

History of American Bookbinding
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Case Construction, Cloth Covered Book Manufacturing In the United States, 1820–1850

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introduction

The advent of case construction bookbinding in book manufacturing occurred in the United States between 1820 to 1850. This is a period in which bookbinding was handwork with tools and equipment guided by physical effort alone. While case construction enabled the eventual mechanization of industrial bookbinding, that mechanization occurred after the structure had first proven itself as a new industrial prototype and as a preferred method of book manufacturing by hand.

While associated with the use of cloth covering generally and with the subsequent decoration of cloth covering, these are secondary features of case construction binding as an industrial prototype.(1) Production cloth covering long preceded the 1820-50 period of case construction development while decoration of cloth covers by direct stamping begins only at the end of the period. What this period does include is the convergence of case construction with features of cloth covering and cloth decoration into a practical product.

Cased and laced (2) constructions are frequently differentiated by a construction sequence of cover made separately from text forwarding versus a construction sequence of cover built directly on the text block.(3) Although this distinction is not an absolute (4), separated case cover construction enabled simultaneous production of covers and text, facilitated the bench-top covering of boards with cloth, and permitted direct stamping of the spine of the cover. Ultimately, case construction provided no obstacle to the eventual mechanization of the binding process.

observing evidence in extant U.S. bindings

There are certain characteristics that indicate either laced construction, in-boards or case construction in cloth covered production binding from the first half of the

nineteenth century.(5) Sewing onto sawed in cords was standard for both cover attachment types indicating stability in this department staffed by women. Double sheet, sewn endpapers are also standard to both types though put down in a distinctly different manner. The texts forwarded in-boards were usually untrimmed and unopened. By contrast, work for case construction was usually trimmed by plowing of three edges.

With laced, in-boards work the boards were "crashed on" or attached with a job of glue in the gutter of the pastedown. This first, partially adhered, sheet was then partially torn away just before covering, usually leaving a remnant half leaf which was captured by the turn-ins of the cloth and board papers. This is clear evidence of in-boards work. Only a single sheet of pastedown is then available to be put down with in-boards work. With case construction, two pastedown sheets including any text back lining lapping onto these sheets, are all adhered on top of the turn-ins of the cloth cover.(6) Case construction covers are invariably full cloth while in-boards work is frequently quarter cloth with dyed paper covered boards. With case binding the spine of the cover, with a separate inlay applied, is free of the text back. With in-boards binding the spine of the cover is frequently adhered tight to the text back.

Printed paper labels are common to both types of construction in early cloth binding.(7) Production stamping in gold directly on the cloth spine, first with locked-up type and subsequently with dies, can only be accomplished with case construction. Gold titling was provided for in-boards cloth work but it required either tooling by hand onto the cloth spine or onto an applied skiver label while working directly on the bound book.

context of bindery methods

Case construction bookbinding was well developed in the German trade of the mid 18th century. This work featured well sewn texts on vellum straps with trimmed and colored edges. Forwarding to that stage could be continued with leather covering or, as a less expensive option, case construction paper covers could be applied to the text. These covers consisted of a spine wrapper that was lapped and adhered under either board. This lapped component assembly was then cut out as a whole. The bare board cover could be cased directly to the text or, more frequently, the bare board cover was over covered in decorated paste papers with label piece and gold tooling before casing in. This German cased binding work continued throughout the 19th century with variations of whole

cloth and quarter cloth with decorated board papers installed over the underlying bare board cover.

Cloth covering was common in inexpensive American binding by the turn of the 19th century. An earlier American cloth was linen canvas adhered overall with spine adhered tight to the text back of laced construction work. The introduction of lighter, polished and dyed cotton cloth which was sized with starch and calendered occurred in the 1820's, though again, in association with laced construction work. In-boards covering using the lighter cotton cloth was difficult. (8) Cotton cloth for such coverings was frequently reinforced overall, or in the spine area, with paper lining. Even so, tripping the turn-ins of the glue struck cloth while manipulating the book with boards attached was certainly not a promising industrial method.

Case construction greatly eased covering using cotton cloth since the boards could be laid down without the text attached. Such, bindery methods conversions from in-boards to case construction caused disruption in the assignments of forwarders and finishers and entailed considerable business risk. (9) In the 1820 to 1850 period finishers were assigned to cloth work to provide stamping on the covers using either locked-up type or smaller dies. Forwarders were reassigned from cutting out and covering stations to case making stations and casing-in stations while other workers loaded and un-loaded the presses for building-in the work. In this last operation the American development of edged press boards greatly facilitated speed and accuracy in loading presses while it also neatly sealed and formed the case construction joints.(10)

Evidence indicates that case construction binding with its bindery features such as the bench top case maker and edged boards for building-in, was introduced in the U.S. in New York in the early 30's. Many binderies continued with laced construction, in-boards edition work well into the nineteenth century even though case construction speeded and facilitated cloth cover fabrication and finishing. Outside of New York, and with genres of shorter run book production, laced construction cloth covering lasted throughout and beyond the 1820-1850 period.

Binding at the J. & J. Harper company in New York offers an example of the advent of cloth case binding in the United States. Production in-board cloth binding was manufactured here in the late 1820's. From evidence of the bindings, the change over from in-board laced to case construction occurred around mid year in 1831. The same polished cotton was used as in previous years, but the

text edges were now trimmed. Trimming and whole cloth covering were components in the dramatic industrial reorganization of the work that accompanied the conversion to case binding. Metal edged pressing boards, producing the familiar modern grooved joint, came into use in 1833 reflecting the increasing speed on the casing-in and pressing line. New varieties of book cloths, both ribbon embossed and grained, came into use during the period from 1833 to 1835. Finally, gold impression on the spine, produced from locked-up type, appears in 1836 when it supplants printed paper labeling. The decade from 1826-1836 must have been an amazingly exciting time in the management of and participation in bindery operations of the J. & J. Harper company.

conclusion

Case construction binding enabled industrial binderies to produce 1000's of books per day by hand methods. In the last half of the 19th century case construction dominated all other structural options in American work and laced, in-boards construction was totally superseded as an industrial process. Only after the mechanization of case construction binding did a subsequent mechanization of the wrapper construction, or paperback structure, develop to challenge case construction. So the dominance of case construction lasted over a century. In the specialties of library binding and edition binding case construction dominates to the present day.

Case binding manufacture has migrated successfully to digital technologies. Both computer assisted and keyboard guided equipment is in place while the materials used are likewise products of digital technologies. However, it is possible that case construction will not dominate the future of the paper based book. It is more likely that wrapper construction will dominate. Surprisingly, it is even possible that the built in boards principle exemplified in codex prototypes from late antiquity to the 19th century could return to book production. As production methods change, case construction bookbinding may finally assume a legacy identity like cigar box making or photo case making.

footnotes

(1) Narratives of the history of English and American bookbinding in the 19th century offer a contrary impression that the introduction of cotton cloth covering and die stamping on cloth constituted the change that introduced a new industrial prototype.

(2) Cased and laced bookbinding can be conceptually separated in terms of cover to text attachment with cased binding cover sealed and hinged to the text at a position away from the

fold of the endpaper and laced construction distinguished by cover attachment exactly at the fold of the endpaper. This distinction also correlates with the typical joint groove of case construction contrasted with the tight, groove-less joint of laced construction.

Trade expressions such as "boards" and "in-boards" terms are used for description of less and more expensive binding. Intermingling of bindery, book trade and bibliographical terms confuses narratives of case construction binding. I have chosen "cased" and "laced" because they work fairly well, are equivalent and yet distinct and they assist in description of other construction types such as the "laced case

(3) An eloquent expression of this differentiation is offered by Michael Winship; "Boards are attached to the book before they are covered or after."

(4) A particular example of tight joint laced construction production using cover made off the book sequence was offered by the old Harcourt Bindery in Boston with its production of fancy sets for the department store trade. An example of case construction built in-boards is offered by split-board technique.

(5) I have recorded and tabulated features of hundreds of American cloth bindings on imprints from the 1820's to the 1850's. Occasionally owners' inscriptions provide an exact date for the binding. Also helpful for binding dating are bound in advertisements.

(6) It is not clear to me at what point the double pastedown was "made" together. This may have been done with paste as an independent operation at the time of text back lining or it may have occurred on the fly at casing in.

(7) Looking at books on the shelf, the advent of case construction in cloth work is almost invisible since the letterpress labels of laced and cased work produce an identical appearance.

(8) use of animal glues was conventional by the 19th century and this added to the misery of adhering the cotton cloths even though the starch size was somewhat resistant to the strike of the glue. Prevalence of ¼ cloth covering in laced construction is probably a reflection of the difficulty of working the early cloths onto the bound book.

(9) An option for publishing houses was setting up entirely new case construction binderies.

(10) This seemingly simple innovation was quite important to the manufacturing process particularly as it enable the quicker loading of press prior to the setting of glue. Early edged boards must have been iron since binding examples show spots of rust in the joints. Brass was subsequently adopted as the standard for edged boards. Its provenance as an American invention is reflected in the British resistance to grooved joints until the 1950's.

bibliography

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