

Book Conservation and University Library Administration

SILENCE, rarely broken, seems to surround the subject of book conservation and the administration of binding. This applies to libraries in general and to college and university libraries in particular. Discussion of book conservation (under other names) is generally concerned with the techniques of maintenance and the routines of preparing materials for binding. In the literature of library administration, binding receives little mention, and surveys of individual libraries are skilful in satisfying the amenities with the briefest of nods. On organization charts, binding supervision usually is placed in a box in some out-of-the-way corner.¹

This polite neglect of the subject in discussion reflects its neglect in action, and conditions in many college and university libraries reveal, sometimes painfully, the results. This is not—and, because of the very nature of the problems, cannot be—a criticism of the hundreds of librarians, directly active in conserving millions of books, who are doing their work effectively. What is usually found to be hampering their work, chaining their activities, gagging their judgment, and often leading to crises and waste, is a fundamental problem of administration which should concern librarians and other institutional authorities.

What are the symptoms of book conservation and binding troubles, and what can be done about them? Without going into individual case histories, it is possible to analyze the conditions which have come to

the attention of this writer in the course of ten years of dealing with the questions and confidences of hundreds of librarians and binders. The records show these to be the most frequent conditions which break out into troublesome "situations" requiring action: (1) valuable (old, rare, irreplaceable) materials deteriorating; (2) growing backlog of unbound stock which should be bound; (3) wearing out of items in heavy or continuous demand; (4) material "in bindery" when needed; and (5) poor binding (short life, poor appearance, inconvenience in using) and consequent spoilage.

The causes and their various permutations and combinations, which are revealed most often as origins and aggravators of trouble, are, at the operating or procedural level: (1) neglect of material in library, inadequate safeguards and precautions, abuse by readers, unnecessary wear and tear, too late discovery of material needing attention; (2) poor re-selection of materials for binding, including neglect of some and unnecessary attention and expense for others; (3) faulty scheduling in library or bindery, or both; (4) absence of adequate specifications or instructions, or insufficient understanding of them in bindery; (5) inadequate preparation of materials for binding; and (6) general incompetence of binder.

The librarian who has observed any of these conditions and diligently seeks to remedy them is confronted with the question, What changes, if any, are needed at the levels of supervision? Or, is the real problem a broader one of the administration

¹ A systematic search by Arthur R. Youtz, New York Public Library, confirms the impression of the writer.

of the library? Or, beyond that, are there vital factors in the situation which touch even broader problems of university administration, requiring perhaps years of patient education of university authorities? It is very difficult to answer these questions unless the diagnostician can compare what he finds with some definite picture of what book conservation should be and what place binding should have in it.

Scope of Conservation

The scope of book conservation may be outlined by following its essential tasks from the time of receipt of a piece of material (and before) to the time of discard: (1) selecting material before purchase with respect to usability and useful life; (2) examining condition and probable future condition of all material received, whether by gift or purchase, and prescribing conservation treatment, if necessary, before use; (3) providing proper housing of all material, in accordance with its conservation needs as well as its accessibility; (4) assuming responsibility for its condition at all times; (5) assuring its proper handling by staff and patrons; (6) organizing systematic inspection so that need for conservation attention is promptly recognized; (7) deciding on the proper treatment of all material needing attention; (8) supervising the treatment; and (9) deciding on storing or discarding.

The administration of book conservation, therefore, tends to touch other aspects of library administration at several points—and that may be one reason for its apparent elusiveness. Binding is only one part of real book conservation, and that is why the most efficient binding supervision may not be able to cope effectively with a library's program of book conservation.

Seeking to get closer to the possible administrative difficulties underlying book

conservation and binding troubles, the librarian may find solutions, and perhaps remedies, in answers to questions like these: (1) Is the organizational position of the binding supervisor high enough and is his authority adequate? (2) Are coordination and cooperation in relations with other service departments of library effective? (3) Is coordination between central library administration and departmental libraries adequate? (4) Is the over-all program of book conservation well planned? (5) Are budgeting (for the library in general and for book conservation and binding) and allocation of binding funds carefully worked out? (6) Is the staff adequate in numbers or experience? (7) Is there effective machinery for cooperation with faculty and students? (8) Are housing of collections and facilities for care good? (9) Have there been lapses in judgment in selecting bindery, either by the librarian or binding supervisor (for reasons of "economy"), or by university or state authorities (because of ignorance, politics, or compliance with statutory requirements, especially in the case of state-supported institutions)? (10) How well organized are working relationships with the bindery?

University and Library Relationship

All these questions relate specifically to the operation, supervision, and administration of book conservation and binding functions. Obviously, the organizational relations of the library to the university would tend to affect conservation of collections as well as every other phase of library operation. Administration of binding operations would necessarily be influenced by the efficiency or inefficiency of these relations between library and university and would share the high or low status of the library in the university community.

Ultimately, therefore, some of the prob-

lems of book conservation are the same as those confronting every other phase of university library activity. Whatever may be the administrative "taking over" of departmental libraries by the central library, the book conservation and binding problems of the departmental libraries will need some sort of administrative solution. If the university library suffers from inadequate funds, it is natural that conservation and binding suffer, at least in proportion.

The lag caused by university libraries growing faster than their administrative machinery is marked in the case of conservation. Here may be found, too often, not only the "traditions" of the university and its libraries, but some additional traditions of "the way we've always done it." If there is outside domination of purchasing policies and procedures, through a state official or through a university purchasing agent, it is more likely to affect binding contracts seriously than the buying of coal or typewriter ribbons. The binding department of a university library may thus have its own lag behind the general lag. It may be on the receiving end of all kinds of unsound practices, without having the power to fight for itself.

Stepchild Psychology

The "stepchild" psychology of many binding departments, in all kinds of libraries, is probably partly responsible for its neglect. It behaves the way it does because it is neglected; it is neglected because of the way it behaves. It has to deal with books when they are least attractive and with serials when they are no longer interestingly new, and it is naturally associated with mending and discarding. The "logical" place for it is in the basement or one of the not-so-respectable corners of the building. The work of preparing material for binding or of supervising bind-

ing transactions is not as exciting as ordering new books or cataloging them or handing them to faculty and students. It is a chore and it calls for somebody who loves it for its own sake. It may, however, fall to one who does not love it and is not in a position to reject it. This, in turn, necessarily adds to administrative problems.

A key problem of binding supervision is where to put it in the administrative organization of the library. It may well be that the wide variety of solutions to this problem is a significant clue to a root cause of many binding and book conservation difficulties. That there is a general uncertainty about where to put binding supervision in the library organization chart is revealed again and again when libraries are reorganized, as they have been in increasing numbers in recent years. If the binding department (or whatever it is called) is not left where it is, as is the tendency, it seems to become the sheep which won't be counted because it jumps around. The picture of the Harvard library organization, presented by Edwin E. Williams, might well serve to describe the real conditions in many libraries: "Serial records are handled by a division of the catalog department, and the binding records division, now unattached, may be added to the department in the future." In the organization chart, there is a dotted line between "binding" and the catalog department, indicating "relationships not yet established." (This is the only functional department thus left vagrant, the few other instances of dotted lines being for special collections and rooms which are common problems in many libraries.)² Solid lines instead of dotted in the organization charts of other libraries do not, perhaps, always picture greater certainty as to the relation-

² Williams, Edwin E. "The Administrative Organization of the Harvard University Library." *College and Research Libraries* 4:218-27, June 1943.

ships between binding and other departments.

Church describes in a recent article not a university library but the Virginia State Library, and, although the report is not very detailed, the omissions are significant. The conditions are characteristic of those in other libraries.³ His chart B shows the place of the doorkeeper and the janitress in the organization, but not the binding supervisor. The proposed plan of the new building (C) provides space for "exchanges, binding," but the reference to binding disappears in the plan (D) of the actual building. The "general library division," he reports, includes the "serials section with visible file equipment for a consolidated serials record, including binding;" also "an order section to serve all divisions and conduct exchanges" and "a catalog section, all as closely related as possible." But the personnel and function chart (E) of the new organization shows no reference to a binding supervisor; presumably the person in charge of binding is a subordinate under the serials librarian.

California and Columbia

In the case of the University of California Library (Berkeley), as described by Leupp a few years back, the organization chart shows "binding" under the assistant librarian, together with the "catalog department," the "accessions department," and "gifts and exchanges."⁴ The recent reorganization of the Columbia University Libraries similarly provides for dividing the functions into two groups, each under an assistant director, *i.e.*, readers' services and technical services, the latter including binding.⁵

³ Church, Randolph W. "A Library Reorganizes through Building." *College and Research Libraries* 5:315-21, 334, September 1944.

⁴ Leupp, Harold L. "Library Service on the Berkeley Campus, University of California." *College and Research Libraries* 4:212-17, 232, June 1943.

Combination of Duties

There are several ways of combining binding supervision with other duties. In one university library, the combination is "order and binding;" in another, binding is joined with photography; in a third, it is put with serials; in a fourth, the assistant librarian supervises binding. Some combinations seem to be fortuitous: the individual librarian may happen to have an unusual combination of interests or qualifications; binding supervision does not take full time; or binding supervision just "seems to fit in there."

In regard to the binding function in departmental libraries, the report of the A.L.A. University Libraries Section meeting on "Departmental and Divisional Libraries" (Chicago, Dec. 28, 1940) presents a varied picture. The paper of Fred Folmer, supervisor of departmental libraries, State University of Iowa, is summarized thus:

There are well-formulated relationships with each department of the main library: order; cataloging; serials; documents; reference; circulation; binding; reserves; library instruction. In observing these relationships, the custodian must maintain a delicate balance in loyalties between the department he serves and his colleagues in the main library. . . .

The report of the meeting continues:

Several of the speakers touched on the departmental reactions to the main library policies of acquisition and binding. Has the departmental librarian a right to change binders because he has found one who will do the work at a third less, in spite of the fact that the head of the binding department knows that particular binder's work is poor? . . .

Summing up, Dorothy H. Litchfield, who reported the meeting, declared: "The [departmental librarian's] problems of

⁵ Wilson, Louis R., and Tauber, Maurice F. *The University Library*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1945, Fig. 4a, p. 113.

fifteen years ago are still unsolved: personnel; cataloging; binding, etc."⁶

Theoretical Advantages

There have, of course, been cases in which the positions of the binding department head and the departmental librarian were the reverse of those in the cases cited. The advantages of centralization may become purely theoretical if the person in charge at the central library is unfamiliar with binding, if centralization involves buying binding through a purchasing agent's office which follows policies not adapted to the task, if the binder selected is incompetent, or if the specific needs of departmental libraries are not given attention. Whatever the details, it is evident that in a departmental system the logical place for authority to select a bindery is still undetermined.

Aside from the special cases of departmental libraries, what is the logical place of binding and conservation in the organization of a university or college library? This question immediately raises two others: Does the place have to be "logical?" Logical or not, can any place provide good working arrangements unless it is picked with some regard for the actual job which the binding department is supposed to do?

The adventures of logic in the wonderland of library organization are well described by Williams:⁷

... As soon as the conditions that gave rise to the original organization have changed, and as soon as relationships are affected by traditions and personalities instead of explicit regulations alone, every feature of the organization involves a good deal more than simple logic, and many changes suggested by logic must be made slowly or postponed to a more suitable time. The danger is that if too little or too late an effort is made to keep the or-

⁶ Litchfield, Dorothy H. "Departmental and Divisional Libraries." *College and Research Libraries* 2:237-40, June 1941.

⁷ Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

ganization changing in the proper direction, it will become hopelessly inefficient and incapable of fulfilling present needs.

Williams thus sums up the reasons why the place of binding in library administration is so often not logical. He also points out the dangers of putting off reorganization to the point of hopeless inefficiency because "so-and-so has had the job so many years" or "we'd have to reorganize a lot of other things if we reorganized the binding department" or "we haven't an appropriation to keep up the department if it is reorganized." In such cases, even if all of these conditions were eliminated, the administrator, all too often, would still find it hard to decide just where to put the binding department.

Why is there such difficulty in locating the "logical" place of binding supervision in library administration? Perhaps an obvious answer may be found in the fact that binding is a vital part of the broader function of conservation of library stock. But the deeper answer lies in the further fact that the scope of book conservation is so extensive and touches so many different library departments.

Active Recognition of Facts

There is an urgent need for more active recognition of these two facts. There is a need for reorienting administrative thought on the whole subject of book conservation and binding; consideration of binding and book conservation as they are today is not enough. A few librarians who have passed through the stress of reorganizations have become aware of this, and, in the reorganization of the Library of Congress, this awareness became clarified into a program—or, at least, definite objectives.

Conservation, as responsible custody, is the only library function which should be continuously at work twenty-four hours a

day. It is the only function which should be concerned with every piece of material in the library from the moment the selector becomes aware of its existence to the day it is discarded. The reason this sounds so exaggerated is that it is a forgotten platitude. It applies to any library collection, whether it be of Egyptian papyrus, of the third-grade classroom library in an Iowa village, or of a university's incunabula.

There was a time when library administration was simpler, when these platitudes were living, activating principles. But, with the increasing complexity of universities and their libraries, the custodial function of the library—the "care and custody of the collection"—has deteriorated through neglect. The difficulties of welding miscellaneous collections, the slowness of growth of central libraries, and inadequate appropriations may all have contributed to the neglect. It may seem very human and "natural" that whatever time and money could be spared should be devoted to the things which just had to be done, the salvaging of material in unusable condition. But certainly this focusing on those activities of binding supervision dealing with crises has been accompanied by declining attention to prevention of crises.

Some strange phenomena in the evolution of library administration have resulted from this neglect of conservation. It became harder and harder to develop a program and procedures for book conservation, and, therefore, it was more and more neglected. As it withered away, it left binding supervision without any fundamental place in some library organizations. This is one cause of this "stepchild" situation. Some administrators have tried to dispose of the annoying department by attaching it to all kinds of other functions, which are frequently not closely related. But few have realized that it could "logically" be

attached to so many other library functions for the very reason that it is essentially a conservation function and therefore fundamental in all library administration.

There are three types of situations in which a librarian may find this analysis of direct and practical interest: (1) the discovery, sudden or gradual, of one or more of the binding troubles described at the beginning of this article; (2) the need for library reorganization, partial or complete; (3) the recognition of the fact that, imperceptibly through the years, important parts of the collection have received inadequate or no attention.

If the foregoing analysis is at all valid and if the ten years' observations on which it is based do represent general conditions, the librarian confronted with one of the three situations may find some usable answer through these procedures: (1) apply frankly to the binding department the same types of questions as those which library surveyors apply to other departments; (2) through the questions indicated earlier in this article, trace out the weaknesses in the administrative relationships of the binding department; (3) plan and provide for a truly broad program of book conservation; (4) create a place for an assistant director in charge of this program, with full responsibility and commensurate power.

This last step is, of course, one which may well involve much more than the action of one librarian in one library. It is, essentially, a broad professional problem. Where are the administrators who can become library custodians in the true and effective sense of the title, when the function has for so many years atrophied? This is a problem of professional education and training and, of necessity, the spiral of making the custodian's position progressively more attractive and of attracting more and better trained librarians.