
Some Personnel Considerations for Binding and Conservation Services

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THE FIRST THING that needs to be said in any treatment of this topic is, of course, that matters of binding and the conservation of materials in a library are everybody's business, the concern of each member of the staff, no matter what his or her regular capacity or functions may be. But there is also a corollary to this postulate, and that is that these matters must, in addition, be somebody's responsibility. It is not enough that everyone should constantly and vigilantly direct attention to the condition and care of all library materials; there must be, as well, someone specifically responsible for the binding and conservation program as a whole. And this responsibility, moreover, must be backed by a degree of authority adequate to assure the program's proper functioning and success.

Pelham Barr in an article published nearly a decade ago defined conservation in its broadest terms as "responsible custody," a function "concerned with every piece of material in the library from the moment the selector becomes aware of its existence to the day it is discarded." Pointing out the existence of "a need for reorienting administrative thought on the whole subject of book conservation and binding;" he urged librarians to "plan and provide for a truly broad program of book conservation."¹

Because our libraries vary in kind and size and organization, they must, of course, vary also in the provisions that can be made for conservation services. In very small institutions it will necessarily be the librarian himself who will perform whatever duties of this nature are to be undertaken, while as the scale is ascended toward the level of institutions of huge size and complex character the question of personnel becomes a more involved and difficult problem.

There is surely no necessity of providing a profusely footnoted exposition of the obvious and widely-recognized fact that persons par-
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ticularly well qualified to oversee and direct conservation activities, especially in their broadest context, are not by any means the profession's most embarrassingly over-abundant commodity. The reasons for the existing scarcity of personnel are several in number. Prominent among them is the inadequacy of the training currently provided by most of our library schools. Louis Shores' article of a few years ago entitled "Do Librarians and Binders Play Fair?" revealed that of the twenty-six library training agencies included in his survey, all "provide some binding instruction," but that most frequently such instruction consisted merely of one or more lectures or exercises included as a part of the elementary courses in materials.² It is apparent that in most instances the exposure was meager indeed, and plainly much ground must still be covered if the profession is to be provided with an adequate supply of conservation personnel.

Also writing from the standpoint of binding considerations alone, Jerrold Orne states that "it is clear to all binders and to most librarians that the [library] schools are not teaching practical binding knowledge." He further observes, "Where the unusual school offers a course in this field it is commonly not compulsory, and those who do take it learn more about historical and antiquarian binding than about today's practical library binding problems."³

E. W. Browning suggests a second cause for the great lack of trained personnel when he says,

. . . in the past at least, there has been little or no call from libraries for assistants specially trained for binding supervision and book conservation. Too often libraries have been content to give this work to an inexperienced assistant, whose only training had been what he could learn from good or bad methods employed by his predecessor.

Libraries have asked for and library schools have trained assistants in book selection and in cataloging and classification. But of what avail are well selected books made easily available through a well organized catalog if, when found, they are not in usable condition. Every library has thousands of dollars' worth of books and other reading materials, but only in the best organized libraries are these materials cared for by fully trained and experienced binding supervisors.⁴

In Browning's opinion, then, the absence of a sufficient demand on the part of the country's libraries has, at least in part, accounted for our library schools not turning any very vigorous attention to providing training in this field.

Still another probable reason for new librarians failing to be especially interested in conservation matters is suggested by E. A.

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D'Alessandro in telling of his own feelings upon transferring from a branch library in the Cleveland Public's system into binding and book repair work: "Frankly, I did not know whether I would like it or not. I did not know if I would find the challenge that I had found while serving the public for ten years or so. For a time, I was worried by the very disturbing thought that I was consigning myself to the dull, dry, dreary occupation of handling nothing but dirty, torn, and worn-out volumes. Could it be that I had sentenced myself to rattle around among the drying bones of the library's grave-yard?"

D'Alessandro discovered, however, that his misgivings, typical perhaps of the reactions of many librarians to the area of book repair, were groundless. "The past two years," he reports, "have been a revelation and an education. Instead of finding myself in a grave-yard littered with the broken backs, crushed spines, and dead bodies of books, I found myself in what verily may be called the library's rehabilitation laboratory. Thus, the Book Repair Division has become for me a proving ground, and an experimental station, wherein new equipment, new materials, and new techniques can be tested, tried, and put into operation, not merely for the sake of change, but in the interest of library economy and better service to our public serving departments."⁵

These are but a few of the causes for the lack of personnel properly trained to handle conservation services. What remedies for the existing situation are likely to develop in the foreseeable future? If, as is hoped, we are entering upon a period in which greater and greater attention will be directed toward conservation, it seems likely that we can expect librarians to be increasingly mindful of these needs and to think in terms of adding conservation specialists to their library's staff. The emergence of this "age of enlightenment," coupled with the demand for qualified personnel, may well stimulate the library schools to give more curricular emphasis to this area and its problems and students to take a more interested view of conservation matters. Hopefully, professional library organizations will become interested and play important roles in stimulating attention to training in conservation. Browning suggests, too, that libraries not able to employ library school graduates see to it that their conservation employees make visitations to binderies at least once a year, and that they also visit other libraries and attend library association meetings for the exchange of ideas and information.⁶

As for the present time, it is for most libraries pretty largely a case of making the most of the talents of personnel available and, obviously,

the services of the best qualified person should be secured. Except perhaps in the largest of institutions, it really does not greatly matter who performs the functions of a binding and conservation officer, nor what his title may be, so long as that individual does the job effectively and well. It is the results that are important. Despite the fact that there will be advocates of all sorts of logical and functional and otherwise professedly desirable and appropriate combinations of interest and responsibility, in situations in which such a combination is required, the decision on who should take on responsibility for conservation ought surely to rest chiefly on the basis of who is best qualified. Few libraries can have a keeper of collections to devote full time to conservation affairs, and in lieu of this a doubling up of responsibilities is required. To do this on grounds of other than ability would seem to be wasteful of talent. Such an arrangement, to be sure, molds a part of the organizational structure on the basis of the individual, which under many circumstances is perhaps undesirable, but it does permit the application of the most skilled services within command to an area of activity and concern that deserves the very best that can be provided. And if preconceived ideas of a neat and orderly design for the organization chart are frustrated thereby or certain theoretical principles of administrative organization are somewhat violated, these transgressions seem to be justified in institutions not able to afford or to find a properly trained person to concern himself solely with conservation matters.

M. F. Tauber in his *Technical Services in Libraries* has, however, sounded a pertinent warning when he declares, "Too often the responsibility for binding has been given to an individual whose time is taken up with other and seemingly more important tasks." ⁷ This is a genuine cause for concern, too, when it is necessary to rely on only the part-time attention of a staff member to the more general and inclusive problem of conservation, and it is a danger that should neither be lost sight of nor minimized.

It is not at all unfeasible, it may be pointed out, for conservation responsibility to be shared by a number of persons, each well-equipped to handle some one of the various specialized phases of the total problem. This is especially true in larger libraries with separate departments for the administration of special classes or kinds of library resources. In this connection it must, however, be strongly recommended that the responsibility be considered—in the finest distinction of the words—really a shared and in no sense a divided one. And in such cases, also, it may be best for one individual to be considered as

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having the primary responsibility and authority. Cooperation on a library-wide basis is, as was pointed out at the outset, a basic requisite of the program, but coordination is, indeed, an equally important aspect, and one that takes on even greater significance when there are two or more persons engaged in the direction of different phases or segments of the program.

This rather naturally leads to the question: What should the conservation officer be expected to know? The answer can be readily given—considerably more readily, it must be admitted, than can its accomplishment be achieved. He should, in substance, know as much as possible about as much as possible. He should have at his command as much knowledge as is available about the library he serves—especially with respect to the nature of its resources and services, as well as the character of its clientele and the kinds of demands they make upon its collections. And balanced against this should be as much knowledge as it is possible to attain of the technical considerations of conservation practices, methods, and facilities.

The chief conservation problem of a library ordinarily is, of course, one of binding. In addition to having professional library training and experience, and, ideally, foreign language competence, a person directing binding operations, whether they be carried on within a library-maintained bindery or in an outside shop, should be equipped with a basic understanding of the binding processes and operations of both hand and machine work, and should be aware of the various pieces of binding equipment and their uses. He should understand the methods employed in binding and re-binding and the practices employed in mending and repair work, as well as the standards to be applied to the finished products. He should be familiar with the differing requirements for the handling of the various kinds of items processed (as children's books, reference works, periodicals and newspapers, to name but a few of the obvious groups). He must be able to decide, based on such considerations as are suggested by G. R. Lyle in *The Administration of the College Library*,⁸ whether in individual cases it is better to rebind, replace, or withdraw a particular worn-out volume. He should know, also, about work flow patterns and schedules, the keeping of adequate records, and, when appropriate, the relative advantages of commercial binding as opposed to treatment within the library's own bindery for different classes of books and other resources. If all or much of the work is done by an outside bindery, it is important that he work closely with the bindery to insure a mutual understanding on both technical aspects and service,

and to establish and maintain a sympathetic and cordial intercourse. As Flora B. Ludington has observed of the association between the librarian and the commercial binder, "It is only through working together with mutual trust and respect for each other's special competence that this segment of library management will be handled with the foresight that is needed."⁹ The Library Binding Institute and the Joint Committee of the American Library Association and the Library Binding Institute have, as has already been discussed by J. B. Stratton, played important parts in developing cooperative considerations and solutions to the peculiar problems of bindery-library relationships and in educating both sides to the conditions of the other's environment and requirements.

Depending upon the size of the institution, there might well be other individuals participating in various phases of the administration of binding and book repair. The binding officer might, for example, have the assistance of a bindery preparations clerk or reviser, who would perform sundry record-keeping and allied duties connected with the transfer of books to and from the bindery. The qualifications for such a position would vary from library to library. It would be, for instance, advantageous in a large research library for such a person to have some background in foreign languages, whereas this would be of only slight consequence in a smaller institution where the materials were largely in English. An acquaintance with general library procedures is in most cases required, and especially a familiarity with the rules of entry. Accuracy and aptitude for detail are essential for a bindery preparations clerk in any size library.

Another of the more common units or subdivisions that exist in some libraries and function under the binding officer is a repair station or stations, often located centrally within the stacks themselves or at the circulation desk. These are sometimes referred to as "plastic" repair stations, in that much of their work consists of making minor repairs using various plastic mending products. They also serve, however, as "feeder" channels to the bindery itself for books that need extensive repairs or re-binding. The chief and comprehensive qualification required of persons manning these stations is that they have, besides a command of the processes they are to perform, a knowledge of the limitations of the services that can profitably be undertaken at such stations—of what materials ought and ought not to be given "plastic" first aid and what items are beyond the stage where they can be treated outside of the bindery.

R. E. Kingery, elsewhere in this issue, in his treatment of "The

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Bindery Within the Library," has already admirably discussed the pertinent problems relating to personnel considerations for a library's own bindery. These topics require no elaboration here except, perhaps, to underscore the fact that the services of skilled bindery workers are not at all easy to secure. There are, however, certain organizations that can perform "clearinghouse" functions for inquiries about the availability of personnel. For example, craft groups like the Guild of Book Workers, an affiliate of the American Institute of Graphic Arts with headquarters in New York City, can sometimes assist with requests for craftsmen in the field of hand bookbinding and in restoration work. Some of the trade unions, on the other hand, would be more appropriate agencies to which to apply for information on workers trained in machine binding or those having specific skills limited to individual binding operations. Publications like *Book Production* (formerly *Bookbinding and Book Production*) and some of the printing journals can be used for advertising. And the Library Bindery Institute and the A.L.A.'s Committee on Bookbinding could possibly provide some help, although the location of personnel is not one of their primary objectives. On-the-job training of workers by a competent foreman will ordinarily be the means of supplying a good part of the personnel needs of binderies within most libraries once they have been set up.

A possible solution to a part of the binding problems of some of our smaller libraries that are unable to bear the costs of maintaining a bindery or repair shop of their own, but for which these facilities are in great need, is to consider whether there exists the opportunity for some sort of cooperative enterprise program with other nearby institutions which may be operating under similar circumstances of need. The matter, nevertheless, should be weighed very carefully in all its aspects—both with regard to costs and service—before any action is taken. Under ideal conditions it might well prove to be economically feasible for two or more libraries to set up a small, jointly-maintained shop to handle their bindery services.

Before leaving the subject of binding and book repair it may be well to point out for the benefit of librarians who may find themselves faced with problems in this field, but who lack an adequate background of training or experience to cope with them readily, certain published works that might be helpful in meeting these problems. Self-education, it should be realized, is an important feature of personnel considerations in the field of conservation, where so little knowledge is or can be derived from academic instruction.

The *Library Binding Manual*, prepared by L. N. Feipel and E. W.

Browning under the direction of the Joint Committee of the A.L.A. and the Library Binding Institute is a most helpful guide, and a copy should be handily within reach.¹⁰ A good general work on binding, such as Edith Diehl's *Bookbinding: Its Background and Techniques*,¹¹ is also a desideratum, and the Government Printing Office's *Theory and Practice of Bookbinding* will prove a very worth-while introductory text.¹² Mention must be made, also, of two other books that ought not under any circumstances be neglected: H. M. Lydenburg and John Archer's *The Care and Repair of Books*¹³ and Douglas Cockerell's *Bookbinding, and the Care of Books*.¹⁴

But what of some of the other more specialized classes of materials included among a library's resources to which conservation services must also be directed, but which cannot ordinarily be provided for with the same binding and repair treatment that is given to ordinary books, periodicals, newspapers, and the like? It has already been suggested that in our larger libraries where special departments exist to administer certain kinds of materials it may be advisable for the specialists in charge of such collections to share in the responsibility for conservation activities. In most instances the librarians of such custodial units will possess as part of their professional training a comprehensive command of the factors involved in the care, preservation, and restoration of the materials with which they deal, and under such circumstances their expert competence should, obviously, be relied upon to supply the need for such services to their collections.

Materials from rare books collections are, for example, usually best handled by or under the direction of their curators or custodians, who ordinarily have a strong background of knowledge about the binding and repair of rarities. In an admirably terse fashion, a committee of the Friends of the Columbia Libraries has set forth what might be termed the minimum qualifications for those overseeing rare books conservation:

It is not suggested that the collector or the librarian himself be an expert binder or restorer. Both of them, however, should be able to recognize the nature of the problem when they see leather bindings turning into powdery dust, hinges cracking, boards severed from their backs or the text badly foxed. They should have the technical knowledge to judge the qualifications of those to whom they entrust the delicate job of preservation or restoration, and to know that the processes employed have been sound and well executed. To follow any other course is fraught with danger and may even result in serious damage to rare or irreplaceable material or its total loss.¹⁵

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In large libraries rare books departments have often set up their own special binding stations, frequently as adjuncts of the library central bindery where such exists. These are staffed by a master binder, whose presence within the department permits work to be done under the direct and close supervision of the curator and the materials to be handled with added security. A well-illustrated article in the February 1949, issue of *Bookbinding and Book Production* gives the details of the establishment and operation of a self-contained bindery unit for rare books at the Clark Library of the University of California at Los Angeles.¹⁶

The same approach is recommended for special departments administering non-book materials, as where libraries possess manuscripts collections and, as is often the case with colleges and universities especially, archives. If there is a manuscripts curator or archivist, or if these resources are administered by the rare book staff, it will be best to have these specialists take responsibility for their physical care. Where the program of acquisition of such resources is extensive, it may be necessary to provide one or more persons to constitute a special unit for repair and preservation services. Some of the functions associated with this work, such as the preliminary cleaning and flattening, are not complicated and will not require highly skilled workers. Others, like the washing of manuscripts, the removal of stains, and performing reinforcing processes, call for expert treatment; and qualified restorers are not easily found. Libraries installing laminating machines will usually have their operators trained by the firm selling the equipment. In connection with laminating W. J. Barrow has suggested that, "In some institutions a good knowledge of book binding is required previous to the training in restoration work." He states that a period of apprenticeship of "at least three to four years produces the best craftsmen," and that all of his own pupils thus far have had "at least a high school education."¹⁷

The librarian having only minor manuscripts holdings with infrequent problems of their care and preservation may use as a handbook Adelaide E. Minogue's *The Care and Preservation of Records*,¹⁸ published as a National Archives bulletin, to which Mrs. Minogue has appended a splendid bibliography. Mary A. Benjamin in her *Autographs: A Key to Collecting* also provides a helpful section on manuscripts preservation, written in a non-technical vein for the layman.¹⁹

With extensive map collections, too, the map librarian can normally be relied on to perform conservation services on his holdings. Lacking such a person, the librarian with no specialized training in

the field will want to refer to the information provided in Clara E. LeGear's *Maps: Their Care, Repair and Preservation in Libraries*²⁰ and L. A. Brown's *Notes on the Care & Cataloging of Old Maps*.²¹

This same approach, should, in similar manner, be followed in providing conservation services for other specialized classes of library materials: their care should be placed in the hands of a well-qualified custodian if he is present, or such other available conservation personnel as may exist and who may have experience in treating such resources, or, these alternatives failing, the librarian will need to refer to the best sources of information on the preservation of the particular kind of materials in question.

Taking as the basis for our consideration the broad view of conservation espoused by Barr, as a 'cradle-to-grave' concern with all library resources, there are still other services for which personnel must be supplied.

The important function of inspection and care of materials in the library's stacks has been treated earlier in this issue by R. J. Schunk in his article "Stack Problems and Care." The question of whether stack personnel should constitute a separate administrative unit within the library organization is a subject over which there has been some controversy, but it is a problem that cannot be adequately treated here in its many and varying aspects. In this connection, it must be urged, however, that whatever organizational structure is adopted, the person responsible for stack management, if he is not directly under the supervision of the library's general conservation services officer, should at least work in close cooperation with him. All personnel working in the stacks should, of course, be fully aware of proper shelving practices and should direct their activities accordingly, and they should be on the alert at all times for items requiring repair. If the cleaning of library materials is a function carried on by the library's building maintenance staff rather than by personnel immediately under the stack officer, the latter should be allowed to prescribe in specific terms how any and all of such operations shall be performed.

It has been observed that "the lack of systematic conservation is often the result of poor layout of the library building and the lack of effective or adequate equipment."²² This points up the necessity of the conservation officer having among his qualifications not only a knowledge of the effects upon the physical well being of library resources of temperature, light, humidity, and other climatic factors and an ability to deal with these problems within the restrictions imposed by his own building arrangements, but also an awareness of

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the variety of equipment that is available and its relative merits for meeting the various storage and housing requirements of materials. The conservation officer will, moreover, be required to be ready and able to cope with such unromantic concerns as insect and vermin control.

There is a growing need for investigation and experimentation in the field of conservation, and this, too, involves a personnel consideration. Referring to P. E. Clapp's article "A Technical Research Laboratory for the Library,"²³ L. R. Wilson and Tauber in *The University Library* observe:

The suggestion has been made that the study of such problems as materials, fabrics, lettering, sizing, paper preservation, reproductive techniques, preservation from mildew, extermination of insects and vermin, and leather preservation, as well as other technical matters of modern-day librarianship, should be investigated by a technical research laboratory, supported co-operatively by major university, public, and reference libraries. It has also been suggested that each large library should have an individual on its staff who would serve as a general research assistant to investigate technical problems of conservation. In those university libraries which have binderies, this arrangement exists to some extent.²⁴

Finally, there is the basic matter, as mentioned at the beginning, of securing the cooperation and joint-effort of all library workers in the library's over-all program of conservation, and of assuring that this activity is intelligently and persistently carried on. Here is the point at which the conservation officer will be called upon not only to exercise the broad authority which it has been suggested he must possess to make the program efficiently workable, but, moreover, to summon up sufficient tactful persuasiveness to insure that the desired ends will be achieved without friction or acrimony. In an undertaking such as this, where the work is of such a vast scope and where so wide an area of the library's total operations and services is involved, it is essential that the spirit under which the program is carried forward be one of friendly harmony. It may prove desirable in the larger libraries to issue a staff information bulletin to give all employees an awareness of the problems of conservation, a knowledge of the nature and aims of the library's conservation activities, and some instructions on what functions each staff member is encouraged and expected to perform. Tauber in *Technical Services in Libraries* provides a section of commentary on the individual roles that should be played by certain of the library departments (acquisitions, cataloging, reference,

circulation, periodicals, and photography) and by the branch libraries in coordinating their conservation activities with particular regard to binding considerations.²⁵ This might well be expanded to cover a broader scope of concern with conservation matters. Perhaps, also, for an appropriately large library system a manual might be produced covering in detail specific approaches to different conservation problems and the procedures to be employed in performing conservation services. The alerting of key personnel to the appearance of writings bearing upon this field is important also.

The conservation officer's duties in enlisting the informed assistance of others in the program which he directs need not and should not be limited to staff members alone but may, as means and opportunity permit, be extended to library users as well. Ira L. Brown in an article entitled "Our Book Hospital"²⁶ interestingly tells of the thoughtfully-contrived dramatization used by one institution in impressing upon children the necessity of using their library books properly and with care. Activities with similar aims of educating the public to the requirements of conservation ought not to be neglected in dealing with all library patrons.

Some of the varied considerations centering upon the problem of personnel in conservation services have been touched upon and discussed. The vast differences that manifestly exist between our libraries make it impossible to prescribe validly the particulars for a standard or even an ideal organizational arrangement. Such structure will, as has been pointed out, depend upon the existing conditions and circumstances within the individual institutions. Similarly, and for the same reason, it is not possible to declare categorically just what the specific qualifications required of personnel will or ought to be and precisely what services they should be expected to perform. It has been urged that in approaching the question of staffing a conservation program libraries carefully survey their needs and their resources, both present and potential, for meeting these needs. No two institutions will be found to be exactly the same, and although it is, of course, desirable to learn from the experience of others, it is an unrealistic and hazardous approach to follow rigidly and precisely patterns established elsewhere or blindly to follow theoretical precepts that do not reflect all of the variables existing as a part of the distinct character of each of our libraries. An attempt has been made to suggest some of the areas of activity and concern and some of the important considerations of background and capability in matters of personnel, and

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to strike some kind of balance between over-generalization and over-specification in the treatment of these problems.

Because conservation itself has been a considerably neglected topic in our professional literature and in the discussions at our library association gatherings, questions of personnel in this area have been given but slight attention. Few studies have been undertaken and little writing done bearing directly upon this subject. It is to be hoped, however, that the period ahead will witness both an expanding interest and activity in personnel matters, as in conservation generally, and that as a result of this increased attention and concern we shall better serve our public of today and not be weighed in the balances and found wanting when, as L. C. Powell has put it, we are judged by the future on the basis of "how wisely we have conserved the research treasure which we inherited, increased, and willed to our successors."²⁷

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