

Who, What and Where in Book Repair: Institutional Profiles of the LCCDG, 1992

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The Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG) is a forum for conservators whose responsibilities include the treatment of large numbers of library materials. These materials, usually books and pamphlets, comprise the library's general collection, but can also include materials from the special collection. Although usually not cataloged "rare," they are often difficult or impossible to replace. Most of these items circulate, and some, like reference books (which may also be irreplaceable), get plenty of hard use.

Distinctiveness and uniqueness in the general collections, as in the special collections, are distinguishing features among great libraries. Libraries have always provided for the repair of their general collections materials as well as their unique holdings. When a volume is in need of repair there are several options available: replace it with another copy, send it to a commercial bindery, reformat it if it is brittle, or send it to a conservator if it's unique or extremely valuable. There are materials for which none of these choices are appropriate and it is the repair of these materials that is the focus of the Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group.

The ethical responsibility of conservators requires that we treat all materials with equal respect, regardless of monetary value, yet many thousands of books have suffered a loss of integrity due to the use of damaging repair techniques and poor quality materials. Conservators and librarians share an interest in the management and implementation of conservation programs that care for these materials. The library community asked conservators to take the lead in establishing guidelines to inform book repair practices nationally. In response, LCCDG, with the strong support of the Book and Paper Group and the Board of AIC, is attempting to do so within AIC.

Treatment of non-rare materials is commonly called book repair. The term, while descriptive, lacks a sense of the changing approach to repair. Most research libraries have had or continue to have a "mendery" where repair work takes place. In progressive libraries this unit has been absorbed by the conservation lab and the preservation department and is supervised by a conservator or a preservation librarian. Repair work has been performed, for the most part, by people with bookbinding training, students, or volunteers.

In order to get a sense of the current state of book repair in research libraries, LCCDG organized a meeting immediately following the AIC annual conference in Buffalo. The primary goal of the meeting was to bring book conservators and technicians together and offer them an Informal environment in which to discuss and handle examples of their various approaches to repair work. Twenty five exhibits served as a catalyst for this "conversation." Exhibitors brought examples of the repair work they perform, at their institution or commercial facility and displayed them on tables totalling 150 linear feet of display space. Each sample was accompanied by an identification label describing the circumstances under which it was appropriate to perform the technique, the types of materials used, execution time, etc. Exhibitors also drafted an institutional profile to help place their work within a programmatic context.

Throughout the morning of this unique event, participants looked intently at the work; the atmosphere in the room was one of concentration and quiet conversation. After lunch we met as a group for an hour and a half. Approximately 130 people attended the meeting; participants were primarily book or paper conservators. We were gratified to find that the meeting attracted a number of book repair technicians and librarians as well, most of whom had never attended an AIC annual conference before.

The descriptions that follow are the institutional profiles contributed by exhibitors. The full text of those profiles, including technical descriptions of the work exhibited in Buffalo, is slated for publication as one in a series of Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Studies SPEC Kits. The profiles provide a glimpse into this evolving component of our profession. Many of the contributors included a brief history of repair at their institution. Other contributors wrote about their philosophical approach to repair; others provided us with an organizational overview. The content and structure of the profiles was intended to be loose. Exhibitors were asked not to regurgitate statistics, but to describe what they felt was most important about their program and to concentrate on those elements that would be of greatest interest to their peers.

We would like to thank Sara Wolf Green and the AIC Board, Robert Espinosa, Jane Dalrymple-Hollo, and the Book and Paper Group Board for making the Buffalo meeting possible and for supporting LCCDG's effort to define, in the words of a prominent book conservator, "Book Repair for the 90's." We are also very grateful to the following institutions and commercial facilities who contributed to this meeting as exhibitors:

American Philosophical Society	New York Academy of Medicine
Booklab	New York Botanical Garden
Brigham Young University	New York Public Library
Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts	New York University
Cornell University	Northeast Document Conservation Center
Emery University	Northwestern University
Goucher College	Princeton University
Harvard University	Saint Bonaventure University
Indiana University	Stanford University
Information Conservation	University of Cincinnati
Johns Hopkins University	University of Michigan
Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library	University of Washington
Nebraska State Historical Society	University of Western Ontario
	University of Wisconsin
