

Over to You

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor Bradburn:

In answer to "Conservator" Jan Paris, who wrote protesting my treating "a complex set of issues" — the care of old books and the even "more complex" question — the repair of old books in a straightforward manner, I plead guilty. I did simplify the care of old books.

Outside the rare book room of Wilson Library, the book world is a different ball game. Most librarians have neither the time nor the resources nor the need to make care of old books complex. They are busy down in the trenches; their budgets and personnel are limited and they don't have many valuable books — if any.

Ms. Paris and I do agree on one point; the important one: avoid excessive heat and humidity. This is 99% of the battle in preserving old books.

Dressing books with Vaseline is just the topping on the cake. It's cheap, readily available, keeps well, won't spill, doesn't smell and works great. Vaseline's a lubricant not a glue. It will not "cause adjoining volumes to become blocked or bonded together". This is not a statement of theory but practice. Some 29 years ago, I started dressing books with Vaseline and thousands of volumes later, I've not experienced the problems that Ms. Paris warns about, including "biological attack."

Ms. Paris proclaims that "recent research indicates that no real benefit to the flexibility of the leather results from any of the leather dressings in current use." — a professional change of opinion from a few years ago. Well, research or not, I'm going to keep polishing my shoes and slathering my leather books with Vaseline. I say skin is skin and skin needs "greasing". I bet ten years down the road my shoes and my books will be in better condition than Ms. Paris's.

However be it, librarians are in need of a practical, simple, straightforward, brief manual on the care of old books. Why don't the professionals in the field get together, survey the situation and produce such a document?

Per Ms. Paris's suggestion, I did call SOLINET and Sandy Mayberry was most helpful and cheerful though not at all approving of mixing Vaseline

and books; the "Conservators" do hue the party line.

Sincerely,

Tom Broadfoot

P.S. Shoe polish is also great to use on leather bindings; brings out the color. I prefer KIWI.

Dear NC Libraries:

I thoroughly enjoyed the special humor edition of *North Carolina Libraries*. There were a number of good pieces in there that showed some real imagination and flair. It's one of the best recent assemblages of library humor that I've seen. You are, in particular, to be congratulated for reviving the insidious technique pioneered by *The Worm Runner's Digest* of running the regular and the humor sections back to front. That will, of course, cause great consternation among those who have to deal with binding that issue not to mention those who then end up using a bound volume. Great fun.

Thanks also for the honorarium that came in the mail today. I hadn't expected any payment but do appreciate it. It's gone into a fund I maintain to help support various projects in the UConn Library.

Collegially,

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