Overview

The materials prepared for the June 8th meeting represent the type of work done by Conservation Services in Widener Library, the largest library in a decentralized system of research libraries within Harvard University. Widener houses 3.5 million volumes in the humanities and social sciences. Rare books and special collections are housed in the Houghton Library as well as other research libraries and are not treated by Widener’s facility.

Widener has repaired collections throughout its history. During the 1980’s, the facility changed its
approach from "quick repair" to fuller conservation treatment, modifying both its materials and its
techniques to reflect changes in library conservation. Doris Freitag provided guidance in her capacity as Book
Conservator for the Harvard University Library.

The current Preservation Department was established in November 1990 and is headed by Carolyn Clark
Morrow, Malloy-Rabinowitz Preservation Librarian. The Department consists of four divisions:

- Binding and Preparation
- Conservation Services
- Photographic Services
- Preservation Review

The Department is in the process of expanding its collections conservation program and coordinating
its activities with other Harvard libraries, aided by a conservation needs assessment prepared by Nancy
under the direction of Chief Conservator Nicholas Pickwoad will serve the artifact conservation needs of
libraries throughout the University. The lab will coordinate its activities with collections conservation
programs system-wide.

Conservation Services in Widener is supervised by a collections conservator and staffed by conserva­
tion technicians for a total of 3.5 FTE. The permanent staff are experienced so they are able to perform all of
the treatments currently done in Widener. Students and part-time employees provide, on average, an
additional 25 hours/week. The staff received their training in a variety of ways: formal training in Europe,
in-house training and experience, apprenticeships, and the North Bennett Street program. Staff also attend
local workshops on conservation or bookbinding topics. Additional formal training will become available
when the conservation laboratory opens.

Candidates for treatment are identified on an item-by-item basis by the Preservation Review Librarian,
who receives damaged items following circulation and routes them for binding, reformatting (both microfilm
and photocopy), or in-house repair. (See the flow chart for a description of this process). The average turn­
around time for repair is 2-3 weeks with rush service available to the Reading Room and Interlibrary Loan.

The staff is able to keep up with demand.

Conservation Services is also developing an approach toward treating whole collections and categories
of materials. During 1991-92, the staff conducted its first en masse treatment of a collection of 12,000 Widener
volumes that were being re-catalogued in preparation for shipment to the Harvard Depository, the off-site
storage repository. The project involved a survey of condition, analysis of needs, and implementation of a
range of treatments, including refurbishing, contract binding and conservation services, and deacidification
of selected illustrated volumes. The mass deacidification program in Widener will be expanded in FY93 to
include treatment of books scheduled for recasing or repair.

Example of collections conservation guidelines at Widener Library:
Criteria for treatment of cloth case bindings in Conservation Services

The following is a draft of the type of guidelines that are being developed to deal on the collections level
with specific categories of research material found in the Harvard College Library. The guidelines include
a historic justification and recommended treatment. Books may be deacidified prior to treatment, depending
upon paper type and condition.

Pre-1820/30 (hand binding). Prior to 1830, bookbinding was a hand craft, separate from the printing
and publishing trades. Bindings were not consistent for all copies of a book, and individual books can provide
evidence about binding history, ownership, and provenance.

Recommended treatment. These should be reviewed carefully by a subject specialist before being
rebound or repaired by a collections conservator. Treatment by a rare book conservator or boxing may
sometimes be more appropriate

1830-1900/10 (nineteenth century edition binding). After 1830, bookbinding gradually became
mechanized to keep pace with the demand for printing. Publishers' edition bindings replaced hand bindings
Preservation Workflow
for a worn, damaged, or deteriorated book in the research collections

Should this book be retained in the collection?

- Yes
  - Is the paper flexible?
    - Yes
      - Treat in-house or contract with an outside conservator
    - No
      - Withdraw
  - No
    - Box

- No
  - Box

Is the paper flexible?

- Yes
  - Does the binding have artifactual/historic value?
    - Yes
      - Repair in-house
    - No
      - Treat in-house or contract with an outside conservator
  - No
    - Box

Does the binding have artifactual/historic value?

- Yes
  - Is repair of the binding appropriate?
    - Yes
      - Repair the textblock and recase
    - No
      - Adhesive bind if appropriate
  - No
    - Box

- No
  - Deacidify individual leaves and construct a polyester book

Does the text or portions of it have artifactual/historic value?

- Yes
  - Is the textblock intact?
    - Yes
      - Repair
    - No
      - Recase
  - No
    - Purchase reprint

Is the textblock intact?

- Yes
  - Should this item be retained in book format?
    - Yes
      - Repair
    - No
      - Purchase reprint
  - No
    - Photocopy text and bind

- No
  - Purchase microfilm replacement

Has another library produced a preservation microfilm?

- Yes
  - Microfilm according to national standards, catalog, and report master negative to OCLC and NUC
    - No
      - Withdraw original
  - No
    - Rely on microform set

Has a commercial micro-publisher produced a microfilm or microfiche copy?

- Yes
  - Does Harvard already own a microfilm set that includes this title?
    - Yes
      - Purchase microfilm or microfiche replacement and catalog
    - No
      - Can the individual titles be purchased?
        - Yes
          - Purchase microfilm or microfiche replacement and catalog
        - No
          - Should the individual title be cataloged?

- No
  - Is the source reputable?
    - Yes
      - Microfilm according to national standards, catalog, and report master negative to OCLC and NUC
    - No
      - Withdraw original

Should the this title be produced on fiche or film?

- Yes
  - Should a photocopy facsimile also be produced?
    - Yes
      - Photocopy text and bind
    - No
      - Should the book be kept after filming?
        - Yes
          - Photocopy text and bind
        - No
          - Withdraw original
  - No
    - Purchase microfilm or microfiche replacement and catalog

Should this book be stored at HD?

- Yes
  - Should the individual titles be purchased?
    - Yes
      - Purchase microfilm or microfiche replacement and catalog
    - No
      - Should the individual title be cataloged?

- No
  - Box
that were made to order for the individual owner or bookseller. Bookbinding was mechanized slowly and, then nineteenth century edition binding retained elements of handwork well into the early part of the twentieth century. Collections conservation repair is recommended for these materials because the conservator or technician can respond to the irregularities of hand sewing and shaping of the original binding, retain evidence of original craftsmanship, and create a sound structure for long-term preservation. Commercial library binding is not appropriate because it is made to handle the perfectly square machine-made text blocks of twentieth century technology. Machine backing and buckram bindings are overly rigid and can damage the more fragile paper of older books, as well as being unsympathetic with the appearance of nineteenth century design.

Recommended treatment. Collections conservation repair, saving the original bindings; boxing; or rebinding in-house with new endpapers and cloth case.

Post 1900/1910 (machine-made case bindings). By the early twentieth century, all the processes of bookbinding had been mechanized. Since then, developments have focused on making the technology more efficient and faster through increased automation. Products of power machinery originally, these books can withstand standard machine procedures used by the library binder. Since design has been transferred from the stamped cloth cover to the dust jacket, it is usually not important to save the original covers. The exact cut-off date for defining this category of material is up for debate. It could be 1900 with the introduction of the casing-in machine, 1910 assuming it took a while for the machinery to be adopted, or 1920 and World War I as a historical moment.

Recommended treatment. Recasing by the commercial bindery unless there are special reasons to save the original boards (e.g., decorative covers or endpapers, provenance, or artifactual value).

Source of dates


It is important to note that this chronology is based on developments in America, which closely paralleled industrialization in England. Countries that did not participate in the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century will have different types of bindings. This is evident, for example, in the Judaica volumes from Eastern Europe where techniques of eighteenth century hand binding survive into the twentieth century. A different strategy will be necessary for these materials.