Many libraries have examples of miniature books in their collections. Like their full sized cousins, they can come in a variety of structures, decorations, and materials, and share some of the same issues for their care, such as proper handling and environmental conditions, storage, exhibitions, and risk of theft or loss. In miniature books, however, some of these issues are exacerbated by their size or are completely unique unto themselves.

**What is a Miniature?**

According to the Miniature Book Society of North America, a book must be less than three inches in all dimensions (height, width, thickness) to be considered “miniature,” although outside the US, anything under four inches is considered miniature. Collectors who specialize in miniature books even have subcategories by size: macro-mini (3” to 4”), the miniature (2” to 3”), micro-mini (1” to 2”) and the ultra-micro-mini (less than 1” in all dimensions). (fig. 1)

Examples of miniature books can be found very early in the history of the codex, from Babylonian clay tablets to the earliest of printed books from the printing house of Gutenberg. Their size can represent a very functional need for the user such as almanacs and calendars, small prayer books to be carried on your person and stay hidden from prying eyes, smaller books for smaller hands of children, but can also be a product produced to be social and fun because of the charm imbued by their size. (fig. 2) The image to the right is an example of a souvenir dance card given to young ladies attending “technician balls” with charms attached representing each respective union: Fireman, Crane Worker, Boilermaker, etc. The books would hang from the ladies’ waist and contained “…a copy of the set list for the night right at the front, so the guys would know which song they were signing up for. It was like the Tinder of its day except when you swipe right it means you get married,” said Jesse Hunt, Conservator at the Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University.

Text is produced in letterpress, hand calligraphy, lithography, photoengraving, and modern printing by laser and inkjet printers. Binding structures reflect traditional binding traditions of their time with alterations for their size: pamphlet sewing, all along sewing, laced on boards, flat and rounded spines, accordion folded.

Binding and decoration can be as intricate as full-sized books with full leather bindings, hand tooling on the covers, and gilt edges. Or they can be utilitarian, with simple paper cover and pamphlet sewing or cloth case binding.

Contemporary bookbinders, printers, and book artists today produce miniatures to exercise and show off their skill in creating fine design bindings on such a small scale; and some artists will specialize in the miniature scale. (fig. 3)

**Considerations**

Miniature books are susceptible to the same kinds of damage as other books,
such as light damage, (fig. 4) but the care of miniature books can present a few quirks. Depending on how they are cataloged, miniature book collections can be shelved with average sized books or with other miniature books. The risk to a miniature being eclipsed by its neighbor should be considered in both cases. There are examples of books as small as 1/2” tall, in which case a neighbor of 3” tall is gigantic. Not fitting on the shelves correctly, becoming lost on the shelf with larger books, or even being pushed back and lost between shelves are common issues with books of these sizes. If miniatures are part of a single large collection, there is the inclination to store them all in a single box together. After all, space is at a premium and these items are small. A collection of a hundred miniature books could take up as little space as a square foot. It is difficult to keep track of individual items with this type of storage. The items are often not put back properly in the box, and it is not easily detectable if something is missing. (fig. 5)

The choice of structure and materials used to make a book has a great impact on how the book will function and hold up over time. In miniatures, elements such as thickness and weight of materials are much more noticeable than they might be on an average size book. Inappropriate structure or materials choices will have high impact on how to take care of them in collections and could also be considered inherent-vice of the item, same as if the quality of the materials was poor. A common malady of miniature books is “yawning” of the covers that could be because of the type of board attachment, too much lining or glue on the spine, tightness of the sewing, or any combination thereof. (fig. 6)

Where a larger book might demonstrate over time uneven wear due to handling of a particular area, miniature bindings could show wear across all surfaces and at an accelerated rate. (fig. 7) They are touched across all surfaces because the binding fits into the palm of a hand; the width of a finger can touch the whole surface of a page as it is turned.

Miniature books in circulation run a high risk of being damaged during transport, or by other items a patron may have with the books. For special collections, these items could easily be pocketed and stolen.

**Preservation**

Often the solution to minimize damage to higher risk materials involves enclosures. For miniatures, this also holds true. A common structure for an enclosure is the four-flap wrapper with portfolio or case, the wrapper holding the item while the portfolio adds some strength and protection for the overall package. When fitting items to these types of enclosures, the fit should be not-too-tight at any one given dimension but not-so-large that the item is loose to move around inside and possibly cause damage when in transit. A miniature can be enclosed in four-flap wrapper that is custom fit for its size and then fit into an outer portfolio case that is a common/average size of the smaller books from the same shelving area. Now the item will sit on the shelf comfortably next to its neighbor, visible to patrons and library staff, and will circulate more safely if appropriate.

For special collections, miniature books requested for reading rooms should be treated the same as their larger cousins. Each book should be requested individually and limited in number to how many are in use at a time. It is tempting to bring the whole set out, especially if they are housed together in a single box, but they are
more easily tracked and accounted for when they are individually processed.

**Conservation**

Often the first head-scratching dilemma for conserving miniature books is how to perform some of the treatments without equipment in miniature sizes.

The options are familiar to most conservators:
- Invest in a new specialized piece of equipment. Where will this be stored? Will it be used again? Who is paying for this? (fig. 8)
- MacGyver something from materials on hand or those easily found at the hardware store.

Whichever path is taken, it should be noted that the textblocks do not sit still or line-up with the same ease as larger books when using the equipment and may take quite a bit a fussing to get just right. The time should be taken to do so and time estimated accordingly; miniature books do not mean miniature treatment times.

Whenever choosing materials for mending, a balance must be made for strength, durability, and aesthetic. For a miniature, any material added could change the functionality of the book dramatically. Uneven sewing tension, mending tissue or spine lining paper slightly too thick, paste too strong—small changes that might be unnoticeable on a larger book—will stand out aesthetically and functionally on a miniature.

Resewing of textblocks is possible but thread matching must be exact to account for the original swell of the spine and is often not feasible unless an extensive variety of thread is on hand or it can be made in-house. For a macro-mini, it is more likely to be able to tie-in to the original sewing or to resew and match the original swell. As you go smaller, it is much more difficult. An alternative to sewing is to consolidate the broken sewing thread into place with paste so it is no longer loose, and secure the disjointed folios with v-hinge repairs, making the textblock still function properly for the opening actions. On a much larger book, a v-hinge might not be structurally sound as the only attachment of the folios to each other, but on a miniature, it is possible.

When choosing paper or tissue for spine lining or board attachments, choose for very long fibered material in lowest weights. The long fibers will provide torsional strength without adding bulk. Many times, there will be only enough room to add a single layer of lining to a spine of a textblock, if it is going back into its original case. If reattaching a board, an under-the-pastedown attachment is still possible (and in most cases the most feasible), but there will likely be only enough room for one layer of material. (fig. 9)

**Jeanne Goodman is the Conservator for the University Libraries of Texas A&M University, who specializes in book conservation and is a formally trained bookbinder. She can be contacted at jeannegoodman@tamu.edu.**


**Selected Resources**


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9: Miniature textblock being prepared for spine lining
Janice Comer Honored

In what may be an unprecedented move, the Board of Directors of the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (a division of the American Library Association) voted to approve a resolution honoring recently retired Archival Products Division Manager Janice Comer. Resolutions honoring vendors are virtually unheard of, and this one serves as a testament to Janice’s career-long dedication to the field of preservation and conservation.

Resolution to Honor Janice Comer for her Contributions to Preservation

Whereas Janice Comer is retiring from her position as Division Manager at Archival Products, a division of LBS in May 2016 after 23 years;

Whereas Janice Comer has been highly supportive of preservation activities in the field, including such contributions as the Archival Products NEWS Newsletter, and donations of supplies for community preservation workshops;

Whereas Janice Comer has promoted Preservation Week since its inception in 2010 through social media, Website, and articles in the Archival Products NEWS Newsletter;

Whereas Janice Comer has made all issues of Archival Products NEWS available searchable and freely available online;

Whereas Janice Comer has worked with ALA members to develop new solutions to housing unique and valuable collections;

Whereas Janice Comer has provided excellent service as a provider of high-quality products to preserve library and archival collections;

Whereas Janice Comer has consistently attended ALA conferences and Preservation and Reformatting Section events;

Whereas Janice Comer has provided support for new professionals entering the preservation field;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services recognizes and appreciates the contributions of Janice Comer to the Association, especially the Preservation and Reformatting Section, and congratulates her on her retirement.

Approved by the ALCTS Board of Directors, April 29, 2016

Call for Participation

We encourage you to send your papers about your special projects, labs, challenges, what you do and how you do it. Share your valuable experience with others who need to know how you handle similar challenges. Do you have something to contribute to the Archival Products Newsletter? Please contact Bill Paxson, 866.518.1081 or billp@archival.com.
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