Book Repairs That You Can Do

by Ruth Walker

After installing bookcases and book boxes to your satisfaction, the next consideration is the minor repair that you can do to individual books, pamphlets and ephemera in your collection.

Upon the acquisition of an item, or in reviewing your books, carefully collate the book, page by page, looking for foreign debris: newspaper clippings, bobby pins, straight pins, paper clips, deceased critters, etc. Remove all such items, including plants, as they stain pages, sometimes actually "eating" through the paper. If you have a number of books to assess, sort them according to cloth, leather, pamphlet, and other ephemera.

Cloth Binding care involves cleaning the boards and spine with a very soft brush and a dry eraser-pad like Faber Castell's Magic Pad, a vinyl cleaning pad that is non-abrasive. Never attempt to use water and soap solutions to clean cloth boards as this makes the cloth separate from the board and leaves discolored areas. Vacuum the head, tail and foredge areas, as well as any remaining dry erasure granules.

Frayed head and tail areas of the spine and corners can be consolidated with a white glue like Elmer's, a polyvinyl acetate (PVA). Using a toothpick tipped in the glue works well. Let dry five to ten minutes (or until dry to the touch) before placing in bookcase.

Older book cloth that shines (indicating a great deal of sizing), and leatherette may be brightened with a soft cloth like flannel that has the barest hint of anhydrous lanolin rubbed into it. Another method is the use of a silicon product called EndDust sprayed into a cloth and then used to wipe the covers. These two methods are similar to lightly dusting and waxing a small wood box. Allow the book to air for 24 hours.

No Glue, No Matter What The Claim, is going to repair or consolidate a cracked joint or inner hinge on a cloth or leather bound book. Books that have been treated in this manner later become complex problems for the restoration bookbinder. It is better to cover the book with a 3 mil. mylar jacket to prevent further wear. You should also consider protecting all of your more fragile or valuable items with a mylar wrapper, especially those with paper dust-jackets. Mylar is simple to cut if lined up with a T-square. Place the mylar and book on a hard cutting surface, line the book up in the center with a good straight edge to take an accurate height measurement. After cutting, wrap the mylar around the book to ascertain the amount of turn-in needed; then trim, fold, and install the mylar jacket on the book.

Leather Bindings in good condition – no powdery or loose joints – can be treated with a dry eraser-pad and then treated with a *barely* damp cloth if dust or grime is present, taking care to do only the spine and boards. Vacuum the head, tail and fore-edge areas.

Elmer's glue consolidates powdery, worn leather corners, as well as head and tail areas that have come loose. Leather labels and gouges can also be treated with glue. Let dry 5 to 10 minutes. Afterwards a leather preservative with no neats foot oil content could be applied according to manufacturer's instructions, with waxed paper inserted between the boards and first free-endpapers to prevent the preservative from staining the endpapers. Allow to dry, buff, remove waxes papers, then return to bookcase.

Pamphlets and Ephemeral Material can also be cleaned with a dry eraser-pad, using careful outward strokes while pressing down firmly on the item. Mylar folders that fit 3-ring binders are useful in cataloguing and storing ephemera for easy access and display. For those who have a large number of pamphlets, a storage system using the standard 7"x10" plastic envelopes with acid-free board inserts available at Comic Book Collectors' Shops, is highly recommended. Lidded storage boxes to fit are also sold at these shops.

Paper Tears are easily repaired using Archival Document Repair Tape, a non-yellowing, neutral PH, reversible transparent product. Old discolored or missing tissue guards that protect wood and steel engravings and lithographic illustrations can be replaced with a neutral PH tissue.