



Conserve O Gram

July 1993

Number 19/3

Use And Handling Of Rare Books

Rare book management is influenced by both museum and library practices. While library and museum collection managers must preserve the physical book, they are also obligated to make it available for use under controlled conditions.

The following guidelines are provided for the use and handling of rare books. (See also *Conserve O Gram* 19/2 for guidance on care and security of rare books.)

- Rare books should be made available for use only within an established space and under staff supervision. If the public has access to the reading area, briefcases, bags, coats, and ink pens are left outside. Rare books should not routinely be allowed outside the reading and storage areas.
 - Rare books should be retrievable as are other library materials, whether in museum storage, on exhibit, or in a library. When a library card catalog is used, the card should look similar to a regular catalog card, but noting location. There may also be a note about any unique physical attribute (e.g., *signed by J.J.* or *No. 30 of 100 copies*).
 - Rare book reading rooms, like archival reading rooms, must register researchers on a form that records the researcher's identification and the rare materials used. The form also delineates the rules and procedures for using rare books, manuscripts, and other closely controlled items. The form should have a place for the user to sign indicating understanding and acceptance of the rules. This form also serves as a record of collection usage, and should be retained permanently.
 - Do not use spine labels or other labeling methods which deface the book. Instead, use acid-free paper strips that protrude from the top of the book block that contain the cataloging information. Such strips can be made from sheets of acid-free paper or purchased from an archival supply house.
 - Never mark the front of the title page. Instead mark ownership *in pencil* on the back of the title page at the bottom near the binding. Use a soft lead HB, H, or 2H pencil and write lightly so as not to damage the paper.
 - When handling rare books, have clean hands or wear clean white cotton gloves; no eating, drinking, or smoking is allowed.
 - Never pull a book from the shelf by the top of the spine. Ragged top ends of spines are the hallmark of improper handling. Reach over the desired volume to the top or front and push it out, or gently push back the volumes on either side, so that the desired volume can then be grasped by the mid-spine.
 - When using rare books, provide adequate support for the binding. This may mean using a book cradle on which the open book rests at an angle that alleviates unnecessary stress on the binding. Simply placing another volume of similar thickness under the opened cover will also support the binding of the opened book.
 - If uncut pages must be opened, use a bone folder or a letter opener with a rounded edge rather than a sharp knife or razor blade. Sharp blades tend to slip and cut pages.
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- Use great care in making xerographic or photographic copies since the process is very hard on bindings and brittle paper. (See *Conserve O Gram* 19/4 and 19/7 for copying guidelines.) Try to purchase reprint copies of rare books to use for this purpose. If a rare book must be copied, it should be done only by staff, never by the user.
- Copyright is not usually an issue with rare books since any publication issued before 1907 is in the public domain. However, later publications and unpublished materials are governed by different rules. See NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part II (under revision), Appendix N, for guidance on copyright.

Rare Books on Exhibit

When a rare book is exhibited open in a display case, certain measures should be followed for this use:

- Light levels in exhibit cases should be kept at a maximum of 50 lux (5 foot candles). Fluorescent light bulbs should be covered with an ultraviolet filtering material.
- Maintain a regular schedule of page-turning to ensure that no single page is exposed to light for too long a period. This requires a museum case designed to facilitate staff access for periodic inspection and maintenance.
- While on exhibit, an opened book requires adequate support to prevent strain on the binding. Book cradles can be purchased to hold a book open at the desired angle, or supports can be made in-house. (See *Conserve O Gram* 18/1 for guidance on construction of polyester film book supports.)

Rare Books in Restored Libraries

Libraries are like living organisms: they grow, develop, gain and lose material. If a library

ceases to grow and develop, it becomes frozen in time. Such libraries can often be found in furnished historic structures. These libraries should be more than props used only to decorate rooms (although some exhibit libraries of finely bound volumes are acquired purely for decorative purposes). The volumes in these libraries are still important research tools. While each volume still contains its original information, the collection as a whole is the focus of study and interpretation. The importance of each volume of that collection is what it can tell about the people who originally formed and used the collection.

In some instances, period books are acquired to take the place of unavailable original volumes identified in historic furnishing plans or inventories. Books that are used as furnishings in historic structures are managed as part of the museum collection whether or not they have a direct association with the site. Reprinted volumes are managed according to NPS policy for reproductions. See NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part II (under revision), Chapter 4.

By NPS *Management Policies* (Dec 88), books used as historic furnishings are managed as museum collections. However, they may also be cross-referenced to a library system to facilitate access. There should be a complete author and title listing of all volumes, and selected volumes may be fully catalogued into a working library collection. Any book catalogued into a library system would remain on display, but the library catalog would note its location. Library catalog records should cross-reference museum catalog numbers for any volumes also catalogued into a museum collection.

Sources

Book cradles, acid-free materials, and archival supplies can be purchased from library and archival materials suppliers.

References

Kyle, Hedi. *Library Materials Preservation Manual: Practical Methods for Preserving Books, Pamphlets and Other Printed Materials*. Bronxville, NY: Nicholas T. Smith, 1983.

Swartzburg, Susan Garretson, ed. *Conservation in the Library: A Handbook of Use and Care of Traditional and Nontraditional Materials*. London: Aldwych Press, 1983.

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Formerly issued as part of Conserve O Gram 21/2.
Revised 1993.

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