



Conserve O Gram

July 1993

Number 18/1

Polyester Film Book Supports

Open books ideally should not be exhibited on a long term or permanent basis because of the cumulative damage to them caused by light and the physical distortion that is likely to occur. The book support described here can be constructed by park staff for temporary display at a reasonable cost.

The following is an updated version of an article that appeared in the *Abbey Newsletter*, Vol. 14, No. 3, page 55, published in June 1990.

Reprinted with permission. Polyester film (e.g., Mylar® or Melinex®) and double-sided tape (3M® 415) suggested in the article are available from most vendors of archival quality materials. (See also NPS *Tools of the Trade*.)

Introduction

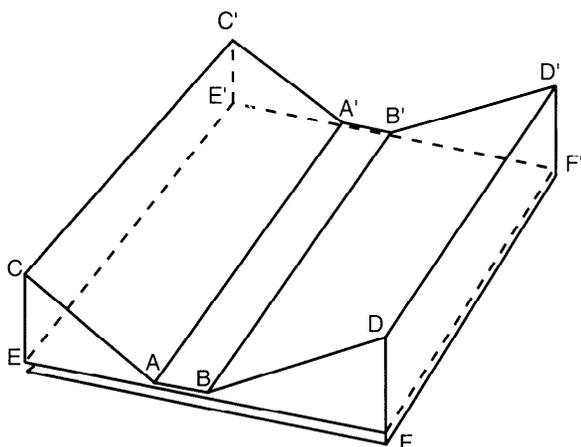
Faced with a need to fabricate book supports on short notice for an exhibit at the New York Academy of Medicine, experiments were made constructing them from 5-mil polyester film. Two-piece book cradles of binder's board covered with book cloth had previously been used but these were time-consuming to construct. Since the books for this particular exhibit were all fairly small and lightweight (ranging from 3 to 8 inches tall and from 1 to 2 inches thick), polyester film worked well. A book support was constructed that consisted of one length of polyester film folded to form the shape of two wedges on a base. As in any exhibit, the degree to which the books could be opened varied and it was desirable to allow each book to rest in a safe and comfortable position. Each support was designed to accommodate a particular book, and the volume was evenly supported across its boards and spine and rested open at an angle appropriate to that book.

In a matter of minutes, an exhibit support was fabricated that exactly fit one volume. The beauty of the polyester film structure is that the surface acts as a *flexible* support that can conform to irregularities in the shape of the book's boards and therefore distributes the weight of the book evenly. Added advantages are that the material used is archivally sound and relatively inexpensive; the time involved in fabrication is minimal. Also, once installed, the support is aesthetically pleasing; the books appear to float in the exhibit case. The support does not call attention to itself and the viewer can enjoy looking at the displayed pages without the distraction of an elaborate or cumbersome support system. The only distractions are some reflections off the polyester film. The support, slightly smaller in height and width than the book resting on top of it, is nearly invisible. It was dubbed the *un-cradle*.

Construction

As a rough measurement, cut a rectangle of 5-mil polyester film approximately three times the girth of the book by slightly less than three times the height of the book (the point being to have a support slightly smaller than the book). Then fold the film into thirds, forming a long strip three times the girth of the book by slightly less than the height of the book. At this point, crease the polyester film (*valley fold A-A'*) with a bone folder just slightly to the left of the center of the folded strip to mark the spot for the left side of the book's spine. Next, crease the polyester film one spine's width to the right (*valley fold B-B'*) for the other side of the spine; now there is an exact place for the spine of the book to rest. The next fold (*mountain C-C'*) is made just slightly less than the width of the front

board and a corresponding *mountain* fold is created for the back board (D-D').

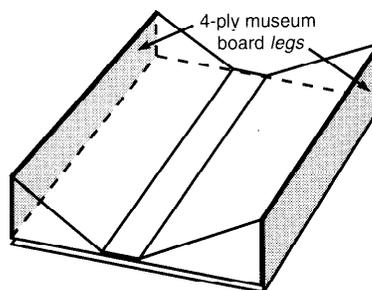


At this point it is necessary to place the book in the position desired for the exhibit, open to the display pages. From this, measure the height of the book's foredge above the table and make a corresponding right angle fold in the polyester film at E-E'. This forms the left turn-in for the support's base, a right angle (CEF). The same process is repeated to form the other right angle (DFE). The two wedges thus formed are not necessarily the same size but they exactly fill the space upon which the book will *float*. This completes the folding of the polyester film.

Place the book in its exhibit position on the nearly completed polyester film support and adjust the base sections to maintain the right angles and establish the finished shape. Since the original polyester film rectangle is three times the girth of the book, the two base sections project beyond the sides of the wedges; the excess is trimmed off neatly. Secure the finished shape of the support with double-sided tape (such as 3M® #415) at both ends of the base (E-E' and F-F'). If desired, tape could also be applied to the underside of the spine area of the support to secure it firmly to the base.

The above construction was all that was required for the small books in this particular exhibition.

From beginning to end, it took about fifteen minutes to complete a polyester film *un-cradle*. When later experimenting with substantially larger, heavier books, one quick modification was all that was necessary to accommodate these as well. Add this step after all of the above have been completed. Cut pieces of 4-ply museum board just a hair less than the height of the support along E-E' and F-F' and insert these two rectangles into the slots created by the thrice-folded polyester film (C-E and D-F).

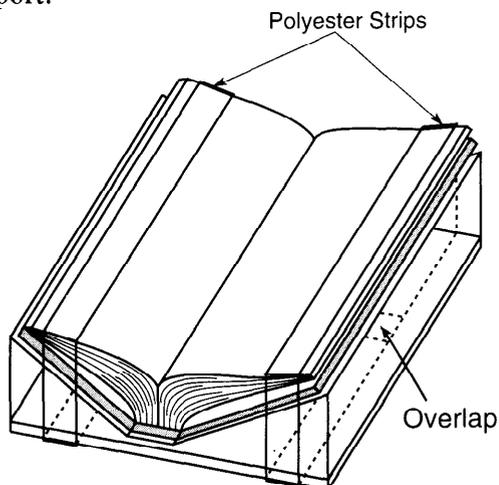


These *legs* provide the additional strength required to stabilize the mount when supporting a heavier book. Books up to 10 x 14 inches, 4 inches thick, and weighing as much as 11 pounds have been successfully supported. The addition of the stabilizing board does detract from the airy quality of the polyester film support but one could cover the outside of the board with a plain or decorated paper to give an attractive appearance.

The Book on Exhibit

To prevent a book's pages from fanning open while exhibited on the book support, encircle each side of the opened book and the support with a strip of one-inch-wide 2-mil polyester film. Cut the strip long enough to allow a one-inch overlap. When measuring the strip, bear in mind that it should hold the book securely, but not so snugly as to distort the pages or damage the binding. After wrapping the strip around the book and support, tape one end onto the other end with a piece of double-sided tape. Use caution to prevent the tape from

contacting the book. Do not tape the strip to the support.



Conclusion

These polyester film book supports have been used in several exhibitions in the Rare Book Room at the New York Academy of Medicine. The supports work well, they are inexpensive and easy to construct, and they can be stored or discarded after use.

Susan B. Martin
Book Conservator
New York Academy of Medicine
2 East 103rd Street
New York, New York 10029

Formerly issued as Conserve O Gram 20/1. Revised 1993.

The *Conserve O Gram* series is published as a reference on collections management and curatorial issues. Mention of a product, a manufacturer, or a supplier by name in this publication does not constitute an endorsement of that product or supplier by the National Park Service. Sources named are not all inclusive. It is suggested that readers also seek alternative product and vendor information in order to assess the full range of available supplies and equipment.

The series is distributed to all NPS units and is available to non-NPS institutions and interested individuals by subscription through the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, FAX (202) 512-2233. For further information and guidance concerning any of the topics or procedures addressed in the series, contact the National Park Service, Curatorial Services Division, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425, (304) 535-6410.