

**Harvard University**  
**Widener Library Conservation Services: Institutional Profile**  
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*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 Schrock, Conservation Consultant, during 1991-92. Beginning in October 1992, a conservation laboratory 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 conservation 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 turnaround time for repair is 2-3 weeks with rush service available to the Reading Room and Interlibrary Loan. At the moment, 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.

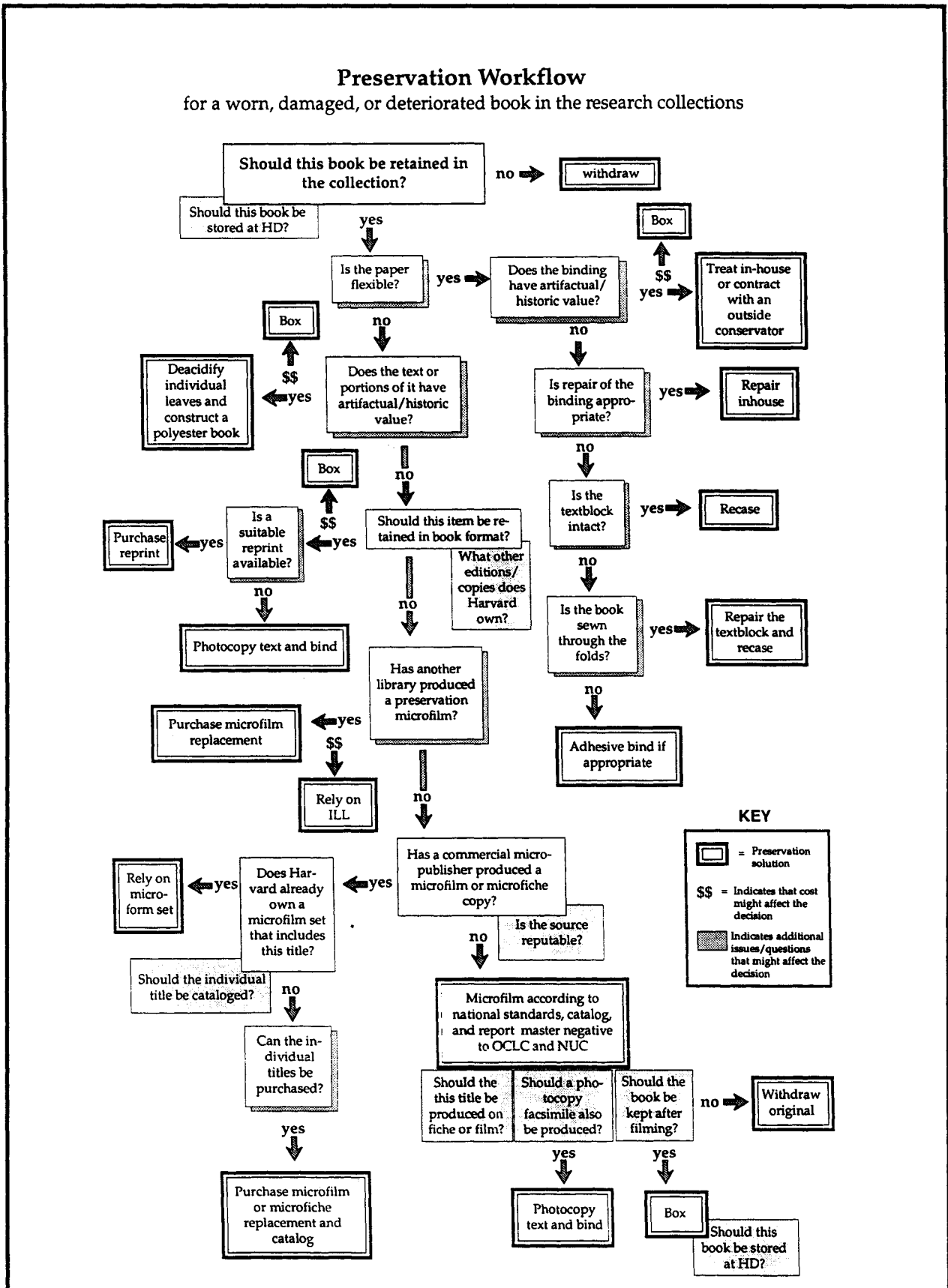
**Pre-1820/30 (hand binding).** Prior to 1830, bookbinding was a hand craft, separate from the printing and publishing trades. Bindings were not consistent for all copies of a book, and individual books can provide evidence about binding history, ownership, and provenance.

**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



that were made to order for the individual owner or bookseller. Bookbinding was mechanized slowly and, thenineteenth century edition binding retained elements of hand work 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*

Rogers, Joseph W. "The Rise of American Edition Binding" in *Bookbinding in America* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1967), and chronologies supplied by Pamela Spitzmueller in her *Advanced Conservation Workshop on Nineteenth Century Bindings at the University of Iowa*, 1990.

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.