

A Survey of Leather Conservation Practices

ABSTRACT

A survey of leather conservation practices was sent out to fellow conservators as well as allied professionals via various Listservs. The goal of this survey was to ascertain what types of treatments and repairs were currently being practiced on leather bindings in a variety of professional settings. The authors wish to present the results of this survey and analyze them to show the continuum of leather treatment within and without the conservation community, highlighting not only emerging trends and established treatments, but also when, why, and by whom more traditional treatments, such as leather dressing, are still being practiced.

The scope of the survey collected data in four areas. The first series of questions collected information on the survey respondents. The second collected data on different methods of repair for leather bound books and the different types of materials used for those repairs. The third set of questions collected information on materials used in treatments of original leather bindings, focusing on frequency of use of materials such as adhesives, dyes, surface consolidants, lubricants, and cosmetic surface treatments. The last set asked this same series of questions, but in regard to treatments on “new” leather used as a repair material.

The survey gathered detailed data from 57 respondents, many of whom are conservation professionals and support staff, but also with significant responses from library preservation staff, special collections professionals and staff, and book dealers. The results show that newer leather treatments are being integrated by conservation and its allied fields, but that traditional treatments such as the application of leather dressings and cleaning with saddle soap are also still used. Further analysis of how these respondents received their training may show a direct correlation between educational experience and the types of treatments they undertake, as well as other trends.

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