

## BOOK CONSERVATION BASICS

The following is a short guide on how to properly care for any antique books or paper materials that may be in your home. It can be easy to think that a book is a sturdy material, less fragile than a glass vase or ceramic plate, but the truth is that old books (even those from the 1930's or 1940's, not just the 1800's and beyond!) can be damaged in numerous ways. Therefore, to help you ensure that they are around for future generations to enjoy, we have put together the following introductory guide on proper care and handling.

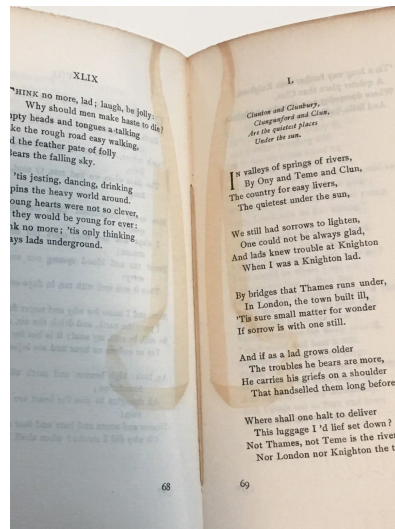
### TIPS FOR HANDLING:

- Make sure that your hands are clean. You do not need to wear cotton gloves when handling old books or materials, however it is important to wash and dry your hands thoroughly before handling any materials.
- Keep food and drink away. A small splatter of water, oil, and/or crumbs from food can have dramatic impacts on aged paper or vellum. Prevent unnecessary damage and do not have food or drinks of any kind near the book while it is being handled. If you are going to take notes, follow the universal rule of every librarian: use a pencil. Remember, no pens or markers should ever be anywhere near your old or rare books.
- Remove the book from its shelf safely. Do not put your finger on the top of the spine and pull down, as this can cause damage and wear away the spine (Fig. 1). Instead, push the neighboring books inward and place your fingers on both sides of the spine at the middle of the book.



(Fig. 1)

- Do not force the book to open at 180 degrees, and do not let it rest flat. This can affect old bindings. Instead, place the book on a pillow or prop the covers up with the use of other materials.
- Never use random objects as bookmarks, post-its, index cards and/or notebook paper to mark a page and do not ‘dog ear’ the pages. Using paper clips or acidic inserts like paper can affect the delicate paper of the book. See Fig. 2, for how even a simple ribbon stained the paper! If you must save a page, we recommend using a piece of archival paper, which should be acid-, lignin- and sulfur free, and buffered.



(Fig. 2)

- Never use self-adhesive tape, glue, or rubber bands on books to hold their bindings. If you wish to repair a book, consult someone in your area that can do proper book restoration. Some re-bindings can be done at home, and we will show you a guide later on in this series. However, if you need to have your book repaired or rebound, do not try a quick, at-home fix. This can create more damage and make restoration harder, or not possible at all.

## TIPS FOR STORAGE

- If you want to protect a book and ensure it will be around for years to come, you must prioritize proper storage. The materials books are made of (paper, leather, glue, string, etc.), are all incredibly susceptible to the natural elements (Fig. 3-4). Glue can attract bugs, which will eat it away. Heat can break the bonds, and moisture can rot the string that holds it all together!



(Fig. 3)



(Fig. 4)

- The recommended temperature to store books is between 65°F to 70°F, with a relative humidity between 40%-55%. Though more difficult to measure, and something most don't consider beyond a humid summer day, humidity levels are very important in book care. Low humidity levels can make old paper brittle, causing it to break during handling, and high humidity levels over 65% provide mold and mildew with an excellent opportunity for growth. Humidity and moisture can also cause the boards and binding to warp (Fig. 5).



(Fig. 5)

- If your book is large (over 3 inches wide at the spine), the book should not be stored upright, rather it should be stored flat on its side. This is because the weight of the book can damage itself over time, causing the spine to wilt and breakdown.

- When storing books on a shelf, aim for a metal shelf. However wood is fine as long as it has been well sealed. Unsealed, or improperly sealed, wood can cause acid to migrate from the wood and into the books. A metal bookshelf is the safest option for old books.
- Make sure that your books are not too tightly packed on the shelves. The books should have 'breathing room', and not have their covers rubbing against each other. By providing more room, the books can still have support in their upright position, without damaging any detail work or leather on the front and back covers (Fig. 6).



(Fig. 6)

- It is very important to remember to clean your books regularly, as dust can accumulate quickly on them. Dust can be a food source for mold and mildew, which can weaken, damage, and stain books and paper. To clean your books: remove books from the shelf, hold the book closed, and carefully brush off the dust with a soft cloth or soft brush away from the shelves and other books. This will help to prevent the dust from resettling on the books.
- Lastly, keep your books out of direct sunlight and away from ultraviolet light, especially. Store them in a safe location where the light cannot fade the covers or pages.

With these tips your books should remain in good condition and future damage can be easily avoided! To learn more about conservation basics, or the antique books in our collection, visit the Natick Historical Society or [natickhistoricalsociety.org](http://natickhistoricalsociety.org).

Thank you for reading!