labor, material, and profit—the only worth-while point of attack is labor cost, both in the bindery and in the library. (Binderries operated by libraries are discussed on another page in this issue.) Cost reductions in the bindery seem to have their greatest potentiality in standardized binding instructions and in a rational division of labor between library and bindery. Economy within each library is certainly amenable to better control than now exists.

The cost of binding a serial volume consists of the cost of preparatory processing plus the binder's billed price. Commercial binders have atomized their routine of binding a volume into some fifty operations. Some of these operations are partly or wholly duplicated in many libraries and they need not be. If the processes themselves are not duplicated, certainly there is a good deal of precious time devoted by librarians to giving instructions about the physical treatment of volumes which binders are well equipped, generally better equipped than librarians, to decide for themselves.³ If a binder is unable to make intelligent decisions about the kind of sewing, trimming, etc., required by an item, he deserves an opportunity to come up to a librarian's standards: if he fails, there are many others who won't. A librarian's obligation is usually fulfilled when he ships a volume, complete with index, supplements, and other integral parts. Binders have traditionally supplied routine labor for page-by-page inspection and for run-of-the-mill matters of collation, and supermeticulous librarians must not try to supersede them. Of course, in the instances where serials have

intricate and bibliographically significant physical arrangements, it is necessary for a professional librarian to provide detailed instructions or even collate such volumes for sewing.

Which leads us to an observation on the use of costly professional talent in the library's binding routine. There are comparatively few questions about the large body of periodical binding which need professional attention. Much of the work is periodically repetitious; and in spite of library humor—born of despair—about the psychopathology of periodical publishers, most titles live perennially conservative and static existences. There is little reason why clerical workers and student assistants under professional instruction cannot operate the binding routine adequately, provided they obey the injunction to take no step which is not covered in a briefing or in a brief manual.

There are two principles of administrative or industrial efficiency which are highly appropriate to library binding routines, but which are only infrequently observed. These are: (1) the principle that a higher level of ability or talent must not occupy itself with tasks which can be performed by a lower level of available ability or talent; (2) the principle of the calculated risk. Practically speaking, professional librarians will make fewer errors in the preparatory routines of binding. But the library's cost of avoiding one or two errors (which also get by the binder undetected) will run into hundreds of dollars of professional time. Add to this the detailed recording and checking procedures employed in all too many libraries, and the economics are more than self-evident.

In the last analysis, serial volumes are preserved for readers; and if readers can conveniently find what they want when they want it, a library's job in this respect has been done. The question may seriously be asked whether there is much point in our professional debates and decisions as to the placement of infrequently used contents pages and indices to periodicals. The professional time and talent which goes into maintaining caviling distinctions and uniformities could well be used elsewhere. Once librarians and binders agree—as they must—that contents pages should be at the beginning of a volume and index pages at the end, unless an uncooperative or idiosyncratic publisher has forced another placement, need specific instructions on the point accompany every periodical volume which moves from a library to a bindery? If, by mishap, a contents page wanders to the wrong side of a volume, little is lost. The occasional reader who finds volume by volume perusal preferable to use of indices and bibliographies will soon enough discover the object of his quest.

Problems of Periodical and Serial Binding

The *Library Binding Manual*⁴ would have it that indices and such are not matters of consequence if a periodical is indexed in some dependable cooperative compilation. To an extent this is true; but it breaks down when the reader has failed to copy some small detail of his reference and does not want to be sent scurrying back to the source of his information. The index becomes important in such cases, as does the practice of binding in the front covers of each issue, as well as contents pages of individual issues where they exist. The point still remains, however, that matters such as this need not concern library experts at each step of the way.

There are, on the other hand, decisions which have to be made regularly on the basis of meaningful experience which only some years of professional service can provide. These are decisions involving economy or extra expenditure, which apply to binding two or more periodical volumes in one physical book, or the converse, binding one volume in two or more books. Probable frequency of use and probable wear-and-tear govern these decisions, matters which can be learned only after considerable observation in a specific institutional context.

Binding policy on monographic serials is an especially hard nut for large public, academic, and research librarians to crack. It is enmeshed in so many ways in publishers' practices, past library binding decisions, home circulation policies, as well as the manner and frequency of use. These considerations must, in turn, function alongside considerations of cost.

For most intents and purposes paper covered monographs in series are no different from other books and, when they need binding, theoretically should be treated like independently published books. But what if these volumes constitute a substantial run in a series much of which had already been acquired from a publisher or other previous owner who had bound them two or three monographs to a physical volume? There is every reason to expect that the portion acquired previously would have been cataloged and classified as a unit. The logical and economic decision to make—unless a very compelling circumstance intervenes—is to bind the newly acquired paper covered monographs in groups. Binding two-in-one is generally no more economical than binding singly; and there are obvious advantages to having single works bound by themselves. But if three or more can be bound within one cover, then economies begin to show.

Doubtless the binding of single monographic works singly is the practical as well as the bibliographical ideal. The library which holds to this rule invariably, however, should not be heard to complain of

squeezed budgets and binding arrearages. The point, that bibliographical arrangement requires absolutely that individual titles be assigned individual classification symbols, seems no longer as compelling as it once did. The testimony of students and scholars, the usual readers of such monographic works, is that shelf classification is the least used approach to materials of this kind. The subject catalog, the printed abstract or bibliography, the scholarly review and the footnote citation, rather than carefully wrought library classification, are the true signposts for monographic series. Moreover, minute classification seems to be breaking down as scholarly writers produce interdisciplinary works which defy the very classification system which renders shelf arrangement most useful to readers.

The remaining criteria for serial monograph binding practice—manner and frequency of use, and comparative costs—must submit to pragmatic test questions such as: How likely is it that two readers will simultaneously request monographs which have been bound under one cover? How often will a reader want one of these monographs for home use, thus having in his possession (during the period of out-of-library use) a few books instead of one? Large public libraries which stock but do not generally circulate reference and research materials of this nature, would seem to have little reason to bind singly. University libraries in institutions where there exist strong graduate departments in certain fields would be under compulsion to bind singly at least in these fields. Special scientific and scholars' libraries would have the greatest need to classify and bind such monographic serials separately. Smaller institutions of all types seldom receive any monographic serial set in anything like its entirety. They would treat such books as they would similar works which are not in series. If a budget so dictates, paper-backed monographs can live long, fruitful lives without binding, or in home-made pamphlet bindings.

The compulsion to bind every regularly received serial publication is a malady which besets large numbers of librarians and upsets them chronically when financial considerations prevent them from doing so. Notwithstanding the fact that hard covers provide security against future mutilation, there are many periodicals which need not be preserved forever wherever they are subscribed to. There are some which may not merit preservation at all. Some libraries, either because they are located in large urban centers with mighty bibliographical resources in other institutions, or possibly because they are cooperating in joint storage arrangements, or are resorting to micro-

Problems of Periodical and Serial Binding

reproduction, may mitigate their binding program somewhat. Others may want to use lesser means of preservation than optimum library binding.⁵

There are a variety of substitutes for prompt serial binding, to be used either while waiting to locate a missing part, or while waiting to discard at such a time when a particular title has outlived its usefulness in a particular library. Some of these alternatives are also useful for permanent preservation of little used titles. There are the drill-and-stitch techniques which produce a sturdy volume for many a year's reading.⁶ Cardboard wood-reinforced boxes have been used over the years, but have been generally judged fragile, space consuming (because of unalterable thickness), awkward and an expensive substitute for binding. The plastic liquids which, when applied to the compactly pressed edges of a group of magazines, uniting them into a single flexible-backed volume, have not yet had time to prove themselves good or ill. Combinations of elementary sewing, plastic application, and commercially prepared binding-cases promise permanence and are useable where a library has more labor supply than binding budget. High school libraries, small public and branch libraries, and a few small college libraries are using such alternatives with great satisfaction thus far. Tying a bundle of magazines with soft twine or tape, in brown board or not, still has no rival for speed, price, and preservation.

In times gone by, when business was very slow and library budgets were abnormally low, library binders encouraged the use of flush binding—at least for less frequently consulted magazines;⁵ the economy of time and materials is substantial if this method is used. But of recent years binders have talked this method down, indicating that savings are not large enough to warrant the use of an inferior type of binding. Librarians may well wish to look into cheaper methods especially for that large area of specialized serial output that must be preserved for limited numbers of readers.

Financial problems may direct decisions in many respects, but, in the last analysis, service considerations do take precedence; and, of all the questions which must be answered with regard to serial binding, that of scheduling seems most frequently discussed by librarians and most complained of by readers. Alas, there are too many variables in this problem to make simple answers possible. Among the factors upon which periodical binding schedules depend are: the size and nature of the library institution; the number of titles subscribed to; the degree to which the instructional program, or reference divisions

in non-academic institutions, make use of this form of literature; and budgetary allocations. The ideal of uninterrupted service, except where libraries close for a month or two each year, appears to be unattainable.

A recent survey of periodical binding schedules in college and university libraries⁷ revealed that the majority of libraries follow some plan in sending periodicals to the bindery, but that few plans systematically consider reader service. The conclusion reached was that "most plans are based solely on preservation of materials." The author states that "The trend within recent years toward greater use of serial literature as a major tool in higher education is clearly reflected in college and university acquisitions . . . the necessity of removing this type of material from circulation for binding, . . . creates a serious service problem."

In an effort to improve reader service, a questionnaire was devised, listing sixteen possible procedures. Certain general measures included a prearrangement with the bindery as to timing of shipments, and an understanding with the bindery as to time limit allowable for binding. Other specific measures, affecting individual titles, included a schedule for binding weeklies, monthlies, and quarterlies at regular intervals; duplication of some titles; and a staggered schedule for important indexed titles in general and subject fields. Of the sixty-three libraries reporting in the survey, none believed that any proposed plan could achieve complete uninterrupted service; although all agreed that an improvement in reader service, described as "infrequently interrupted service," could be achieved upon the adoption of a controlled periodical binding schedule. One older treatment of the subject⁸ suggests monthly shipments based on a staggered selection of weeklies, monthlies and quarterlies, plus a more equitable distribution of work to the binder. Such a procedure would work, however, only where the subscription list is large enough to guarantee a shipment of at least fifty volumes a month.⁴

All of these suggestions tend to ignore or minimize one fact, which in effect imposes a schedule of its own: publishers complete their volumes, in so many cases, either in June or in December, or both. Moreover, it has become the practice in academic institutions, where the reader demand on periodical literature is more or less predictable, to schedule binding shipments during vacation and intersession periods, which roughly correspond to the June-December axis of periodical publishing schedules. This creates formidable pressure on commercial binders, and there is little wonder that they find them-

Problems of Periodical and Serial Binding

selves deluged with work in midsummer and midwinter. If this becomes a serious concern to librarians because service is seriously curtailed, they may as a group attempt to remedy the situation somewhat by sending out a minimum of rebinding during peak periodical binding periods.

One thing is certain: from every point of view—service, convenience, and the flow of routines both in the library and in the bindery—some schedule involving at least two or three binding shipments a year is desirable.⁹ Moreover, no “sleeping” time in a centralized binding division must occur between the time a periodical leaves its service point in unbound form and the time it returns to service in bound form. If it were not for possible building arrangements and administrative exigencies, the principle might be formulated that independent binding divisions are important only for the services they perform in making records and making contact with bookbinders regarding shipping, complaints and financial affairs. The library service division which knows most about the habit and habitat of serials is best equipped to prescribe the details of binding; the same division should be able to make materials available to readers practically up to the moment before unbound issues start on their way to the bindery; the same division knows best how to do priority scheduling, i.e. indicating which titles are “rush,” which are “regular,” and which may be deferred in the case of a pile-up on the binder’s assembly line. The division which is to control the bound volumes should receive its materials directly from the bindery so that the accessioning process may take place after these materials become available for use.

Librarians have for a long time attempted certain aspects of standardization with a view to minimizing time consuming processing and handling, as well as to reducing supervision and decision making on an item by item basis. More than a decade ago, there arose a movement to persuade magazine publishers to attain some uniformity in matters of make-up and the printing of essential bibliographical information. It was one writer’s thought that: “Although libraries as subscribers receive only a small proportion of some large general circulation periodical publications, nevertheless, those copies which go to libraries are almost the only ones which are preserved. Therefore it is not unreasonable for librarians to cry for uniformity in their issues.”¹⁰ The organization of the American Library Association Committee on Standards was an important step forward, but it has failed for the most part to enforce any degree of uniformity. The profession has compensated for this failure by trying to record behavioral con-

sistencies and deviations on periodical receipt record cards. The practice is laborious and often futile because publishers are too often inconsistent even in their deviations.

If the profession has failed in this organized pressure tactic, it has succeeded in another attempt at standardization, viz. in the matter of standards of bookbinding materials and workmanship. Expert opinion has produced a set of specifications to which any library can insist its bookbinder conform. In recent years, representatives of the Library Binding Institute¹¹ and of the binding industry¹² have urged that, inasmuch as each bookbinder binds so many identical titles for many library customers, that the librarians accept standard forms of lettering, wording, placement of lettering, abbreviations, and colors. Standard placement of special pagination may well come within this scope. The profession is told that it can by this means save much of the writing of pattern slips and instructions, much labor of making rub-offs and of sending samples. If binders' costs of lettering and otherwise producing to specification are thus reduced, such reductions can accrue to the accounts of library customers in the form of price reductions.

Now, if library binders resist standardization of type fonts, it is understandable because some of their investment in type will be rendered obsolete if and when they accept a standard type. But the cry of 'regimentation' from librarians is hard to understand. Why the fetish of precise uniformity of binding (normally in closed stacks) from volume one until death? If library professional bodies were to set up such standards for 1957, most libraries (not having special service requirements that render their serials unamenable to such standardization) would have bookstacks reading traditionally from volume one to 1956, and standard thereafter. Our librarians, readers, and pages would certainly survive this traumatic experience, and the reduction in binding costs would be sizeable. So it is promised. At very least, a cooperative arrangement could be set up for titles indexed in those bibliographical tools upon which libraries rely most.

It has been possible to discuss general principles and practices pertaining to the binding operation. The more difficult task, an impossible one it seems, is to prescribe organizational patterns for the performance of library binding procedures. What with the variety of library types and sizes, and a multitude of difficult or uncontrollable personnel problems and building situations, the natural course taken by textbook writers is all but to avoid binding problems. The typical text in school librarianship is satisfied with expounding the virtues of

Problems of Periodical and Serial Binding

bound periodical files. In the public library field, a binding division is written into tables of organization and little else is said. The literature of college and university librarianship is still far from furnishing positive answers to troublesome questions.

M. F. Tauber and associates¹³ point up the fact that binding has been tossed about and generally neglected in libraries, because everybody is much interested in the process but no one wants to take responsibility for it. It is recommended that a separate, or semi-autonomous, division be created in every library large enough to warrant one; that this division be headed by a staff member whose rank will command respect from others involved in the binding process. As a prescription for administrative clarity and proficiency, there can be little argument with this idea. The desirable functions of such divisions and their relationship to other library divisions have already been suggested. (See p. 255.)

Texts concerned with serial publications are only occasionally helpful with respect to binding problems. Gable¹⁴ practically ignores the binding problem. Grenfell¹⁵ offers a conventional sketch of preparation processes and little more. Osborn,¹⁶ whose book on serial publications arrived as this article was being completed, analyzes the literature of serial binding rather completely. One fears, however, that, by virtue of its impartiality, this book may lead readers to believe that many an outworn notion is still feasible or desirable. In the matter of administrative organization, Osborn indicates that catalogers constitute the logical element of professional decision making in matters relating to serial binding. The rejection of this idea by the present writers is implied in earlier remarks anent the role of service divisions in binding affairs.

In view of the paucity of decisive literature in this field before the publication of Tauber and Osborn, and before the advent of the excellently conceived *Serial Slants*, one wonders how librarians have come to their high level of proficiency in serial binding. The answer probably lies in good library school groundwork,¹⁷ supervision by senior librarians on the job, and much painful learning by exploratory experience. The result has been good; it is with over-doing the process that we must be concerned.

References

1. Warner, Frances: Current Binding Policies at Iowa State College. *Serial Slants*, 3:39-42, Oct. 1952.
2. Hertzberg, Ernst: The Bindery Industry. *Serial Slants*, 1:10-19, July 1950.
3. Thurman, W. R.: Conservation of Periodical and Reference Volumes. *Library Journal*, 66:804, Sept. 15, 1941.
4. Feipel, L. N. and Browning, E. W.: *Library Binding Manual*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1951.
5. Casford, Ethel L.: Periodicals, Their Use and Preservation. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 13:593-596, May 1939.
6. Mogus, M. L.: Magazine Magic. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 20:370-371, Jan. 1946.
7. Hughes, Margaret H.: Periodical Binding Schedules for Improved Reader Service in University and College Libraries. *College and Research Libraries*, 13: 223-226+, July 1952.
8. Ayer, T. P.: Schedule for Binding and Rebinding Magazines. *Library Journal*, 62:856-857, Nov. 15, 1937.
9. Dawson, J. M.: Binding Quotas and Priorities. *Serial Slants*, 6:72-75, April 1955.
10. Croft, Kenneth: Consider the Librarian Who Binds Your Magazine, Mr. Publisher! *Library Journal*, 66:204-205, Mar. 1, 1941.
11. Browning, E. W.: Standardized Lettering for Bound Magazines. *Library Journal*, 74:1221-1222, Sept. 1, 1949.
12. Ort, J. G.: Standardization of Periodical Bindings. *Serial Slants*, 4:12-14, Jan. 1953.
13. Tauber, M. F., and Associates: *Technical Services in Libraries*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1954, p. 300 ff.
14. Gable, J. H.: *Manual of Serials Work*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1937.
15. Grenfell, David: *Periodicals and Serials; Their Treatment in Special Libraries*. London, Aslib, 1953, pp. 112-117.
16. Osborn, A. D.: *Serial Publications; Their Place and Treatment in Libraries*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1955, pp. 232-245.
17. Shores, L. S.: Do Libraries and Binders Play Fair? *Library Journal*, 74: 704-707, May 1, 1949.