

Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group: A Short History and Summaries of Recent Discussions

ABSTRACT

This is a summary of the Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG). This submission includes a short history of all LCCDG meetings and more detailed summaries of LCCDG in 2000 and 2001. The topics for LCCDG in 2000 were technicians and statistics. In 2001 LCCDG took a tour of BelforUSA, an international disaster recovery vendor.

INTRODUCTION

In 2001 the Book and Paper Group Publications Committee discussed the need to document the events that occur at discussion group sessions at AIC annual meetings. The committee invited the co-chairs to begin documenting Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG) by publishing summaries of our discussion in the *Book and Paper Group Annual*. We were pleased to receive this invitation as we know that information about library collections conservation is often difficult to find. This is an opportunity to have information in print (and a bibliography of sorts).

When asked to document LCCDG discussions, we decided to take the time to include some LCCDG history and share information from discussions at the 2000 and 2001 AIC meetings. In later entries, we will simply report on the most recent meeting.

In discussing the history of LCCDG with former chairs, we felt it important to include many of the events

This standing discussion group met for open discussion on June 3, 2001, during the AIC 29th Annual Meeting, May 30–June 5, 2001, Dallas, Texas. The chairs organized and led the discussion and recorded notes. Readers are reminded that discussion group chairs do not necessarily endorse all comments recorded and that although every effort is made to record proceedings accurately, further evaluation or research is advised before putting treatment observations into practice.

outside of AIC that LCCDG has taken part in. One of the original missions of LCCDG was to communicate with the broader library community, including programs at the American Library Association (ALA) and lectures at other conferences. We all feel that promoting communication between librarians and conservators is an important role for LCCDG to play. For more information about LCCDG, please look at some of the sources listed below. LCCDG is primarily a group of conservators and technicians who work in libraries and deal, at least in part, with general collections circulating material. Many of the problems we face are due to issues of use and wear of materials, as opposed to only the nature of the materials themselves.

A SHORT HISTORY OF LCCDG PROGRAMS

LCCDG met prior to 1992 at AIC annual meetings under the leadership of Robert Espinosa. In 1991 Randy Silverman and Maria Grandinette were nominated and accepted co-chairmanship of LCCDG; they served from 1991–1999. In 1999 Meg Brown and Ethel Hellman became co-chairs.

1992

Buffalo. LCCDG meeting: show and tell. Samples of general collections library conservation treatments were displayed and the group discussed treatment techniques appropriate to the conservation of general collections. Institutional profiles created for this display were published:

Maria Grandinette and Randy Silverman (eds). 1992. Who, what and where in book repair: institutional profiles. *Book and Paper Group Annual* 11:34-84.

1993

Denver. LCCDG meeting: show and tell. This year was a continuation of the discussion of conservation techniques from 1992.

Randy Silverman and Maria Grandinette. 1993. *The changing role of book repair in ARL libraries*. SPEC Kit 190.

Washington, D. C.: Association of Research Libraries, Office of Management Services.

1994

Nashville. Report to the general session of the AIC annual meeting: "The Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group: A Revitalizing Force Behind Book Repair in Research Libraries," presented by Randy Silverman and Maria Grandinette. Binding historian Sue Allen presented a program on "Connoisseurship of Nineteenth-Century Bookbindings."

Maria Grandinette and Randy Silverman. 1994. "The Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group: taking another look at book repair," *Library Resources and Technical Services*, 38(3):281-7.

At the American Library Association (ALA) annual meeting Randy Silverman gave a short presentation to the Physical Quality & Treatment Discussion Group on "Options for Repair of Nineteenth-Century Books." Randy Silverman gave a short presentation to the Curators & Conservators Discussion Group on "Preserving Physical Evidence in the Open Stacks."

1995

St. Paul. LCCDG meeting: G. Thomas Tanselle presented a talk, "The Future of Print Records." Attendees reviewed a draft of "Checklist of Primary Bibliographical Evidence Contained in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Publishers' Bookbindings," a chart prepared by Maria Grandinette and Randy Silverman. Tanselle's lecture, "The Future of Primary Records," appears in an expanded version in his book:

G. Thomas Tanselle. 1998. *Literature and artifacts*. Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia.

American Library Association Annual Meeting, June, Chicago: program, co-sponsored by AIC: "Expanding the Role of Book Repair in Collection-Wide Preservation." The presenter panel consisted of: Paul Banks, Nicholas Pickwood, Randy Silverman, Eleanore Stewart, and Nancy Schrock.

Maria Grandinette and Randy Silverman. 1995. New book repair methods in research libraries. *Abbey Newsletter*, 9(2):29-33.

1996

Norfolk. LCCDG meeting: "Blue-Skying LCCDG," a discussion of future directions for LCCDG.

Randy Silverman presented a paper, "Connoisseurship of Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Publishers' Bookbindings," and Maria Grandinette presented paper, "Library Collections Conservation in the USA," at "Erice '96: International Conference on Conservation and Restoration of Archive and Library Materials," sponsored

by the Istituto Centrale per la Patologia del Libro (Rome), Erice, Italy, 1996 (Published in the pre-prints, volume 1). Includes discussion of LCCDG activities.

1997

San Diego. LCCDG meeting: show and tell, including specific treatments for reinforcing spiral bindings, spine repairs, and board reattachment, followed by observations and discussion with Gillian Boal, David Brock, and Pam Spitzmueller.

Maria Grandinette and Randy Silverman presented a paper, "Book Repair in the USA: A Library-Wide Approach to Conservation," at the Association Pour La Recherche Scientifique Sur Les Arts Graphiques (ARSAG) conference, "La Conservation: une Science en Evolution, Bilans et Perspectives," Paris, France, April 1997. Includes discussion of LCCDG activities. Paper published:

Maria Grandinette and Randy Silverman. 1997. Book repair in the USA: a library-wide approach to conservation. *La conservation: une science en evolution. Bilan et perspectives. Actes des troisièmes journées internationales d'études de L'ARSAG, Paris, 21-25 avril 1997.* Paris: ARSAG. 274-280.

1998

Arlington. LCCDG meeting was a special session on "Connoisseurship and Preservation of Paperback Books" with papers by Mark Jaffe, Clark Evens, Colleen Strumbaugh, Peter Waters, Gary Frost, and Michael Waters, and presentations by Bob Strauss of Preservation Technologies and Fritz James of LBS.

Clark Evens and Colleen Stumbaugh. 1998. A collection of value: mass-market paperbacks at the Library of Congress. *Book and Paper Group Annual* 17:57-61.

Gary Frost. 1998. Paperback rebinding at a library repair station. *Book and Paper Group Annual* 17:63-65.

Peter Waters. 1998. Phased conservation. *Book and Paper Group Annual* 17:113-122.

Maria Grandinette and Randy Silverman presented a paper "Issues Relating to the Repair of 19th and 20th-Century Books in Research Library Collections," at the Institute of Paper Conservation meeting, "Book Conservation: A Review of Current Practice," in London, England, March 1998. Includes discussion of LCCDG activities.

1999

St. Louis. LCCDG meeting: "Paper and Page Mends for General Collections Library Materials." This included a presentation "Pressure-Sensitive Tapes: A Primer for General Collections Conservators" by Elissa O'Loughlin.

Meg Brown and Ethel Hellman became chairs of the Physical Quality and Treatment Discussion Group for ALA. At the ALA midwinter meeting in February they hosted "Disaster and After: the Book, the Contract and the

Vendor” with a panel of conservators and librarians who have dealt with past disasters. For the annual meeting in June they summarized the LCCDG meeting and had a further discussion of issues concerning mending in general collections.

2000

Philadelphia. LCCDG meeting: “Technicians: How to hire? Who do you hire? How do you train?” and “Statistics: What is kept? How are they kept? Why are they kept?” A summary of this meeting is appended below.

Meg Brown and Ethel Hellman chaired the Physical Quality and Treatment Discussion Group at the ALA mid-winter meeting on the topic, “That Other Deacidification Treatment, Preservation Photocopies, and What about those ARL Stats Anyway???” At this meeting we looked at mass deacidification (the Zentrum für Buch-Erhaltung [ZfB] process), talked about preservation photocopying procedures and problems, and began our discussion about how ARL statistics are kept by different institutions. Meg Brown and Ethel Hellman planned the ALA program “Know Your Plastics.” This program, hosted by Meg Brown, featured lectures from Tom Edmondson (conservator) and Scott Williams (conservation scientist) and was an opportunity for members of the conservation community to teach librarians about the long-term issues related to plastics in library collections. This program was co-sponsored by AIC. (A summary of this session was published in *Technical Services Quarterly*, see reference below.) Also, Meg Brown and Ethel Hellman hosted the Physical Quality and Treatment Discussion Group including the following topics: “The Last Word” (Hal Erikson gave an overview of all of the various mass deacidification processes and their relative merits), a demonstration by Pinnacle Technology Inc. (dataloggers with internet capabilities), and “Statistics Keeping: Why and How,” a discussion defining statistics terminology and identifying inconsistencies in our record keeping; this included a summary of discussions from the LCCDG meeting in Philadelphia.

Meg Brown. 2000. Know your plastics. *Technical Services Quarterly* 19(1).

2001

Dallas. LCCDG meeting: tour of BelforUSA, an international disaster recovery vendor. A summary of this visit is appended below.

SUMMARIES

It is important to note that LCCDG is often a discussion forum. Information shared in summarizing these discussions is usually anecdotal in an attempt to share ideas and information that may be useful.

AIC Annual Meeting 2000, Philadelphia:

Technicians: How to hire? Who do you hire? How do you train? and Statistics: What is kept? How are they kept? Why are they kept?

The Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG) met in Philadelphia in 2000 for an evening session. We began with a recap about heat-set tissue. The formulation of the adhesive originally used to make heat-set tissue has changed, and problems with blocking have been noted. Is anyone still making it in-house? Conservation legend says yes, it is being made at New York Public Library, at the Library of Congress, and at the Center for the Conservation of Artistic and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA). We were unable to verify these reports and recipes currently in use have not been forthcoming. Other comments made (but not confirmed) were that the Library of Congress and CCAHA still have a supply of tissue that was made years ago and they haven’t needed to make more, or they have old supplies of the original adhesive. It was stated that Paraloid B-72 is currently being used as a wetting agent for some heat set tissue recipes.

Because our first topic was conservation technicians, we invited Maria Grandinette to report on the progress of the AIC task force that is working on technician-related issues. The task force is examining what technicians do across all of the conservation specializations, defining what knowledge they need and what skills they should possess. After Maria spoke, LCCDG co-chairs Meg Brown and Ethel Hellman lead the discussion with the following questions:

- Where do you find technicians?
- If you advertise for a technician—what part of the newspaper do you advertise in?
- What kind of experience do you require from a person when you hire her/him?
- Do you prefer hiring “artsy” people with hand skills or worker bees (i.e. art/aesthetics vs. speed)?
- Do your technicians order supplies?
- Where do you draw the line, if you do, between a technician and a conservator?

Discussion highlights

Hiring tips

When hiring a new technician, references need to be taken very seriously. You should understand probation rules in order to weed out an unsuitable hire early on (it may be very difficult to do so at a later date). It was suggested that other staff should be included in the interview process. Many people commented that their human resources office had helped them to word questions in interviews to elicit the information they needed.

What do you do with a slow or difficult technician?

If you have a technician who is difficult, you could give them some of the less “fun” jobs (like cleaning mold, large encapsulation projects, etc.) and offer more “fun” jobs as a bonus when they do a good job. This technique might work to encourage a difficult technician to work harder, or to choose to take a different job. Another suggestion was to consider fitting tasks to a particular technician. Someone who seems difficult might be happier and better at a different task. When we discussed management issues, the group agreed that we need more training in developing interviewing skills and in managing staff.

Do you give dexterity tests at interviews?

For many people these tests are not about dexterity as much as they are about how the interviewee reacts to instructions. Do they pay attention? Do they ask questions? Do they ask too many questions? Do they mimic what I do? Where do they put a dirty brush? on the bench? out of reach? Etc.

Where do you find good technicians?

Someone suggested having brown-bag lunches where you display and discuss book structures; this might interest other employees in the institution to apply for jobs when they come open. (Brown bags also keep conservation in the eye of the rest of the institution.)

Do technicians sort materials in the lab?

Most members answered yes.

Do you tell your technicians why they are doing something?

All said yes.

Do you send your technicians to workshops?

Many members said yes; many members said they bring someone in to teach.

What type of training do you offer?

Answers included: the New England Guild of Book Workers training (if you sponsor a guild workshop, people in your institution can go for free); the Kress Foundation sometimes offers scholarships for training. Some institutions give technicians release time to go to the Guild of Book Workers Standards of Excellence Seminar, or to the AIC annual meeting. Most institutions will not pay for travel and expenses.

Because of the large interest in this topic we followed up on this discussion by putting a post on the Conservation Distribution List:

August 4, 2001: At a recent Library Collections Conservation Discussion Group (LCCDG) meeting (at AIC in Philadelphia) we discussed issues concerning technicians. One of the topics that was raised was what questions people asked technician candidates at interviews, and also what questions they ask references they call about these candidates. Many suggestions were given and the group was interested in making a complete list of questions. Because many of us have our own lists, and there may be

duplications, and we don't want to clutter the DistList, I would be happy to compile entries and share the compiled list with all (I will keep institutions confidential in case anyone is uncomfortable about that). Please send your questions to me: mbrown@ukans.edu. We were also interested in what types of dexterity testing people might do at interviews and would welcome suggestions in that area.

We received a total of twelve responses to the question about interviewing technicians. Of the twelve responses, over half were from people requesting a report on the information received.

Many responses about dexterity tests were taken from *Conservation Treatment Procedures*, by Carolyn Clark Morrow and Carole Dyal (1986), in the appendix “Dexterity Tests.” We will not repeat the variations of dexterity tests based on the Morrow and Dyal book but the following are some unique suggestions received:

1. Cover a square box with paper using only a glue stick (but respondent found no correspondence to how they did this and their later performance)....
2. Follow written instructions for fabricating a little paper enclosure
3. Unfold and refold an automobile map
4. Requires applicants to send in one book with three types of repair before the interview (a paper repair, a group of 8-10 pages tipped in, and a reback or recase). The candidate is asked to describe the steps performed and the materials, supplies, and tools used in the three types of repair.
5. Introduce a hypothetical scenario in which the interviewer has already pasted out a spine and found that the spine lining did not fit. Give the interviewee a box with scraps of paper and ask them to choose a strip from which they could cut a cover for a 9 x 1-3/4" spine. How accurately do they estimate the required size? Ask the interviewee to cut the spine piece free hand. Measure the result, checking for size and evenness of the piece.
6. Candidates are asked to carry out four tasks: to perform a simple paper repair, to apply a hinge to an item, to hinge an item to a support sheet, and to package a set of sheets. They are given written instructions and any questions must be dealt with before they start. They are given a choice of adhesives and papers for repair and are asked to write down comments.

Other respondents commented on where to find students or staff:

1. Art, art history, and associated programs.
2. One large public library requires (for an entry level position) two years of experience in hand bookbinding, book repair, and conservation of books or an equivalent combination of course work and/or experience in an apprenticeship/internship.

3. Recognize potential in previous experience.

We hired a woman who cooked for families who were too busy to cook for themselves (two career families). She purchased, prepared, and froze the meals for her clients. She is a very creative person, agile, and a good mind and eye for detail and could “see” the end product. She was one of the easiest persons to train, learning at a faster rate than most. Not only that, but she was up to production speed very quickly.

Other questions asked at interviews:

- What attracts you to this work, why are you interested in this position?
- What qualifies you for this work? Why should we hire you for this work? What would you be able to bring to the job?
- What qualities do you think make a good book repairer?
- What hand skills do you have and how have you used them?
- Would you rather be a member of an outstanding team, or on a team of outstanding individuals?
- Tell me about your job bench experiences repairing or binding books going back five years as they relate to this position.
- Tell me about a book repair treatment you have performed many times. What steps and thought processes did you go through and what tools did you use in performing the repair?
- How do you decide which treatment is best for any given material and what factors would you take into consideration when deciding upon a treatment?
- Give me an example of the standards that you have applied to book repair treatment, what makes a good repair in terms of quality, efficiency, and appropriateness to the job at hand?
- This is a book that was sent to Preservation for treatment. Can you tell me the condition of this book and what you might do with it?
- Have you ever been asked to change a procedure from an old way of doing things to a new way? Have you agreed with the change?
- How do you prioritize your work load?
- Describe a book that you believe should be sent to the bindery—what condition would it be in?
- What are your hobbies?
- What is your academic background? (looking for a field with attention to detail such as engineering or math or other exact sciences)
- Tell us about your work experience up to now. What have you liked/not liked?
- What have you done in your previous work to contribute towards team work?

- Tell us about some practical work of which you are particularly proud.
- How will you deal with rather monotonous, repetitive practical work?

Our second discussion concerned statistics-keeping in collections conservation. We viewed overheads of statistics reporting forms from various institutions, which provided a springboard into a discussion about why we all keep statistics and how we use them in our institutions. One obvious difference in statistics-keeping exists between libraries that are members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and non-ARL libraries. ARL requires conservation statistics based on the amount of time spent on a treatment. This requirement raises the question of how treatment times are recorded—whether we record the time each treatment actually takes or assign a standard time to each treatment performed. Since both methods are used in reporting ARL statistics, the validity of using ARL statistics to compare institutions seems questionable.

AIC Annual Meeting 2001, Dallas: Visit to BelforUSA

In a departure from the usual discussion format, LCCDG sponsored a field trip to BelforUSA, a disaster recovery vendor operating out of Fort Worth. A representative of the vendor presented an overview of the situations in which an institution might require an outside disaster recovery vendor (large scale disasters), and the services these vendors can provide. Discussion group members were given a tour of the vendor’s facility, which includes a supplies warehouse, a lab designed for recovery of electronic equipment, and box-car sized freeze-driers.

It was noted that almost all disaster recovery vendors will write up contracts with institutions to cover the institution’s collections (specific to the type and quantity of materials) on an if-and-when basis. This “pre-contracting” can facilitate a quick recovery in the event it becomes necessary.

The co-chairs of LCCDG note that this vendor is one of many and we are not endorsing BelforUSA over other vendors in the field. Most offer the same services: packing out damaged materials, transporting them, freeze-drying, and cleaning. They provide salvage and recovery for a wide range of materials, including books, paper records, photographic materials, film, magnetic media, electronic equipment, and artistic works of every sort. These vendors also do on-site recovery, clean-up, and dehumidification of materials and facilities.

REFERENCE

- Morrow, Carolyn Clark, and Carole Dyal. 1986. *Conservation treatment procedures: a manual of step-by-step procedures for the maintenance and repair of library materials*. Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

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