

Book Repair 101

By Vivian Walker, Library Technician

At the 2011 Conference, Brenda Somerville presented an enlightening workshop on book repair. I say enlightening because many people had never thought about repairs beyond tape and glue and I saw a lot of church librarians who were having personal lightbulb moments.

Some of the best ways to prevent damage or to stop it while it is still minor are taught in library skills courses. However, many techniques are learned on the job or copied from those willing to share their own quick tips. Even after 16 years as a library technician I can tell you that most of the nifty tricks I know came from working at Tyndale Seminary (where CLABC member Barbara Robinson also honed her repair skills and then passed them on to others) or from Carol Campbell, a CLAO member in Ontario, who also works in the technical services area of a public library system. In the next few issues of *The Rare Bird*, I will be discussing the basics of book repair, including how to set up an inexpensive repair and preparation kit, how to start off on the right foot by properly preparing and reinforcing new books, and how to fix even the most egregious cases of damage. I'll discuss how some materials can be found around the house or at dollar stores and when to steer clear of cheap fixes and use archival quality materials. I'll even tell you when to call "uncle" and give up.

First, the Toolbox

There are repair kits available from library suppliers, but in my experience, many have materials that aren't quite right for the mix of materials in church libraries or require skills that library volunteers don't have. Your experiences may vary, but I can tell you up front that I have never re-stitched cloth bindings or used Japanese rice paper to invisibly repair page tears. You need to measure the book's value against the cost and time of extensive repairs. The following is a good basic kit for both preparing and repairing library materials. You can add other sizes of materials and more expensive tools as you go on, but this will get you started. It's not inexpensive, but you can justify it over time in the longer life you will be giving your materials.

- Repair Manual- both Brodart (<http://www.ioba.org/StepByStepBookRepair.pdf>) and Carr McLean (http://www.carrmclean.ca/UploadedImages/Documents/REPAIR_LR.pdf) have excellent free manuals that give you the basics of repair. They also tell how to use their supplies in the most effective ways. Print out a copy of each and keep it with your toolbox. In this repair series, I will be referring to illustrations in the Brodart and Carr McLean manuals rather than draw my own. (For which you will be very grateful!)
- 2 pairs scissors- Right off the bat, take the cheaper/older pair of scissors and write "STICKY" on it with a Sharpie Marker. This is the pair you will be using to cut tape, plastic wrap, and hinge tape. Then write "NOT STICKY" on the other pair so you won't ruin your "good" scissors by leaving adhesive behind.
- 1 exacto knife- a dollar store variety will work fine.

- 1 bone folder- you can buy ones made of real bone, but check the library supply catalogues to find a plastic one for around \$5. The non-metal edge side of a ruler also works, but is not optimum. You will mostly use this for burnishing labels, pushing tape into tight spots, and gently pushing out bubbles from book wrap.
- Knitting needles-easy enough to find a few old pairs. These will be used for poking into tight spots where the bone folder can't go.
- Bamboo skewers and chopsticks. Just a few of each will come in handy when working with glue and plastic wrap.
- Repair tape- I use 3M 845 Book Repair tape. Buy at least two sizes- the 1 ½ inch width and the 3 inch width. The 1 ½ inch width can also be used as a barcode or spine label cover. DO NOT substitute packaging tape. It turns yellow and brittle, bleeds glue under the edges, and starts to curl after a few years.
- Magic Tape- Scotch brand or equivalent in ½ inch works well for mending pages. It has a matte finish, doesn't yellow, and disappears into the page.
- Hinge Tape- This comes in clear plastic, paper, Tyvek, or cloth in various widths. Clear plastic works best for paperbacks, and cloth for hardcover. However, I find 1 inch Tyvek with a split back to be the most versatile and easiest to apply if you are only buying one roll.
- Erasers-a pink eraser, an art gum eraser, and a plastic eraser (the kind used for drafting) will enable you to get rid of most markings.
- Sandpaper- you only need a couple of small squares of this in the finest grit. You can easily bring some from home or buy it at the dollar store.
- Waxed paper- this is sold in library supply catalogues but it's nothing fancy. You don't even need to bring this from home. Save the backing papers from labels and plastic wrap in your library and cut them into 8 x 8 squares.
- White book glue- you will want to buy this from a library or art supplier so you get acid-free. Brodart's Bind Art is excellent. Buy the smaller size. After a while the lid and upper part of the bottle get gummed up and you will be happy to buy a fresh bottle.
- Paste brushes- you will be applying glue with these. Small watercolour paintbrushes from dollar stores are just fine and you won't feel guilty throwing them away when they get too stiff to clean.
- Rubber bands- a variety of widths will help hold repaired books together. Just bring in your saved ones from home. The thick ones from broccoli work well.
- Binder clips-as with rubber bands, have a few of these in various widths for holding repaired books together. They are great for clamping on the spines of glued books while they dry.

- Plastic book wrap in 10 inch and 12 inch widths. Don't buy the thinnest one (2-3 ml) because it stretches as you are working with it, sticks together, and is hard to handle. The thickest one (7 ml) is sturdy, but you may find it is extra work to make it stay folded over edges. The 4 ml seems about right. DO NOT buy Mactac or similar plastic wrap at hardware stores. It is okay for books over the short term, but it has chemicals that off-gas and I don't think it is safe if you are covering multiple books and have to handle it and inhale. Whenever I have worked in libraries that use inexpensive plastic wraps from building stores, my hands and eyes turn red after a short period of time and my nose begins to run.
- Book jacket covers if you use them, and filament or attaching tape to hold them in place. If you have a small library and don't add many hardcover books with jackets, you can use plastic wrap on the jackets instead.
- Cloth repair tape in the colour of your church's hymnals and pew Bibles if the library is responsible for repairs.

You may notice that I haven't added reinforcing wings or corner repair wings. In a future article, I will show you how to make templates to cut your own out of plastic book wrap scraps.

Place your supplies, other than the tape, in a sturdy plastic container. Add a laminated list of supplies that the kit should contain. If you have extra money, buy a dispenser that holds a variety of repair and reinforcing tapes on a 3 inch core roller. If you'd rather save the cost (about \$60), you can hang your rolls of tape on a wall-mounted metal paper towel holder. With your workspace ready, you will be ready to learn some new skills! I look forward to teaching you how to effectively protect your library's investment in books and other materials.

Next issue..... *Starting Off Right – preparing new books using your toolbox.*