



Book Conservation at Iowa

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The beginning of the Conservation Laboratory at the University of Iowa Libraries is an interesting story. In 1984, Dale M. Bentz, then University Librarian, and Kim Merker, Director of the UI Center for the Book, joined forces to bring William Anthony, a conservator and binder in Chicago, to Iowa to establish a book conservation lab and binding facility. His private business had already been conserving books from the John Martin Rare Book Room of the Hardin Library for the Health Sciences. Mr. Anthony brought one apprentice, with the idea to not only conserve Iowa's books but to train book conservators as well. He and his staff conserved many important books in the Libraries' collections, such as Hartman Schedel's 1493 *Liber Chronicarum* ("the Nuremberg Chronicle") and Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Mr. Anthony was an early member of the UI Center for the Book and developed bookbinding courses still taught in the University's Saturday and Evening Program. Additionally, lab staff under Mr. Anthony's supervision also bound limited editions for the University's Windhover Press in the English Department. Mr. Anthony's untimely death in 1989 was a great blow to the program, but it continues to flourish because of the strong foundation he built and the urgent need for book conservation that all major libraries and their aging collections now face.

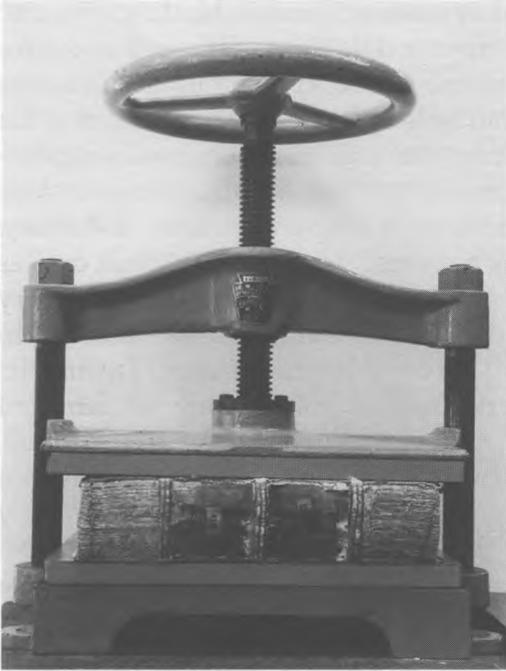
The mission of the Conservation Laboratory is twofold. The rare and special library materials whose nature and age often make them in need of treatment are the "patients" in this lab. Our goal is to repair, protect, and make accessible these rare and sometimes fragile books to current students, faculty, and scholars as well as their future counterparts. A second mission,



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which also reaches into the future, is the training of highly motivated people to become rare book conservators. Diverse knowledge and skills are required to conserve rare books—bookbinding hand skills, an understanding of the history of books and book structures, a knowledge of book materials and their chemistry, and the nature of deterioration of organic materials. A training term of four years of full-time on-the-job work and study has proved to be effective at the lab. So far four individuals have served apprenticeships and there are currently two apprentices. Updating of knowledge, practice of skills, and learning of new techniques is a life-long obligation for a conservator. Though the field of book conservation is young, it has changed dramatically even since this author started conservation work in 1975.



Book press in the Conservation Lab.

Though we now look into an era of electronic information and the concept of “book” is changing from a codex structure made from paper, our history and heritage are entwined in these bundles of cellulose fibers. But it is often the case that scholars and students, exhibitors and publishers want, and sometimes must, see “the original.” This is where the conservator must come up with solutions to problems that most people never have to think about. What do

you do to a book so embrittled it falls apart when it is handled? Or a dusty document full of tape and wrinkles? What if it has mold or insect damage, or has gotten wet from a leaking pipe? What if the leather spine is cracked in two or the cover has fallen off? What is possible and what is cost effective are not always the same. What are the ethics of replacing a broken binding structure versus repairing the original?

A day in the Conservation Laboratory is always varied and interesting. Currently there are several projects underway. Twenty-five handcolored copies of a Windhover Press limited edition of H.D.’s *Within the Walls* are being bound. The special binding is black one-quarter leather spine and paste paper sides with windows cut out to reveal the title and one of the illustrations in a “sewn-board” style of binding. Staff are conducting a condition survey of the John Martin Rare Book

Room in which each book is examined and its binding style and condition noted in a computer data base. This will allow for streamlined treatments in the future since a number of books with the same problem can be located easily and repaired at the same time. The resulting repetition of treatment by the apprentices gives them the necessary practice to fully learn the skills involved and see variations for a single technique. Exhibition preparation is an ongoing responsibility of the lab. Book cradles and other special supports must be made to protect library materials during the five to six exhibitions mounted annually in the Main Library's north lobby exhibition space. Treatments may also have to be performed on soiled, torn, or damaged items before they can be shown. An upcoming Futurist Movement Show at the University's Museum of Art will include a number of brittle Italian books and pamphlets of the early twentieth century from the Libraries' Special Collections Department. These will be examined and repaired before the exhibition. William Harvey's very special book *De Motu Cordis*, presented to the Rare Book Room of the Hardin Library for the Health Sciences by Dr. John Martin, will also be treated this year. This small volume, privately printed in Germany in 1628, is the first discussion of the heart as the organ responsible for the circulation of the blood. Fewer than sixty copies of this landmark book have survived. Uncharacteristic of the time period and unfortunate for us, the condition of the paper of our copy is very poor as it is extremely brittle and an almost chocolate brown color. This book will require a full treatment including written and photographic documentation, disbinding, washing, sizing, mending, resewing, repair of the original cover, and reattachment of text to cover. The greatest difficulty will be the internal strengthening and mending of the paper. Some experimental mending tissues, not commercially available, have been made in collaboration with Timothy Barrett, Associate Research Scientist and Director of Papermaking at the Oakdale Campus, a branch of the Center for the Book. It is

hoped these tissues can be used to repair the fragile pages of the Harvey volume. The book will be on display when the treatment is completed.

Another aspect of the Conservation Laboratory in the University community is the teaching of bookbinding classes in the Saturday and Evening Program. Each semester, new and returning students study the craft of hand bookbinding. Because of the need for specialized equipment, the classes are taught in the lab. Students learn about handling paper, folding, sewing, gluing, and covering. A collection of historical binding models, begun by Mr. Anthony, is housed in the lab and utilized as a teaching tool to explain how book construction has evolved over the centuries. The book models range from a coptic sewn book to a medieval girdle book, a limp vellum binding to a modern fine binding.

Next year will be the tenth anniversary of the UI Conservation Laboratory. We are not sure what projects we will be undertaking, but we are sure they will combine aspects of history, materials, craft, art, creativity, and patience.