

Jackets Recommended: The Case for Preserving Dust Jackets in Research Libraries

ABSTRACT

This paper will provide a historical overview of dust jackets and present a cost-effective mass approach to their treatment.

Research libraries generally treat dust jackets as extraneous to the physical integrity of new acquisitions and consequently discard them as part of the shelf preparation process. This practice is diametrically opposed to the normal operating procedures for most public libraries, where the application of polyester or polypropylene “cover protectors” is common and is observed to prolong the durability of publishers’ bindings four-hundred to one-thousand percent before rebinding is required.

Patrons, too, benefit from the retention of dust jackets. The presence of a synopsis of the text (or “blurb,” a term coined in 1914 by American humorist and illustrator Gilette Burgess), a brief biography and photograph of the author, and excerpts from independent book reviews—all assist readers in evaluating the usefulness of a work. As its intended purpose is to attract, however, the dust jacket’s most significant contribution is as state-of-the-art material culture, providing evidence of nineteenth- and twentieth-century trends in marketing and consumerism. Yet, less than twenty pre-1880 examples of dust jackets are known to survive, while pre-1920 exemplars often increase a book’s resale value by as much as one thousand percent.

These cumulative considerations suggest that research libraries nationally should reexamine their current practice relative to the preservation retention of dust jackets.

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