

Conserving the Context of Commonplace Form and Function in Field Book Treatment

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the Field Book Project, undertaken in partnership with the Smithsonian Libraries and the Biodiversity Heritage Library, conservators have grappled with appropriate treatment methods for note books that historically have been cared for as ancillary collections. Original structures designed for ephemeral working use (indeed, sometimes even designed to be taken apart, such as a notebook with perforated pages) now require long-term stabilization. Surprises found between the pages and in the books' makeup also present challenges. Accordingly, conservators adapted established conservation and preservation treatments and best practices in order to meet the needs of the books as well as those of the project.

In this poster, we present examples and variants on the sewn board binding, taking into account similarity to the original structure and the level of complexity inherent in the treatment. Informed treatment decisions (*see below*) serve multiple goals: a stable structure that opens flexibly, easily, and flat to permit imaging; reversal of overbearing secondary bindings that limit access, block view and threaten loss of information; and restoration of material culture characteristics related to stationery binding practice and researchers' use.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INFLUENCES: Gary Frost, Craig Jensen, Katinka Keus, Karen Hanmer, Consuela Metzger, Sonja Schwoil, Keith Smith*

FIELD BOOK PROJECT CONSERVATION STAFF AND INTERNS: Blair Bailey, Janelle Batkin-Hall, Elizabeth Childs, Anna Friedman Fridley, Tessa Gadowski, Andrea K. Hall, Noah Smutz, Win Suen, Kirsten Tyree, Breann Young

*See also our online bibliography.



Smithsonian Institution Archives



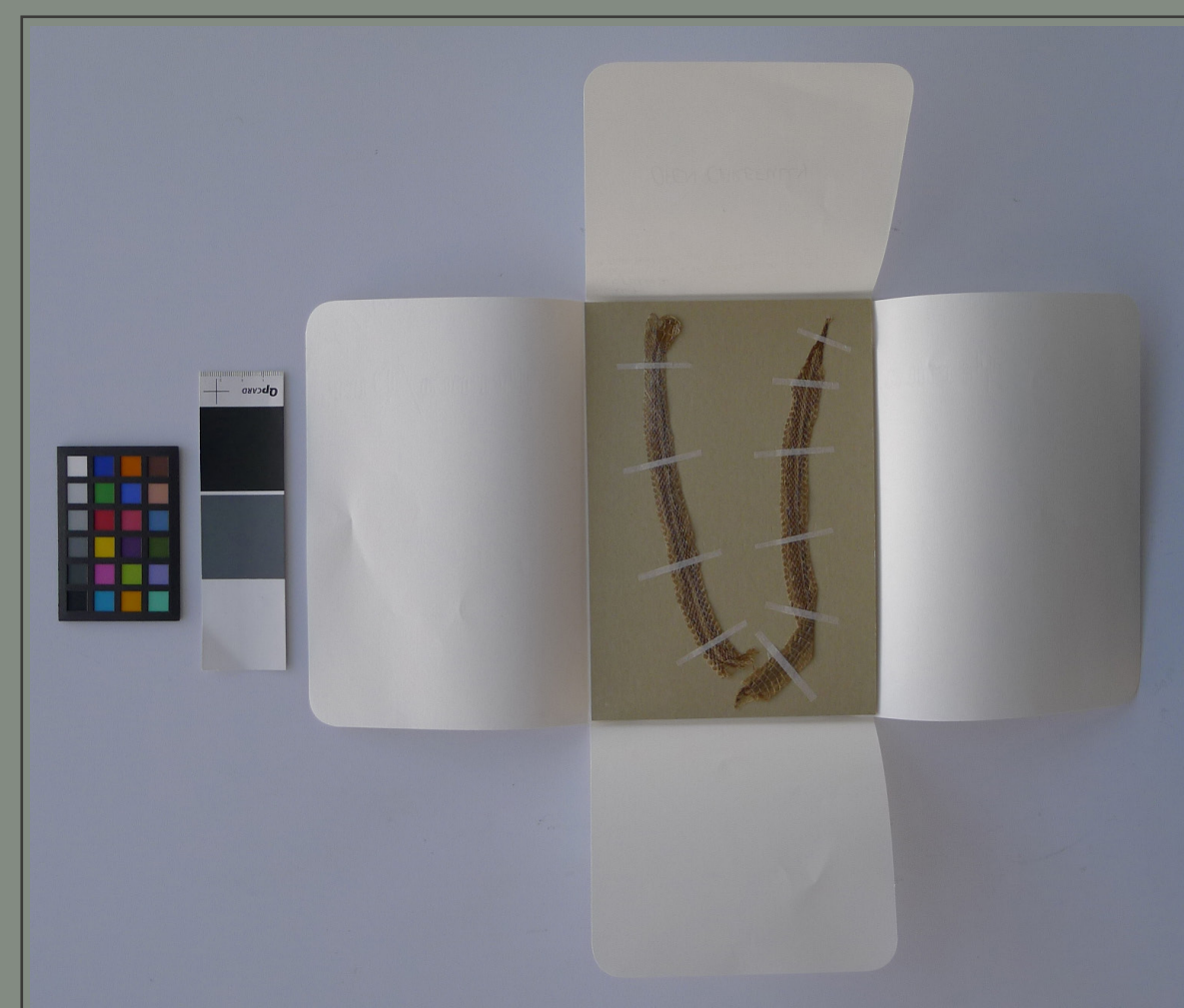
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ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL Informing Treatment Decisions

When making a treatment choice that affects the structure of the volume, several factors are at play: the original structure must be considered, and returning a book to its original, working state is often the goal; this assumes and includes the way that the book was used by its original owner or creator. With field books, inclusions—often specimens—are encountered between the pages, and these must be considered in choosing treatments. Access is also a factor, as the project's main focus is the digitization and online publication of these materials, so a treatment that facilitates imaging, and therefore flat opening, of the book is desirable and helpful, and may result in a permanent or temporary disbinding.



FAR LEFT: A specimen mount for a snakeskin found unexpectedly between the pages of a field notebook during treatment.
LEFT: Before and after with tight or oversewn bindings—above, the book can barely open; below, the book's pages drape smoothly for ease of imaging and consultation.

TREATMENT SOLUTIONS for CONSERVATION REBINDING



Drawing on the earliest examples of codex bookbinding styles, the sewn board structure for conservation has several advantages: a flexible and flat opening; secure attachment of the cover to the bookblock; chain-stitch sewing accommodates existing sewing stations (a concertina can also be used to reduce pressure or friction); little to no shaping of the spine, thus not inducing further damage or distortion to the exterior gatherings of the bookblock; adjustable thickness of the sewn card folio boards, which can be set to accommodate swell from the sewing or guarded sections, or to nestle squarely against the bookblock shoulders (*see Gary Frost, 2004*).

Sewn Board Binding, Cased

More similar to original structure

Less complex treatment

The longstitch, when sewn unlinked, facilitates easy removal of a single section when particular openings are desired for display or exhibition, and avoids the creation of preferential opening and the need for rotations. The section(s) can easily be removed without disturbing the remaining structure. The thread tie-off is hidden from view under the spine wrapper, giving the impression of a link-stitched book. Sewing through a slotted or pierced support provides a surface for new strong thread to slide upon, reducing friction and strain on brittle paper, and for knots to rest upon, to avoid sinking into extant kerf cuts or mended lacunae at sewing stations if broken away with aged adhesive.

Longstitch, Unlinked Single Sections



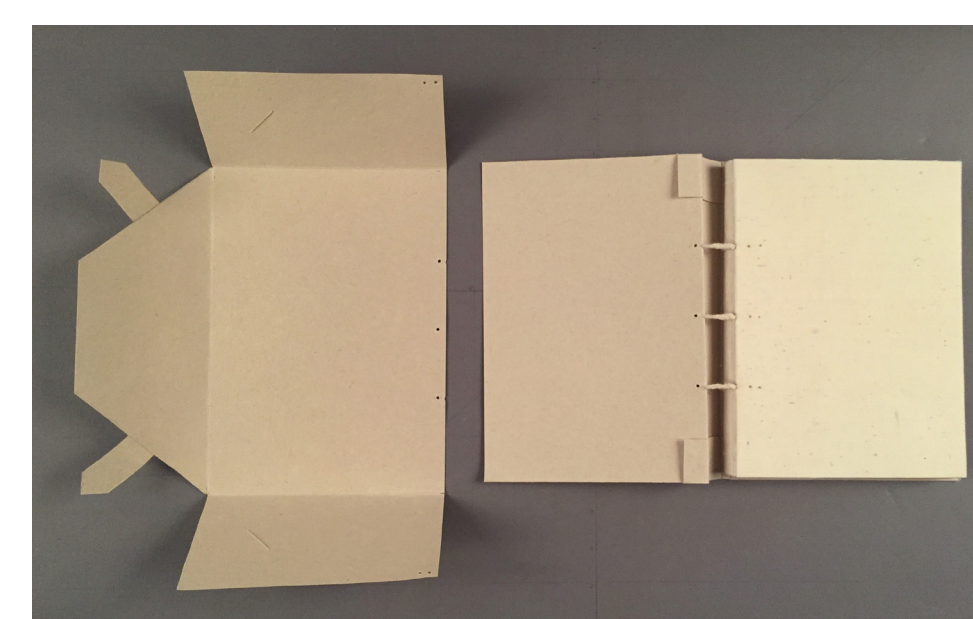
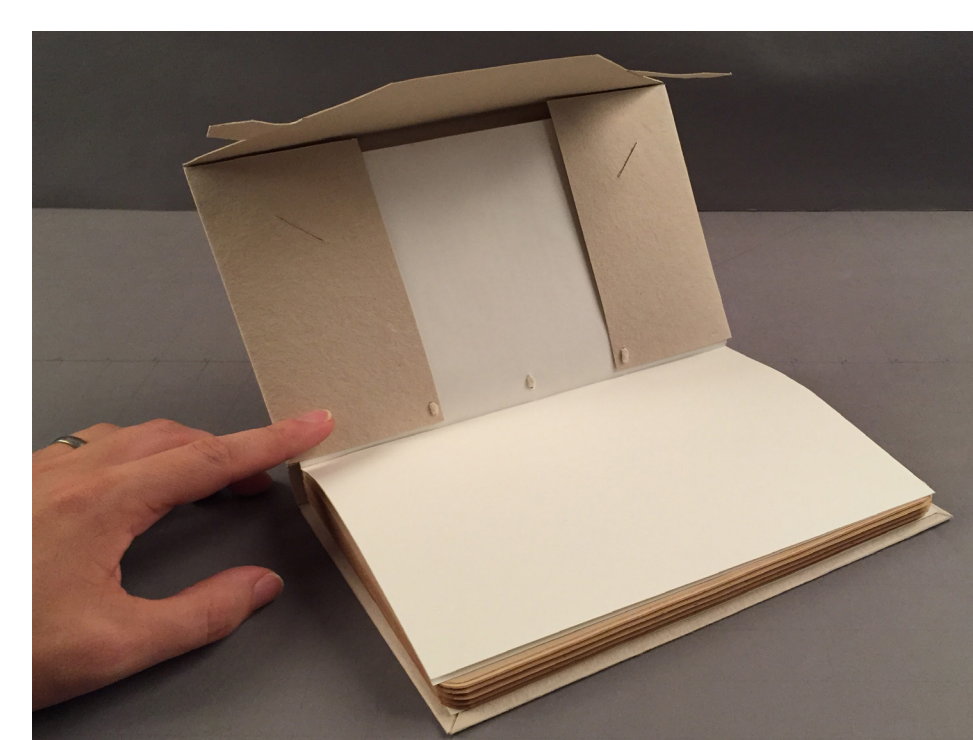
Less similar to original structure



In the longstitch linked sewing shown here, the original thin boards covered with red-rotted split leather are partially encapsulated in a polyester wrapper with pockets (much like a CoLibri cover). Despite the modernity of the plastic, it presents a mostly original appearance to the reader, and allows handling without restoring the deteriorated leather boards. (Alternately, the boards could be treated with consolidant, and modified with a sewn board stub for inclusion within the new paper case, which would replicate the original sequence of the bookblock. However, this adds a level of complexity to the treatment.)

Longstitch with Encapsulated Board Wrapper

More complex treatment



Laced Paper Case

The laced paper case is especially suited to bookblocks with no extant cover, and offers protection and additional support. It was developed with sewing supports in mind, and uses the tension of the cords laced through the case to hold it in place. Use of sewing supports, not normally found in a sewn board binding, mitigates stress on sewing stations and spine-folds that may be compromised due to prior interventions, despite the now-mended gatherings. It also echoes the standard sewn board convention of incorporating the exterior covering into the sewing structure of the book. The natural hollow allows the bookblock spine to flex freely and open flat. Variations include one- and three-piece styles. The one-piece is similar to a covering in full leather, with either turned-in or flush-trimmed edges; the three-piece offers an aesthetic mimicking a quarter binding, with mixed cloth or paper coverings.

A BRIEF VISUAL HISTORY OF FIELD BOOKS



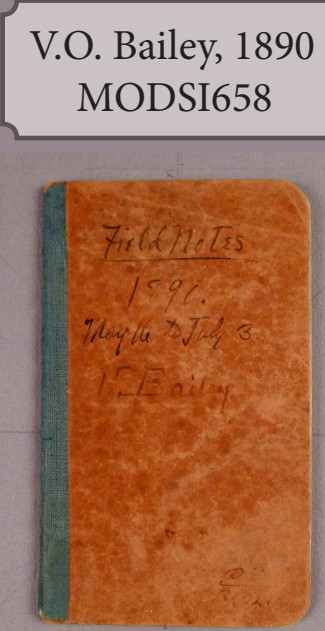
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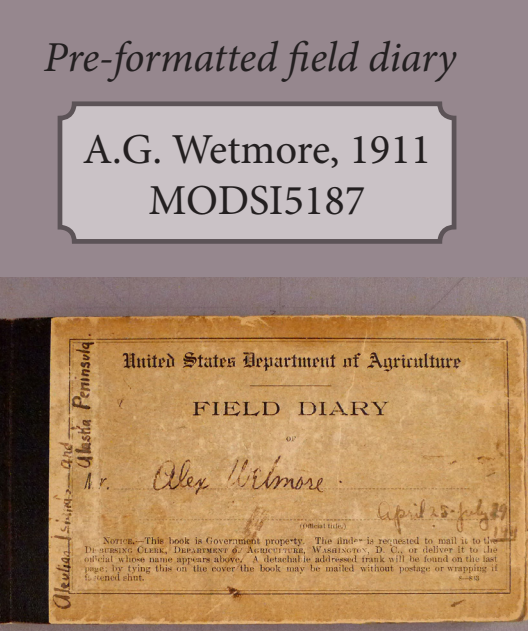
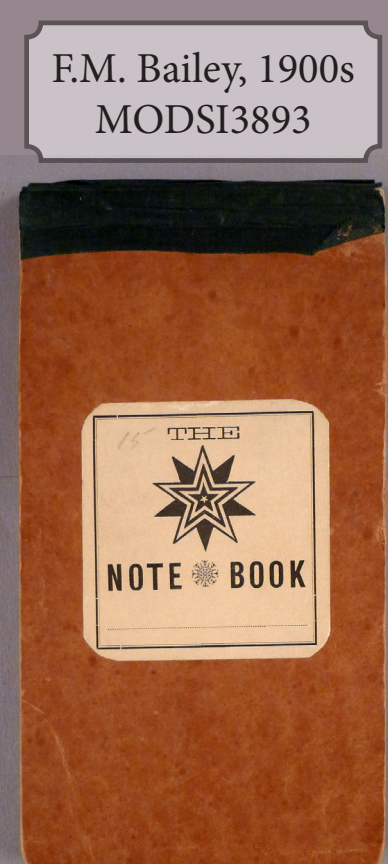
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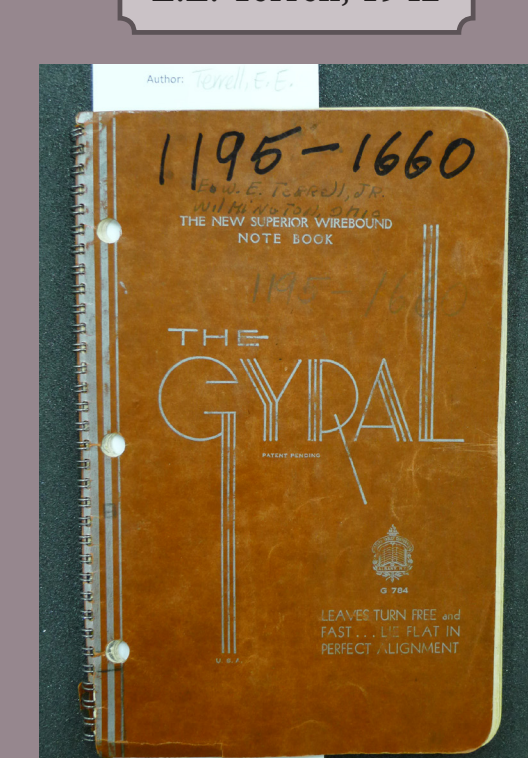
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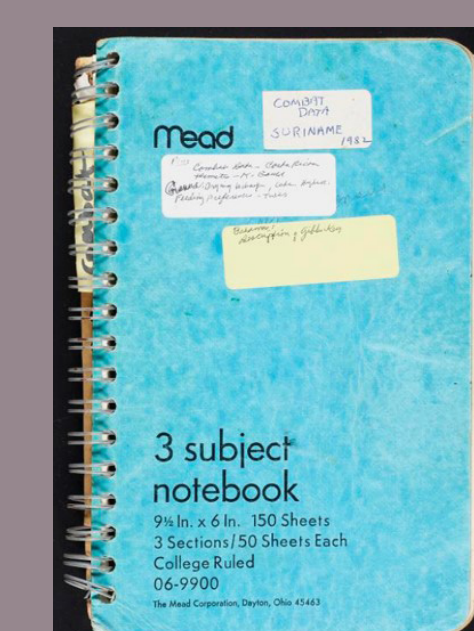
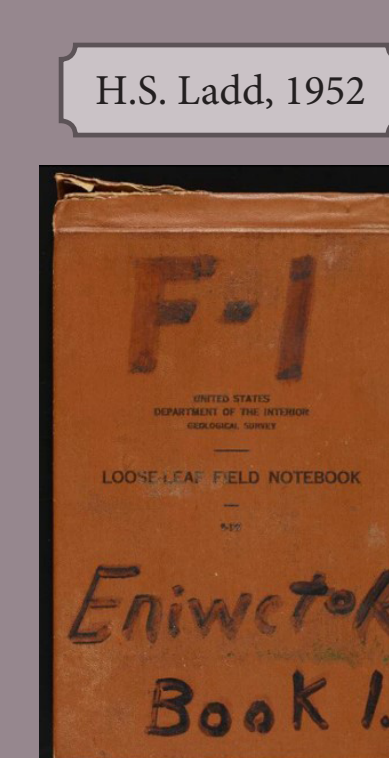
1900



1925



1950



1975