The Library Binder

MATT T. ROBERTS

Library binding is the business of supplying specialized binding services to institutional, private, public, and other libraries. The Library Binding Institute (which may be defined as a trade association of commercial library bookbinders in the United States and Canada, suppliers to the bookbinding industry, and institutional bookbinders) further defines certified library binding as bookbinding meeting the minimum specifications necessary to produce a volume which will achieve two objectives: (1) to meet the requirements of libraries for an end product capable of withstanding the rigors of normal library circulation or use, and (2) to provide maximum reader usability. The Library Binding Institute (LBI) goes on to say that “only binding, including rebinding, prebinding and periodical binding, in accordance with the standard is LIBRARY BINDING, but nothing in this standard excludes other types of binding, whether superior or inferior to LIBRARY BINDING, for library use, as determined by a librarian and his Certified Library Binder for any specific purposes.”

The qualification offered by LBI gives its definition a degree of plausibility which it otherwise would not have, because the definition without that qualification would not serve the total library community. One would have to ask which library and what user is intended. Insofar as this writer is aware, no one has ever adequately defined “rigors of normal circulation or use,” or “maximum reader usability.” Unless qualified, the definition fails to take into consideration the obvious fact that there are many different libraries serving widely differing clienteles, and the binding which serves the needs of one library may well be completely unsatisfactory when applied to those of another. A children’s librarian, for example, may require a bright, attractive binding that can withstand the efforts of a user to tear it

Matt T. Roberts is Binding Officer, Preservation Office, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

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apart, whereas the reference librarian of a research library may require a plain, unadorned flexible binding, yet one sturdy enough to be photocopied without splitting the spine.

Perhaps it is not possible to provide only one definition of library binding that will adequately serve all types of libraries. It would be just as logical, for example, to define library binding as binding which will produce a product that will endure as long as the paper on which the book is printed, or as long as the library chooses to retain the book, whichever comes first. If all libraries pursued the same acquisition and weeding policies, and if all books were printed on the same quality of paper, such a definition might serve. Obviously it cannot, except possibly to the extent that some of the very largest research libraries retain all of their books until they literally turn to dust.

However one chooses to define it, library binding, regardless of cost, should provide a book that will: (1) open easily and lie reasonably flat at any place in the text to which it is opened; (2) retain its solidity and shape after repeated openings, including the extreme opening required for photocopying; and (3) be bound in such a manner that, should rebinding become necessary, the basic structure of the first binding will not make rebinding unduly expensive or impossible.

SERVICES OFFERED BY THE LIBRARY BINDER

The services offered by the library binder include: class "A" library binding, prebinding (also called prelibrary or reconstructed binding), textbook binding, edition binding, storage binding (also called LUM-SPECS, and warehouse work), adhesive binding (also called perfect or unsewn binding), blank-book binding, pamphlet binding, binding of Bibles, fine binding (i.e., rare book binding, not artistic binding), binding of music materials, law book binding, theses binding, general repair work, and mounting of maps and works of art on paper.

Class A binding is the very heart of library binding. It is the library binder’s bread and butter, and the foundation on which the LBI stands. By definition, it applies to the binding of serials and monographs; in practice, however, it applies principally to the binding of serial publications (the most expensive style of regular library binding, accounting for about 60 percent of the typical library binder's business). Class A binding includes the binding of:

(a) Any ordinary-sized graphic material consisting of an appreciable number of leaves or folded sheets produced originally as a unit
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and submitted for binding, rebinding, prebinding, or sold pre-bound as such a unit, and not requiring special handling; (b) A series of multileaved, like-constituted, serially numbered graphic units submitted for binding or rebinding into a scheduled multi-unit volume and not requiring special handling; and (c) Any underdized, oversized or odd-sized volume, or any volume that requires special handling.8

Prebinding is the rebinding of edition, or publishers', bindings before they are received by the library (or before they are put into circulation), and is designed to provide a strong binding capable of withstanding the rigors of use made of books by the clientele of a circulating library. Prebinding may also include binding from gatherings or (rarely) sheets. The LBI also has a standard for this style of binding.10

Textbook binding is actually the rebinding of worn books for educational institutions. It is an economical style of binding, since the binder generally receives dozens (or even hundreds) of copies of the same title and is able to realize economies, such as precutting boards and cloth, that he cannot realize with most other styles. Textbook binding, for the most part, is also carried out during the summer months, when other binding activities are at a relatively low level.

Edition binding is the binding of numerous copies of a single title from sheets. Large edition binderies generally do not like to accept orders for a relatively small number of copies, because the equipment setup time is lengthy and therefore expensive; consequently, library binders having the necessary basic machinery (or access to that machinery)—notably folding machines, three-knife trimmers, etc.—will edition-bind small runs (e.g., 1,500 copies) of a title.

Storage binding is the binding of infrequently used materials according to the Specifications for Binding Lesser Used Materials, the so-called LUMSPECS.11

Adhesive binding is a form of library binding which does not utilize sewing. The leaves are secured by means of a hot-melt or cold (resinous) adhesive. Adhesive binding can be done by hand; however, it is better done by means of an adhesive-binding machine, such as the Sulby (hot-melt) or Ehlerman (resinous). This is a very economical style of binding.

Blank-book binding generally refers to the binding (or rebinding) of such materials as county or court record books, i.e., books meant to be written in, and which must, therefore, lie almost perfectly flat.
when open. This is a very specialized style of binding, calling for special sewing to webbings, and sometimes for split boards, a spring-back, round corners, and so on. Blank-book binding is undertaken by relatively few library binders and is expensive. This style of binding, insofar as library binders are concerned, does not include mass-production work, such as padding or checkbook binding, which is the work of the job binder.

Pamphlet binding is the binding of very thin monographs, i.e., those consisting of one signature or a relatively small number of leaves. The term pamphlet binding, which derives from the time when the writing of discourses on political, moral and social issues was popular, is unfortunate in that it is confused with the work of the pamphlet binder, whose activities include such diverse items as periodical issues and telephone books.

The binding of Bibles—which is almost invariably rebinding—is rather specialized work, but is nonetheless done by many library binders. It is specialized in that the Bibles are often bound in limp leather covers which have extending squares (Yapp style), sometimes with zippers, and have round corners. If the binder must trim in the course of rebinding, he may spray or otherwise color the edges.

Fine binding usually refers to the rebinding (or restoration) of valuable books, usually in leather, but it would also include the binding of keepsakes, presentation books, table books, diaries, signature books, and the like. The term is something of a misnomer in that most, if not all, such binding is case work and not "in-board" binding.

The binding of music materials is accorded a separate category because it is often necessary to sew music materials through the folds so that the publications may, if necessary, stand open and flat on stands. Music books also frequently require pockets and compensation guards.

Law-book binding is distinctive largely because law books are commonly covered in so-called law (tan) buckram in imitation of the fawn-colored calfskin they once were bound in. They frequently have red and black (paper) labels in lieu of the title skivers used when they were bound in leather.

Newspaper binding is somewhat different because of the size of the publications, and because some require whip-stitching. The margins of newspapers are usually so narrow that they cannot be sidesewn or oversewn.

Thesis binding—a highly lucrative business for those library
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binders fortunate enough to get it—might actually be considered job binding, or even a form of edition binding, except that it is done almost exclusively by library binders.

The mounting of maps, works of art on paper, etc., is a very specialized type of work better left to those who are experts in the field. General repair work includes tipping-in of loose leaves, maps, charts, etc.; refolding maps; repair of hinges; and the like. Some library binders will even attempt to salvage smoke- and/or water-damaged books.

Few library binders undertake to offer all of the services outlined above. Indeed, it is the unusual library binder who does edition binding, fine binding, blank-book binding, and extensive repair and/or restoration work.

THE LIBRARY BINDER AND THE GRAPHIC ARTS INDUSTRY

The library binder, while representing only a tiny part of the graphic arts industry, is almost unique. Library binding differs from edition, pamphlet and paperback binding in one important respect: unlike those forms of binding, it relies heavily on handwork, supplemented by the use of specialized machinery such as nippers, smashing machines, rounding and backing machines, guillotines, and hydro-presses—all of which are also to be found in the edition bindery, but usually in larger and more sophisticated forms. Since it does involve so much handwork, it is inherently a style of bookbinding which is more expensive than most other kinds of commercial binding. Library binding is not, and probably never will be, highly mechanized, mainly because the library binder does not bind large runs, e.g., 10,000, 50,000, or 200,000 identical copies of a single title. The library binder must treat each book as a separate item, although he can rough-sort by size.

The 200 or so library binders in the United States and Canada gross roughly $40 million per year, of which approximately $30 million is taken in by the fifty or so certified library binders. The industry has expanded rapidly in the past twenty years, as evidenced by the fact that it grossed approximately $3 million in 1955. All types of libraries utilize in some way the services of the library binder (see Table 1).
TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Library</th>
<th>Percent Industry Average of Sales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Libraries</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools (Elementary, junior and high)</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior colleges</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges and universities</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal government</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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SELECTING A LIBRARY BINDER

The selection of a library binder can be a difficult and uncertain process, unless the only criterion is low price, in which case the official can simply accept the lowest bid or cheapest price list. On the other hand, if the librarian is interested in the highest quality regardless of cost (and surprisingly, there are libraries that can afford this luxury), the problem possibly becomes even more complicated because the highest bid or the binder with the highest price list may not offer the highest quality. Somewhere between these two extremes the librarian should be able to locate a binder who offers good quality at a fair price. The problem is finding him.

In order to be successful, a library binding program must be built on mutual understanding and cooperation between the librarian and the binder. Library binding does not represent the sale of a commodity, but of a service. In a sense, the library binder is actually an extension of the library. The really good library binder knows something about the library he binds for—the use to which the books will be put, the purpose of the library, the clientele it serves, and the like. He must know, in other words, which kind of binding the library needs. On the other side, the librarian should become informed about bookbinding in general, and good binding in particular, in order to be able to communicate his needs intelligently and accurately. If the binder does not know what the library expects in the way of binding,

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obviously he cannot supply it. Conversely, if the librarian does not know what the binder is capable of offering—the state of his technology, the experience of his staff, the quality of his materials, new materials he may have developed or identified, the degree of training and abilities of his supervisory personnel (an all important consideration because the quality of work produced by any library binder is directly related to the quality of his supervisory personnel)—he may demand too much of the binder or, what is worse, too little.

It is essential for the library to find a competent library binder and retain his services permanently, assuming he continues to do a good job. This is important because it takes several years for both parties to work out the many details involved in a successful binding program. It is very difficult to maintain a mutually satisfactory binding program if the library changes binders every year, or even every few years.

There are several possible approaches the library can pursue in its search for a competent library binder. The librarian may simply write to the LBI and ask for the names of several member binderies. Such an approach, however, excludes binders who may be highly qualified but are not members of the institute. As a second approach, the librarian can visit several binderies, inspect their facilities, look at their work, and judge for himself whether or not they are qualified to bind for his library. This method can be expensive and time-consuming, since there are not many library binders and the nearest one may be several hundred miles away. In addition, it can be difficult to assess the quality of binding unless one has time to inspect thoroughly the work he is shown. The third possibility, and one which several libraries (or groups of libraries) have found worthwhile, is to request interested binderies to submit samples of their work for inspection and evaluation.

The purpose of such samples is to eliminate from further consideration those binders who cannot produce binding meeting the library’s needs or specifications. It is important, therefore, for the library to have some statement of specifications, even if they are purely eclectic in nature and draw heavily on the LBI’s own minimum specifications, which cover class A binding reasonably well. The library’s own specifications can cover binding other than class A binding, as well as fold-sewing, trimming, margins, procedures for handling special format materials, brittle paper, adhesives, chemicals, and even when not to bind.

Sets of samples should be as uniform as possible, so that all binderies work with the same problems. The samples should also
const of books representing the normal work the library expects to have done during the course of the contract. It is pointless, for example, for the library to ask for an example of binding a Braille book if the library does not acquire books in Braille. The same may be said for newspapers, portfolios, slipcases, etc.

THE SAMPLE

A typical set of samples might include:

1. A periodical volume made up of thick issues with relatively narrow margins or even center spreads. This will pose a special problem, since such a publication must be sewn through the folds. The thick issues will also make it difficult to round and back the book properly. It is a fair test, however, because the binder who can bind such a serial properly will also be able to bind ordinary serials equally well or better. It is an unfortunate fact that some library binders cannot (or will not) cope with unusual binding problems.

2. A monograph one and one-half to two inches thick, with an inner margin adequate for oversewing (at least three-fourths of an inch and preferably more). This type of sample will indicate whether the binder is capable of binding a book according to the LBI's minimum specifications.

3. A monograph one or more inches thick having an inner margin of less than three-fourths inch, which the binder has been instructed to tape-sew. This will indicate whether the binders have the personnel to sew a book by hand on tapes. (Some binders cannot or will not do this.)

4. A monograph approximately one-half inch thick, which is to be adhesive-bound using a hot-melt adhesive. The binder should be instructed not to round and back this book, and to cover it in a cloth lighter than buckram, such as “C” cloth. Some library binders do not have the equipment for this style of binding, and adhesive-binding can be expensive when done by hand.

5. A very thin publication, e.g., a single periodical issue, to be covered in a light cloth, as above, and without rounding and backing. Casing-in a thin book can be a troublesome operation, especially in obtaining a proper joint.

6. A monograph of any thickness more than one-half inch, containing fold-outs, maps, etc., as well as pocket material. This will indicate how well the binder can make both a pocket and a compensation
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guard. It will also determine whether he checks for fold-outs, etc.,
before trimming the fore edge.

7. A publisher's binding with instructions to rebind. The original
sewing should be weak in all samples, or strong in all, so that each
binder will have to decide whether to resew or retain the original
sewing.

Each prospective binder is sent a sample package, a copy of the
library's specifications, a list of instructions, and a deadline beyond
which the sample will not be accepted.

The logic of using a sample to determine which binders are
qualified is simple. If a library binder cannot do a good job on a
sample of seven volumes, especially when he knows he will not be
considered for the contract if his sample fails, then he is certainly not
going to be able to do even a satisfactory job on the library's yearly
work, be it 700 or 70,000 volumes. A sample is an effective means of
permitting a library binder to demonstrate that he is capable of
meeting the standards the industry has established for itself, as well as
satisfying the individual library's specifications. It can be of use in
eliminating the incompetent binder, which in itself will be of benefit
both to the industry and libraries.

Judging of the sample should be rigorous and the passing score
should be high, i.e., 85-90 percent. The prospective binders should be
informed of the passing score, and warned that no work may be
subcontracted. They should also be informed that failure to follow
instructions (a not uncommon shortcoming among library binders) or
excessive trimming will result in loss of all points for that particular
book.

EVALUATING THE SAMPLE

The most convenient manner in which to evaluate the sample is to
prepare a chart listing the pertinent aspects of a binding. A 100-point
score for each book is convenient; however, the pamphlet and adhe-
sive binding should be scored below 100, because they are not
rounded and backed. It should be noted that those persons judging
the samples should not know the source of any sample, in order to
eliminate any accusation of bias. An evaluation sheet should consist of
the following elements.

1. Failure to follow instructions and/or excessive trimming—loss of
all points for that book.
2. Followed instructions and did not overtrim:
   a. Sewing or adhesive structure (one of the following)
      Sewing through the folds
      good “openability”
      tapes properly spaced
      sewing thread of proper weight
      tapes extended onto boards
      Oversewing
      good “openability”
      minimum back margin taken by sanding and sewing
      sewing uniform and not ragged
      sewing does not extend all the way to head and tail
      Adhesive structure
      leaves firmly secured
      depth of penetration of adhesive onto leaves adequate
   b. Endpapers
      construction suitable to book
      width of tipping not too great
      absence of drag on first and last leaves
      correct weight of paper
      grain direction of paper parallel to spine
   c. Trimming
      square
      smooth
   d. Rounding and backing
      shape of round
      shoulders even along length of book
      depth of shoulders equal to thickness of boards
      signatures or leaves properly folded over to form round and
      backing
   e. Spine lining
      well attached
      proper material and of proper weight
      second (kraft paper) lining over first lining on books sewn
      through the folds or books more than two inches thick
      lining extended onto boards
   f. Case-making
      covering material well secured to boards
      properly pressed (absence of wrinkles or other defects in
      covering; no adhesive on covers)
**PRINCIPAL QUALITIES OF A WELL-BOUND BOOK**

Several writers have described the principal qualities of a well-bound book, including Bailey, Clough, Cockerell, Coutts and Stephen, and the Library Binding Institute.\(^1\) Basically, the qualities are:

1. The signatures or leaves are solidly secured, with no starts or unevenness at the fore edge and no splitting in the spine.
2. The book opens easily and lies reasonably flat at any place in the text.
3. The spine is thoroughly glued up and appropriately lined, so that repeated opening does not cause the book to lose its shape.
4. Tapes and/or spine lining extend well onto boards (one to one and one-half inches).
5. The endpapers do not pull at the first and last leaves, i.e., there should be no drag due to excessive width of tipping.
6. The spine is rounded to an arc of approximately one-third of a circle and the shoulders created by backing are of an extent equal to the thickness of the boards.
7. Trimming is minimal (no more than one-eighth inch) and is straight and smooth.
8. The boards and covering material are of a weight (thickness) appropriate to the size of the book.
9. The covering material and board papers adhere firmly in the joints and to the boards.
10. Squares are appropriate to the size of the book.
11. A reasonably thick book (one-half inch or more) stands vertically with no support.
12. When the book is lying flat the upper cover remains flat, and when the book stands by itself the covers remain closed.
13. The lettering is accurate, properly positioned, and legible.
14. The binding is clean, neat, and shows evidence of good workmanship.

TRENDS IN LIBRARY BINDING

Before 1900, binders who did work for libraries did so entirely by hand and as more or less a sideline, their principal source of income being work done for private collectors. There was no distinctive style of library binding as such, nor was there any library binding industry. Frank Barnard, one of the earliest library binders, was able to say as late as 1929 that "binderies devoted exclusively to rebinding [that is, library binding] are of quite recent origin; most of them are less than fifteen years old and few go back twenty-five years." The library binding industry emerged as a separate sector of the bookbinding industry "because of the increase in the circulation of books by public and semi-public libraries, and because of the general use of free text-books in the public schools."

Prior to the rise of library binding as we know it today, library books were always sewn on tapes. The use of four tapes was traditional, but the number varied with the size of the book. The tapes were secured between split boards and the book was covered in full or half leather. This was the economy binding of that day. The increasing number of books in public and school libraries, however, called for an even more economical style of binding.

The concept of oversewing is not new. It was in common use at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, although not in its present form. Various forms of whip-stitching, overcasting, etc., went through periods of experimentation, enjoying varying degrees of success. It was not until 1904, when Sir Cedric Chivers patented his method of oversewing, that library binding as we know it had its start. This early form of modern oversewing was, of course, done by hand, and it was not until the period 1916-22 that Elmo Reavis and his associates were able to design and put into operation a machine that oversewed. Machine oversewing began a relatively rapid growth in the early 1920s and became the dominant form of library sewing by the early 1930s.
Librarian Binder

Oversewing is the principal method of securing the leaves of books in the library bindery, at least in the United States; however, in the opinion of this writer, it is currently being challenged, and will be challenged to an even greater extent in the immediate future by one or more of the methods of adhesive-binding in use today. There are two reasons why this will take place. One reason is that publishers are issuing more and more books that are adhesive-bound rather than sewn and, although this in itself does not preclude oversewing, the adhesive binding seems to go hand in hand with diminishing binding margins, which in turn frequently precludes oversewing. Other publications, notably periodicals, are also being published with narrower margins.

If the cost of paper continues to rise (and there is no indication that it will not), the margins will continue to diminish. While as recently as ten years ago the average journal issue had a binding margin of about three-fourths of an inch (which is about the minimum margin needed for oversewing that is to have any openability whatsoever), the average journal today has a binding margin closer to one-half inch.

The second reason relates to the economics of library binding. Just as oversewing is considerably less expensive than hand sewing, so is adhesive-binding considerably less expensive than class A binding. Adhesive binding is faster, and speed is the economy. In addition, more skill is required to operate an oversewing machine than to operate an adhesive-binding machine.

The rising costs of materials and labor, particularly the latter, will force library binders to seek more ways in which to reduce costs, and adhesive-binding is a most appealing way. A given library binder may not like adhesive binding, but if the alternative to adhesive binding is bankruptcy, he has little choice.

One can see other trends, also. Many, if not most, of the early American library bookbinders were craftsmen, and some were highly skilled in the craft of bookbinding. That day is coming to an end. Many of today's library bookbinders, and probably all of tomorrow's, are economy-motivated individuals who may well be competent businessmen, but they are not bookbinders. They will continue to seek (and undoubtedly find) faster and more economical ways to bind a library book. It can only be hoped that what they find will prove to be in the best interest of the library and its book collection.

There is also the trend, at least in college and university libraries, toward taking the responsibility for library binding away from the professional librarian (where it belongs) and giving it to the business
manager of the institution. All too often this individual is interested solely in obtaining the lowest-cost binding possible, regardless of quality. If this trend continues, it can only have a deleterious effect on library binding.

References

17. Ibid., p. 235.
21. Ibid.