The Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG) is a forum for conservators whose
responsibilities include the treatment of large numbers of library materials. These materials, usually books
and pamphlets, comprise the library’s general collection, but can also include materials from the special
collection. Although usually not cataloged “rare,” they are often difficult or impossible to replace. Most of
these items circulate, and some, like reference books (which may also be irreplaceable), get plenty of hard use.

Distinctiveness and uniqueness in the general collections, as in the special collections, are distinguishing
features among great libraries. Libraries have always provided for the repair of their general collection
materials as well as their unique holdings. When a volume is in need of repair there are several options
available: replace it with another copy, send it to a commercial bindery, reformat it if it is brittle, or send it
to a conservator if it’s unique or extremely valuable. There are materials for which none of these choices are
appropriate and it is the repair of these materials that is the focus of the Library Collections Conservation
Discussion Group.

The ethical responsibility of conservators requires that we treat all materials with equal respect,
regardless of monetary value, yet many thousands of books have suffered a loss of integrity due to the use
damaging repair techniques and poor quality materials. Conservators and librarians share an interest in
the management and implementation of conservation programs that care for these materials. The library
community asked conservators to take the lead in establishing guidelines to inform book repair practices
nationally. In response, LCCDG, with the strong support of the Book and Paper Group and the Board of AIC,
is attempting to do so within AIC.

Treatment of non-rare materials is commonly called book repair. The term, while descriptive, lacks a
sense of the changing approach to repair. Most research libraries have had or continue to have a “mendery”
where repair work takes place. In progressive libraries this unit has been absorbed by the conservation lab
and the preservation department and is supervised by a conservator or a preservation librarian. Repair work
has been performed, for the most part, by people with bookbinding training, students, or volunteers.

In order to get a sense of the current state of book repair in research libraries, LCCDG organized a
meeting immediately following the AIC annual conference in Buffalo. The primary goal of the meeting was
to bring book conservators and technicians together and offer them an informal environment in which to
discuss and handle examples of their various approaches to repair work. Twenty five exhibits served as a
catalyst for this “conversation.” Exhibitors brought examples of the repair work they perform, at their
institution or commercial facility and displayed them on tables totalling 150 linear feet of display space. Each
sample was accompanied by an identification label describing the circumstances under which it was
appropriate to perform the technique, the types of materials used, execution time, etc. Exhibitors also drafted
an institutional profile to help place their work within a programmatic context.

Throughout the morning of this unique event, participants looked intently at the work; the atmosphere
in the room was one of concentration and quiet conversation. After lunch we met as a group for an hour and
a half. Approximately 130 people attended the meeting; participants were primarily book or paper conser-
vators. We were gratified to find that the meeting attracted a number of book repair technicians and librarians
as well, most of whom had never attended an AIC annual conference before.

The descriptions that follow are the institutional profiles contributed by exhibitors. The full text of
those profiles, including technical descriptions of the work exhibited in Buffalo, is slated for publication as
one in a series of Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Studies SPEC Kits. The profiles
provide a glimpse into this evolving component of our profession. Many of the contributors included a brief
history of repair at their institution. Other contributors wrote about their philosophical approach to repair;
others provided us with an organizational overview. The content and structure of the profiles was intended
to be loose. Exhibitors were asked not to regurgitate statistics, but to describe what they felt was most
important about their program and to concentrate on those elements that would be of greatest interest to their
peers.
We would like to thank Sara Wolf Green and the AIC Board, Robert Espinosa, Jane Dalrymple-Hollo, and the Book and Paper Group Board for making the Buffalo meeting possible and for supporting LCCDG's effort to define, in the words of a prominent book conservator, "Book Repair for the 90's." We are also very grateful to the following institutions and commercial facilities who contributed to this meeting as exhibitors:

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