

Archival Products

NEWS

Sleeves and Posts: A Rehousing Option for Scrapbooks

by Henry Hebert

SCRAPBOOKS PRESENT A challenge for library preservation programs due to the range of structures and materials used in their creation. Typically constructed with poor quality materials, many scrapbooks from the early 20th century are deteriorating rapidly. Several print resources have been created since the early 1990s to discuss collection care strategies and treatment methods for scrapbooks; however, due to the unique nature of construction, the condition of individual items may require a more tailored treatment.

This article describes the rehousing of a 20th century scrapbook (Figure 1) by a student at the North Bennet Street School, using polyester L-sleeves and a post binding structure as a viable solution for allowing continued use in a codex format. This item presented a specific set of structural problems that barred any kind of handling without risk of further damage. While the treatment may not be appropriate for many scrapbooks from the same period, it is the author's hope that it will be of interest to custodians of scrapbook collections.



Figure 1: Scrapbook before treatment.

This item presented a specific set of structural problems that barred any kind of handling without risk of further damage.

Established in 1986, the bookbinding program at the North Bennet Street School in Boston is a two-year, full-time course in hand binding. Conservation topics and techniques are also addressed extensively throughout the curriculum and students are required to perform a range of book and paper treatments. Individuals from the surrounding community often contact the program with items from their collections that need work, and, in December of 2010, I was approached by an individual to repair one of her many family scrapbooks.

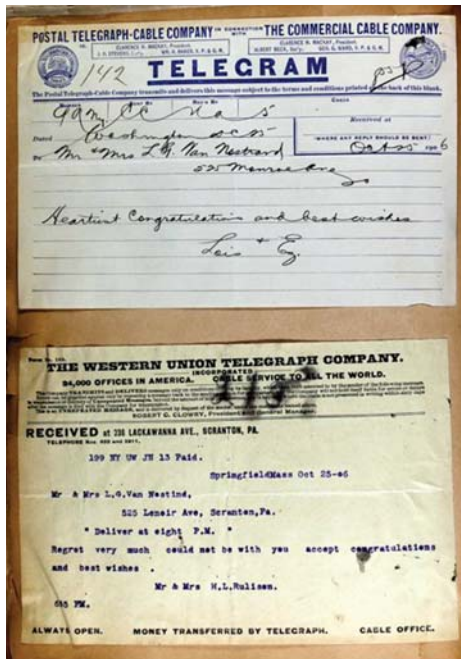


Figure 2: Page with two telegrams.



Figure 3: Page with adhered newspaper clippings and an embroidered dance card.



Figure 4: Spine of the book, showing stubs of detached pages.

Description and Condition

This particular volume (measuring 10" x 13" and over 6" thick) was created by the client's grandmother as a student at Cornell University. The dates of the content range from 1904 to 1916 and focus exclusively on correspondence with family members and life at the university. The binding had been so completely filled with ephemera that the original compensation built into the binding was overwhelmed and the boards had begun to warp around the over-packed textblock. Flat items that were adhered to the pages included newspaper clippings, printed invitations to school functions, manuscript letters, pencil drawings, and telegrams (Figure 2). Bound items that were adhered to the pages (or simply placed between them) included printed programs from school theater productions, magazines, and university newsletters. Of particular interest were several dance cards in leather or embroidered cases, each with small pencils attached on a cord (Figure 3).

The substrate paper of the scrapbook was extremely discolored and brittle. The weight

of bound adhered ephemera had caused many leaves to completely detach at the gutter (Figure 4). Pages that were intact would often come free when turned. Items adhered to the substrate, however, were in remarkably good condition. Aside from some discoloration from their mounting material, they remained strong and intact. Much of the original cover material, however, was damaged or missing. The spine leather was completely gone and the inner hinges had broken. The boards had been reattached at some point with green cloth hinges that had been sewn on to the first and last sections and adhered to the inside of the board. While the marbled siding-up paper was in good condition on the face of the boards, the board edges and leather corners were worn away.

Treatment Considerations

In this condition, the scrapbook was very difficult to handle without causing damage to the items contained within. The owner had not been able to view the majority of the material inside and wanted the item to function like a book again. As we discussed several treatment options, it was clear from the condition of the paper and the previous repairs that the binding was not functioning and had to be taken apart. The original boards and pages would be saved, but the section folds and sewing would be removed and discarded, as they offered little in the way of artifactual evidence.

Early on, we ruled out washing the pages, lifting the adhered items, and attaching them to new substrate paper as too extensive and cost prohibitive. While an aqueous treatment might have arrested the chemical degradation of the paper, it would have been very time consuming to reproduce the order and placement of the materials on the new paper. The original arrangement of the items was very important, and the client did not want to risk disturbing it. Non-aqueous deacidification sprays were discussed as a future treatment option.

Traditional methods of guarding leaves together into sections would have been ineffective in this case due to the extreme brittleness of the paper. A Japanese tissue guard attached to a page would likely result in a new breaking edge developing at the edge of the mend. As items were adhered to both sides of each leaf, lining with Japanese paper was also ruled out.

It became clear that polyester sleeves presented a quick and effective method for dealing with the fragility of the substrate paper. Not only would the polyester support the pages during handling, but the natural static charge that develops inside the sleeve might also keep loose ephemera from moving from its original position on the page. To retain the codex format, the polyester could be bound up using a post binding structure so that the object could be experienced in a similar format to its original configuration (Figure 5).

Treatment Performed

The bookbinding department at the North Bennet Street School does not have access to a polyester welder, so leaves could not be fully encapsulated. In addition, it was desirable for the top of the polyester enclosure to be open so that the contents could be removed without completely taking apart the binding. Polyester sleeves welded on two sides and measuring several inches larger than the height and width of a leaf were obtained. The height of the sleeve was cut to $\frac{3}{4}$ " taller

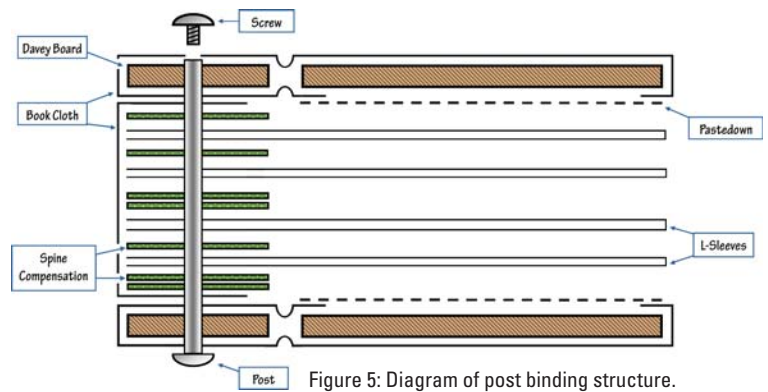


Figure 5: Diagram of post binding structure.

than the leaves to allow the item to shift and remain protected. Considerable excess of width (at least 4") was left to allow each sleeve to flex in the binding (Figure 6).

The cloth hinges attaching the boards were cut to completely detach the boards from the textblock. Pages were then separated from the binding, one by one, and placed in a polyester sleeve. While most pages were already detached, the remainders were removed by simply folding the leaf at the gutter of the binding. The brittleness of the paper caused them to cleanly come free with a single fold. Loose materials, not originally attached to a page, were also sleeved and kept in their original arrangement.

To avoid the wedge shape of the original binding, the book was assembled so that the thickness of each encapsulated leaf (with attached ephemera) was matched by thick material inserted at the spine. Thin strips of 4-ply museum board were cut to function as the new spine compensation. Punching



Figure 6: View of the new binding illustrating flat opening.

I decided to split the scrapbook into two volumes in order to make each book easy to handle and to avoid the stress on the binding from so much weight.

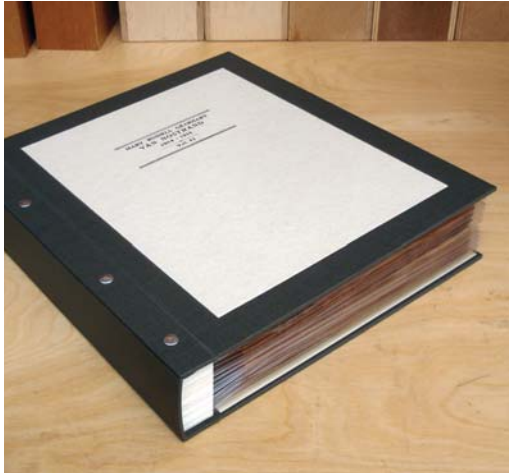


Figure 7: One of the two finished bindings.

both the L-sleeves and compensation strips precisely presented a challenge. The holes had to be large enough to fit the aluminum posts that would be used, but not so large that the sleeves and compensation strips would shift when the binding was picked up. Additionally, the holes had to have the exact same placement in every piece or the alignment of the pages would be off. A jig was made from binder's board to ensure consistent punching alignment throughout.

When finished, the binding was built up in the original order on the posts, alternating L-sleeves and compensation strips in such a way that the contents remained flat. Brass or aluminum posts are available in a range of lengths, with variable length extensions, so a post can be easily assembled to fit any thickness of material.

With the added bulk from the polyester and proper spine compensation, the overall thickness of the volume had nearly doubled. I decided to split the scrapbook into two volumes in order to make each book easy to handle and to avoid the stress on the binding from so much weight. The front and back boards of the new bindings were fabricated using Davey board and buckram (Figure 7). Separate spine pieces of the same buckram, lined with 10 pt card, were also made to fit the spines of each book exactly. The width of the spine piece was made so that it

could fit over the posts but be secured underneath the board. By making the covers in three parts, a very custom fit could be achieved and would allow the two bindings to be easily joined in the future.

I was very pleased with the performance of the new structure. The polyester sleeves held even thick bound objects securely. The boards opened easily and with the extra polyester at the gutter, the binding was able to open flat. Bound items that were not held well by the polyester sleeves were removed, labeled to indicate their original placement, and stored separately. As an added protective measure, two corrugated drop spine boxes were fabricated to hold the volumes. Additional space was built into one of the boxes so that the original boards could be stored inside.

Conclusion

The condition of this scrapbook was uncommon, in that the brittleness of the paper and ill-fitting original binding required a more invasive treatment to prevent further damage from occurring to the contents. Working on this item was a unique experience and I learned a great deal throughout the process. I was challenged to develop a treatment plan that was beneficial for the item long term and increased its usability. I believe that the polyester sleeves in a post binding structure allow the user to safely engage the material in a manner more consistent with the way that the creator intended. While the chemical stability of the item was not addressed by this treatment, the new binding structure will not restrict future action.

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The Use of Japanese Paper as an Alternative Material in the Repair of Leather-Bound Items in Academic Research Libraries

By Ann Carroll Kearney

THIS ARTICLE IS BASED ON A talk presented on May 12, 2010 at the 38th Annual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation and Artistic Works (AIC) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The subject of that presentation was the use of Japanese paper as an alternate material in the repair of leather bound items in academic research library collections.

Meeting and Presentation Themes

“The Conservation Continuum: Examining the Past/Envisioning the Future”—the theme of AIC’s 2010 Annual Meeting—provided a receptive environment for a preliminary presentation on the adaptation of a traditional procedure (leather repair) through the use of an alternative material (paper) to a contemporary application.

The initial steps in the consideration of this topic were to develop and conduct a survey of academic research library preservation departments. Those that performed “Level 3” procedures (an ARL-designated level based on time required to complete procedures—in this case over 2 hours—that would accommodate working on leather volumes) were contacted. They were asked to complete and submit an eight-item online survey.

The survey and its results are presented below. Implications of these results—including identifying variations on techniques and material, attitudes toward the use of one material to repair a different one, levels of

knowledge about of the substrates involved—are also briefly reviewed and will lay the groundwork for further research. These aspects can guide us in a thoughtful and appropriate use of paper in the use of a procedure that can make and has made a significant contribution in the ability of conservation professionals to “make whole” compromised items in collections that are constrained by budgets and a lack of trained personnel.

Goals of Study

The purpose of this investigation was to begin to explore the “what, why and how” of the use of Japanese paper in leather-bound book restoration. To narrow the focus, the study was limited to its use in the Association of Research Libraries’ (ARL) preservation departments. The first steps were to conduct a literature review and then develop a brief survey for identification purposes.

Background on the Development of the Techniques and the Original Materials Used

In 1995, Don Etherington described his repair techniques using Moriki papers in the repair of leather-bound collections materials in *The Abbey Newsletter*.¹ Having presented these methods at workshops over the previous decade, Etherington’s article here provided specific identification of materials and directional information to aspiring practitioners. A different technique involving the use of Japanese paper for hinge repair was

A brief (eight-item) survey was designed to collect general information on the use of Japanese papers in the repair of leather bindings.

presented at the 1991 AIC Meeting by James Brock and published in a 1991 edition of *The Abbey Newsletter*.²

In 1996, then-conservation student Donia Conn published “Board Reattachment for Circulating Collections: A Feasibility Study” in *AIC’s Book and Paper Annual*, which succinctly documented the above contributions in light of their relationship to a larger framework of board reattachment initiatives.

Kristen St. John and Olivia Primanis both in published articles involving the use of Japanese papers in leather repair in *The American Institute for Conservation’s 19th Book and Paper Group Annual*. St. John’s “Survey of Current Methods and Materials Used for The Conservation of Leather Bindings,”³ covered some of the ground examined in this current survey by touching on Etherington’s and Brock’s methodology, as well as by identifying some of the surface consolidants and colorants being used at that time.

Whitney Baker and Liz Dube, in the *American Library Association’s Library Resources and Technical Services 2010* issue,⁴ presented an overview of standard practices in research library book conservation and devoted several survey questions and study conclusions to the use of Japanese papers in the repair of leather volumes.

Survey Development/Population Selection/Survey Distribution

A brief (eight-item) survey was designed to collect general information on the use of Japanese papers in the repair of leather bindings. The population for distribution was determined by reviewing preservation statistics of Association of Research Libraries’ members that listed “Level 3” statistics in their annual reports.⁵ Sixty-nine library preservation departments were identified and contacted regarding blind survey participation. The survey was distributed in early March, 2010 and 32 responses were received before the collector was closed on April 15, 2010.

The survey itself addressed the use of paper in leather repair procedures, the selection of paper and qualities that affect this choice and the application of treatments to paper that makes it more suitable to restoration work. It also requested opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of this Japanese paper for the repair process.

Limitations

The questionnaire was designed to be brief in order to encourage participation and focus responses. Consolidating questions, however, paved the way for providing answers that offered little useful information. This became apparent once the completed questionnaires were returned. The less-specific format did, on the other hand, give greater rein to participants in their responses and provided information that might not have otherwise been obtained.

Survey Questions

1. Do you use Japanese paper instead of leather in leather repair procedures?
2. In which procedures do you use it?
3. What type/types of paper do you use?
4. What are your criteria for Question #3?
5. Do you size, tone or line the paper?
6. If “yes,” could you identify the products or items used?
7. Do you use a consolidator, i.e., SC 6000? What do you use, under what circumstances do you use it and to what end?
8. Can you suggest advantages/disadvantages/comments about using paper instead of leather in book repair procedures?

Result Summary and Observations

• **Conservators do use Japanese** (and other, i.e. Cave) papers as an alternative to leather in the repair of leather volumes.

The wording and formatting of the question did not encourage specific responses, so 17 answers listed “various” as the type of Japanese paper used. Of

the responses that did specify a type, Moriki was the most frequently given answer (10) followed by (unspecified) Kozo (4), Hiromi Kozo (2), Tenjugo (2) and Kizukishi (2). Single responses included Paper Nao, “Western,” Hanji and Barrett. “Cave Papers” were listed by two.

- **The procedures in which** Japanese paper is most frequently used are (a) board reattachment closely followed by (b) rebacking.

In addition to the Etherington and Brock procedures mentioned earlier in this article, prior contributions to board reattachment by Carolyn Horton, Christopher Clarkson and Anthony Cains are described by Donia Conn in her 1996 article.⁶

- **Strength is the quality** most frequently identified (four times in Questions 3 responses/seven times in Question 8 responses) when selecting paper. Other highly-rated features include its ease of handling and speed of use and its cost-savings aspect.

- **Many participants tone**, some size and a few line the paper.

The construction of questions #5 and #6 did not differentiate among procedures and did not facilitate obtaining specific information. The results were as follows:

Lining materials used:

Cotton (3)
Linen (8)
Tyvek (1)
Japanese tissue (8)
Pastel (1)
Watercolor (3)

- **Acrylics are the toner of choice** (Golden™ Acrylics were frequently specified).

Toning:

Acrylic (13)/Golden™ Acrylic (5)
Watercolor (4)
Colored pencil (2)
Powdered pigment

- **SC 6000 is the primary** consolidant used; 5 respondents favor mixing it with Klucel-G, 2 respondents with Ethanol.

Sizing:

Klucel G (5)
Methyl Cellulose (1)
SC6000 (4)
Renaissance Wax (1)
Wheat paste (2)
PVA (2)

- **The “advantages” of paper** use offered in response to Question #8 out-numbered the “disadvantages” by 58 to 4. The respondents to the questionnaire appear to have found paper to be a viable alternative to leather in the repair of leather bindings.

- **Ease of handling**, speed of performance, material strength, minimal departmental investment (in money, in training and in the purchase of additional supplies) and media stability were identified as positive consequences of using papers).

- **Color fading**, material durability (argued as a plus above) difficulties in handling and the incongruity of “repairing leather with a material that isn’t leather” were cited as negative consequences of using paper.

Additional Observations

Level 3 procedures often do not include leatherwork; using Level 3 procedure performance as a preliminary qualifying characteristic of an academic library preservation unit for this study may not have been a reasonable qualifier.

A better background in the history and composition of paper would be useful to those charged with using paper in library preservation units (gathered from the use and misuse of terminology and references from several respondents).

The wording and formatting of the question did not encourage specific responses, so 17 answers listed “various” as the type of Japanese paper used.

This small study displays a range of paper choice and handling practices and indicates the importance of initiating efforts to evaluate the best possible methodologies and applications.

Preliminary Conclusions and Future Directions

Japanese papers are widely used in the repair of leather bindings by conservators in academic research libraries. This small study displays a range of paper choice and handling practices and indicates the importance of initiating efforts to evaluate the best possible methodologies and applications. Papers, lining options, toning media and finishing consolidants should continue to be examined⁶ for their strength and longevity. This is particularly significant in light of this survey's results showing use of paper based on cost effectiveness of the material as well as of the time of trained personnel.

References

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5. These libraries were selected as those most likely to be using these techniques—the study coordinator acknowledges that these techniques are in use in academic libraries that are not members of the Association of Research Libraries, but that a method for identifying usage by those libraries could not be determined.
6. See Conn, 1996.

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On July 23, Molly McIlhon exchanged wedding vows with Anthony Fiddelke in Des Moines, Iowa.

We congratulate Molly and Tony and wish them much happiness and a fulfilled life together.

Please note Molly's new name and contact information:
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