

The Library of the New York Botanical Garden: Basic Collection Preservation Care Program

Judith Reed, Conservation Librarian
Bronx, New York

The Library of The New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx is one of the world's largest plant science literature collections. Founded originally to support the research and educational work of the Garden, it now serves a broadly defined public audience. It is the only major plant science library in the metropolitan New York City area and, with Cornell University, shares statewide responsibility for providing library and plant information services to the plant science research and academic community and to the public.

The New York Botanical Garden Library's research collection contains over 196,000 volumes (over 114,199 titles including 9,000 serial titles); over 108,509 reprints; 2,023 linear feet of archives and manuscripts; 28,097 microforms; 10,055 items of botanical art; over 150,000 architectural plans; and 3,600 artifacts.

A program of book preservation was begun in the Library in the mid-1960's in conjunction with a major collection recataloging project. When books were recataloged, they were cleaned, and those which needed care were put into wrappers or pamphlet bindings. As preservation efforts evolved and staff members were trained in binding and conservation, more sophisticated and current techniques and operations were possible. Eventually a program for book preservation emerged. It continues in practice today.

A descriptive outline of the process includes the following components. Books are cleaned and cataloged. Those volumes needing no further attention are returned to the shelves. Other materials are sent to the conservation staff for such basic preservation attention as wrappers (for brittle books or ones needing extensive conservation) or pamphlet bindings. Books requiring rebinding (including rebacking or recasing), as well as materials which need basic paper repair, are cared for in-house. When appropriate, a variety of preservation enclosures, such as clamshell boxes or slipcases, are made by the conservation staff.

Outside funds are regularly sought to cover costs of major conservation projects. Such work is generally carried out by The New York Botanical Garden Conservator in collaboration with outside contract conservators.

The recataloging of the collection has recently been completed. Books in need of preservation/conservation treatment will be drawn systematically from those identified in the item-specific surveys that have been carried out over the past several years, as well as those volumes brought to the attention of the Conservator by Library staff members and users. Books needed for specific purposes, such as exhibition, are given priority treatment.

The conservation staff consists of one full-time conservator and 3-5 volunteers. The Conservator holds

the title Conservation Librarian and serves as the preservation administrator, as well as the practicing conservator. The staff is non-union.

The Conservation Librarian received her training in bookbinding and book conservation from Laura Young in New York City. She holds the AMLS degree from the University of Michigan. Volunteers are trained and supervised by the Conservation Librarian. Most of the volunteers do a variety of preservation work, although some have a wider range of skills than others. The conservation Librarian determines the preservation treatment. When appropriate, such decisions are made after consultation with staff librarians.

The basic preservation repair unit is an integral part of the overall preservation program and shares space in the Conservation Bindery. The same budget covers all of the preservation activities.

The Library's approach to preservation care tends to be relatively conservative, reflecting both the Library staff philosophy and the Conservation Librarian's training under Laura Young. However, a 'do nothing' approach is not considered appropriate or acceptable. Techniques continue to evolve as new information becomes available in the field of library materials conservation.

The Conservation Librarian is encouraged to attend a wide variety of conferences, workshops, lectures, etc., to strengthen her skills, broaden her background, and remain up-to-date on new conservation information. She serves on a number of professional committees in both the fields of library conservation and librarianship.