

THE SEWN BOARDS BINDING

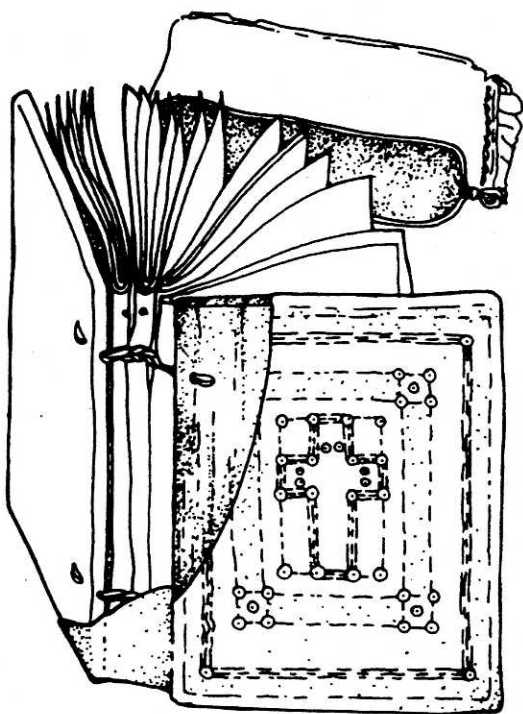
BY GARY FROST

MY ENTHUSIASM FOR SEWN BOARDS BINDING DEVELOPED IN 1987. During that year a Tony Cains workshop and the Library Binding Services conference on the use of historical models as sources for conservation binding structures inspired my interest in the use of this early binding form. Since then I have tried to develop a sewn boards structure for rebinding and for limited edition binding.

The sewn boards binding is just that. It follows in principle the form of the earliest codex binding of North Africa and elsewhere. The distinguishing features are unsupported sewing, boards sewn to the book as if they were outermost sections, and a squareless cover.

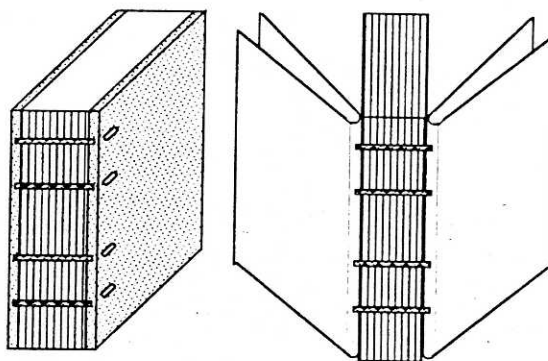
There is another distinguishing feature. The sewn boards binding is a laced-in, not a cased, construction binding. The laced construction feature takes on meaning as you move into in-boards work and begin to learn its skills and bindery interactions. Such production experience is also part of the revival of a historical form.

The attributes of historical binding types do not necessarily make them practical models for current work. At least six historical prototypes have proven directly useful in book conservation practice, but library binding and limited edition binding, the last remnants of the hand binding trade, are dominated by the grooved cover, case binding. Because of this lack of diversity the sewn boards form offers a new direction for production hand binding.



In many historical prototypes for this binding the boards are sewn to the text as if they were outermost sections of the book. This is typical of the Ethiopian binding where the wooden board sewing passes through a tunneled lacing path which produces an action and connection identical to sewing through the fold of a section.

In the modern sewn boards binding the board is a twenty point card folio sewn to the text as an outer section. The card folio is used either to produce a simple two ply board, or additional plies of board can be tipped into the folio. Unsupported, thread-only sewing and a squareless cover-to-text relation are also features of the sewn board structure, both old and new.

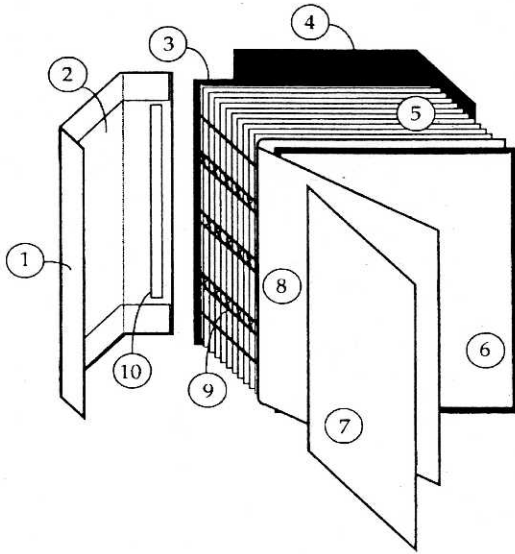


I have worked with the sewn boards model in both its application to rebinding of early printed books in a trial form for library binding and in its actual application to limited edition runs. The book rebinding form – with its single station chains of stitches conforming to existing holes or kerfs and its shoulder seated board – offers a graceful alternative to conventional sewing on cords, thongs, or tapes. The library binding version features absolute economy, without turn-ins. Travel journals that I have made in this style have survived very well.

But the central application for sewn boards has been for limited edition binding which is a large portion of our work at BookLab. At first we considered it as a "Desktop Deluxe" type for personal computer productions. Happily such a product never materialized, so we have avoided the paradox of a double fanned "sewn boards" form. However, the sewn boards form has become an option for through-the-fold sewn projects and two limited editions of one hundred and fifty copies each have been completed so far.

The features of this type of edition binding are indicated in the following diagram. These include: 1. linen spine wrapper with turn-ins, 2. spine inlay one-half millimeter taller than the text, 3. composite sewn board, 4. board cloth, 5. text and boards trimmed out together, 6. insert of two or four ply board, 7. outside filler card to match the thickness of the spine wrapper, 8. sewn card folio, 9. paired station edition sewing with a linking web pattern and 10. double faced tape to tack on gloved spine wrapper.

The sewn board design for limited edition work is best suited to books of two to eight sections. A production modification in the sewing is the use of paired stations that produces a web pattern instead of a chain. This is the



same pattern used for link stitching across linen tapes. It stitches quicker than single station chains and speeds tension pulling.

An endpaper folio is tipped to the outermost sections prior to sewing. For this reason a self-ending printer's blank is the best typographical design for a sewn boards production. The tipped end folio is a colored sheet chosen in coordination with the board cloth. The fold of the endpaper folio should be positioned very slightly ahead of the fold of the outer section to ensure freedom of the board opening in the finished binding.

Remember that the boards, or card folios, are sewn on first and last, over the endpapers. Following sewing, an additional two or four ply board can be bonded into the outer card folio by stippling adhesive in the gutter margins only. Set this mat board down directly behind the stitches. A nip, with the book bottomed out in a small lying press on the bench, will seal the mat boards into the sewn board folios. Then an additional filler card is tipped onto the exterior in a setback position to match the butt of the cloth spine wrapper. With thin texts the setback can be considered as twice the width of the text back. One half this measurement is lapped over by the board cloth.

Notice now that the board's plies are not bonded together overall and freely fan open from the foredge. Neither will the board coverings be bonded down except at the gutter margin and turn-ins, nor will the pastedowns be sealed down except at their perimeter. This drummed construction ensures a flat board, minimizes adhesive application time and almost eliminates pressing and seasoning time. The sparing use of adhesive is also in sympathy with historical models.

The sewn book is knocked up flat to the back and square to the head and carefully positioned in a finishing press for lining. Use a folder to smooth out the back and soften hard-edged section folds. A thin lining of kozo fiber paper is used with one or two linings depending on book size. The lining is bonded down with pva adhesive applied to the book with a small foam rubber roller. The dry lining strip is positioned and stippled on with a stiff brush. The books can be taken

out of the finishing press immediately to form neat stacks of lined books.

Trimming is a central step in the production of a sewn boards edition. The three edges are finished using a freshly sharpened blade on the guillotine. Cut the foredge first, then cut the tail placing the jogged head against the back gauge. Finally, cut the head to the finished book size. Of course, the positioning of the outer sewing stations took this trim into account.

Although the books are now "bound," we proceed to over-covering just as in the historical work. The cloth spine wrapper, with inlay and turn-ins, is made up as a separate component. A one-half millimeter over book height measure on the inlay piece will ease the wrapper positioning and ensure a visual cap head and tail. Seal the turn-in down on either side of the inlay and produce a slight downward glance to the turn-in on either side. I use strips of double-faced tape applied to the side margins of the wrapper between the turn-ins to tack it into position as the spine wrapper is gloved onto the book. However, for those not ready for self-adhesive binding methods, masked pva tips will work as well.

Almost done now, no cover making or casing in for this job! The board cloths are applied, setting them back the width of the text and tipping them on. A jig, carefully set up and carefully used, is needed to get the board cloths pitched on symmetrically. Then, working flat to the bench, open the book between the pastedown and board and apply adhesive to the turn-ins. Bring over the turn-ins, putting them down with simple miters. Finally, the pastedowns from the tipped-in endpaper folios are bonded down, using perimeter adhesion only. Put moisture wick sheets in the board openings and pile the books into stacks for drying.

As for finishing, the spine wrapper can be stamped before installation or paper labeled after. For board panel labels, it is necessary to consider the drummed construction. Blind stamped recesses for a paper board label should be provided with an underlying swatch of pva applied to the bare board before covering. (Otherwise an adhered label will distort the drummed cloth.) Or, if a board paper is to be used, this can be stamped prior to its installation.

The adaptation of the sewn boards binding to contemporary book work eliminates case making and casing-in. Eliminated also is rounding and backing. The contrasting spine cloth and board cloth, the elegant squareless array of book edges, and the interesting reveal of the board laminations at the visual site of the traditional endband decoration are all attributes of the appearance.

The finished book exhibits a docile opening, combined with cover-to-text attachment strength and a flow of motion and forces through the book. The binding has a graceful action which is visually elucidated as the spine wrapper moves off the book during opening and reading.

Now is the time to revive and reveal attributes of traditional book forms. Perhaps this sewn boards binding is not an antiquated structure, but a book model for the electronic era.