

The Deckled Edge

Newsletter of the Baltimore Area Conservation Group
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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

After having served as Member-at-Large and as Contributing Editor for the Deckled Edge during the past two years I am very pleased and excited to take on my new role as President of the BACG. With your support, and with the help of other members of the Executive Committee, my plans for this year are to define a new set of goals for the group. Our main focus will be to increase the membership of the BACG by publicizing more visibly the activities of the group, thus drawing in new members from the Baltimore/Washington area and from other parts of the country. We would also like to institute a slight increase in membership dues in order to meet increasing production costs for the Deckled Edge and other publications, and to fund more ambitious programs for the group. We have already scheduled an exciting and varied group of programs for the rest of the year. In late March/early April we have organized an evening film festival which features such classics as "The Restoration of Books: Florence 1968" and the 1987 film "Slow Fires." On May 5th Roger Wisock, Associate Curator of Manuscripts and Rare Books at the Walters Art Gallery, will host a special slide presentation and tour of a new major exhibition, "Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours." I hope that you will all participate in the various activities that we have planned and contribute your time and effort to work on the various projects initiated by the Executive Committee during the coming year. I look forward to seeing you at our next meeting.

Abigail B. Quandt

The "Professional School for Book Restoration" in Ascona

Following my apprenticeship, I spent three and a half months at the "Professional School for Book Restorers" of the Centro del bel Libro in Ascona, Switzerland, which also has a school for artistic binding. It is the latter for which the Centro originally became known. The school is set in the old center of Ascona, a small town on the shores of the Lago Maggiore, in the Italian part of Switzerland. The building which it occupies also houses a cultural center. The school for fine binding is located in the attic of this building while the school for restoration is in an annex off the court yard and garden.

Entrance requirements for the school are that one must have completed an apprenticeship in hand bookbinding or an equivalent type of training. While the

language of instruction is German, explanations will also be given in French and English. The participant will receive a detailed syllabus, which outlines the theoretical and hands-on topics of each course. Each course has at least three hours theoretical instruction daily, which weather permitting is held out doors. The remaining time is used for actual hands on work. Although the school has some objects available to work on, the participants are asked to bring their own materials and tools with them.

The theoretical instruction is comprised of chemistry, material science, damage analysis, as well as the history of paper, binding styles, and various decoration techniques. During the time spent hands on, one is introduced to the proper forms of documentation, paper conservation, and the restoration of bindings, in paper, leather, vellum as well as those with wooden boards. Before one can take any of the courses, one has first to complete a three day introductory course as well as completing the Paper I course. The other courses go under the headings of Leather I, Vellum I, Wooden Boards I, with a II course being offered only for paper. For other topics specialization courses are at various times during the year.

In Paper I, the bulk of the time was spent with introductory chemistry requiring no prior knowledge, and going into the problems of acidity and deacidification. We also learned the proper way to repair tears in paper going as far as pulp fill with a suction box and vacuum press to couch the new paper. Other topics were disinfection, and the removal of various stains and adhesives with solvents. Bleaching and leaf casting were not dealt with as they are topics of the continuation course.

In the leather course we again went into the chemistry and processes involved in producing leather, as well as the different kinds of leather. Various methods of refurbishing and cleaning bindings were also dealt with. Hands on we covered the different endsheet styles, sewing structures, headbands and corners, making models of all as we went. Rebackings and recoverings were dealt with in detail. For this and all other courses a great deal of emphasis was placed on the reuse of all parts of the binding. Boards which were worn or had pieces missing were repaired and all the original covering materials were put back on. The new leather was dyed to match the shade of the old.

Many of these topics also applied in the course dealing with wooden boards which gave us more time to go into the carving of the boards, weaving leather headbands, and making of clasps. Because this type of binding is not that commonplace, we made a model where we applied all the various methods of sewing... In covering we also left portions of the spine visible so as to show the structure. Before we were allowed to make the actual boards and clasps we spent a day practicing with scraps. We also learned to replace missing parts, consolidate, and repair cracks in the boards.

In the vellum course we again went through the appropriate chemistry and properties of the materials. The flattening and repair of tears and other damages were also dealt with. For these we made our own gelatine by cooking up scraps of vellum. I had a 2 volume set to reback as well as recreating a semi-limp vellum binding, following the norms set by the historic precedent of 1559.

Tuition for the school is expensive with the average 2 week course costing 1000 Swiss francs. Additional costs are leather, vellum, and wood, as well as room and board which the school does not provide. They will, however, assist in making arrangements. I spent 4480.- francs for ten weeks of actual course time, with about another 20 francs/night + food. Despite the expense, I felt that it was well spent. Course size is limited to 6 which allowed for a great deal of individual attention, although at times I felt that even that was to large.

The school for fine bookbinding offers courses in many different styles of contemporary binding, tooling and design. While entrance requirements are the same, the tuition is about half that of the other school. Again leather and gold are added separately.

If anyone is interested they can get complete information by writing to the Centro del bel Libro, Casella Postale, 6612 Ascona, Switzerland. It is a good idea to enroll a good deal in advance. I also have complete schedules.

Peter Verheyen

Don Etherington at ICI, Inc

In November the library binder Information Conservation, Inc. hired Don Etherington to establish a new Conservation Division. Don is well known to the library preservation and conservation community through his former positions in the Conservation Office at the Library of Congress, and as Chief Conservation Officer of the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas.

In his new responsibilities with ICI Don envisions the Conservation Divisions filling the gap between the single item rare book, or fine art conservation and the production oriented commercial library binder. Don hopes to answer the need for a cost effective treatment for large numbers of special collection-items. An example is the encapsulation and binding of "County Atlases" now being undertaken by ICI for New York State. These Atlases from the later half of the 19th century are brittle, and accurately described as (despite the odd locution) semi-rare. Other examples would be boxing projects where ICI would make multiple drop spine (rare book) boxes, or ICI's "Archival-Pak" (a phase box in a buckram case), or the restoration into original covers of a series of victorian case bindings. These projects if undertaken on a single item basis would be prohibitively expensive, but commercial binders were previously not equipped to handle the special needs of these artifacts.

In addition to Don the Conservation Division of ICI is beginning with a staff of three with prior commercial binding experience. Don will be training the staff in the techniques of hand bookbinding. Another area Don would like to enter is the binding of limited editions. Don views this type of experience as beneficial to the training of his staff.

In the early stages of development the real challenge for the Conservation Division of ICI is to discover if there is truly a market for its services. Clearly collections are in need of treatment, but is this need recognized by the institutions, and more importantly are they prepared to fund this type of work.