

# THE SEWN BOARDS BINDING

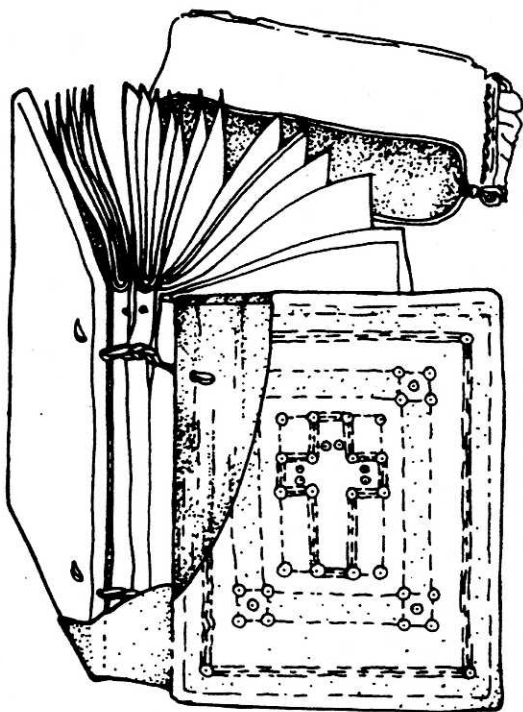
BY GARY FROST

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.

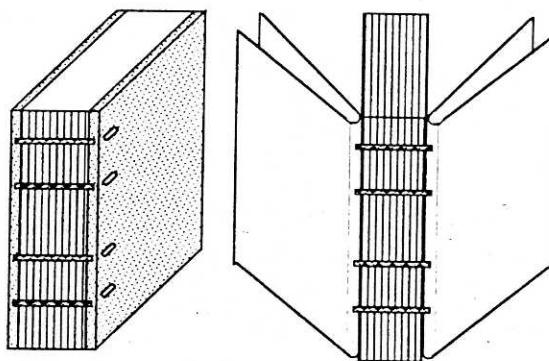
There is another distinguishing feature. The sewn boards binding is a laced-in, not a cased, construction binding. The laced construction feature takes on meaning as you move into in-boards work and begin to learn its skills and bindery interactions. Such production experience is also part of the revival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

