

Preserving Periodicals at the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches

By Kay L. Stockdale

Periodicals here, there, and everywhere. Some processed completely; some, partially; and some, not at all. Almost every library is faced with this problem at one time or another. So was The Historical Foundation until we decided to tackle the problem.

Since its inception in 1927, Presbyterian and Reformed periodicals from all over the world have arrived at our Library by subscription, gift, and purchase. But for many years the limited staff, who had the responsibility for the entire library, archives, museum, and research center, could in no way adequately process all of the periodicals.

Inevitably, the time came when something had to be done. The first prerequisite was to obtain the funds for a more adequate staff. Next, staff had to be organized to work on the project. Third, additional space had to be created, in what seemed like an already overcrowded building.

Determining the Shelving Needed

Now to tackle the problem. First we took an inventory of the number of shelves of regular and oversize books and periodicals and the number of regular and oversize shelves currently in use. Thus we knew what amount of shelving was needed to house the existing collection. Then we looked for space to install the needed shelving.

One space was readily available for regular size shelving — the cross aisles. Finding space for the oversize shelving was not so simple. One extra-wide aisle in the regular stack area provided a solution — remove the regular shelving and install oversize shelving. The wide section of the aisle would then become a regular-width aisle. We ordered the shelving.

Once the shelving had arrived and was installed, the tedious job of separating the books and periodicals and arranging each in order according to call number began. Some few books at the beginning of the book section could stay where they were located. From time to time new inventories were taken of the remaining volumes and available shelves in order to assure that the remaining volumes could be accommodated by the shelves and still allow room for expansion.

I became convinced that the numerical arrangement of books on shelves in archival fashion has some merit — particularly when one considers the time consumed in rearranging books on the shelves as collections grow. However, arranging periodicals chronologically still has its merits.

Preparing Periodical Volumes To Be Relocated

Simultaneously, several other jobs had to be done before some volumes of periodicals could be located in their proper place. Many volumes had to be sorted to determine if they added to our collection. As it turned out, all but a few volumes and issues did so, either by filling in missing gaps or by adding new titles. We offered those few issues not needed to similar institutions through a periodical exchange list.

Next, uncatalogued periodicals had to be catalogued. The call number consists of four parts — the letters for the subject area or particular denomination, a capital *I* for periodical, the abbreviation of the periodical, and the dates of the volume. In addition, a capital *O* precedes the call number when needed to indicate an oversize volume. Since the bulk of these volumes were unbound, we gave them “bindings” of acid-free paper. Thus, we were not only adding to our readily available collection, but were also better preserving the entire collection.

Throughout the years at The Historical Foundation, many volumes of periodicals were received unbound. Out of economic necessity, the staff devised an ingenious method of “binding” these periodicals. Each volume received a “binding” of brown wrapping paper, was tied with string, and labeled with water resistant ink on both the spine and the front of the volume.

In keeping with the practice of improving our preservation procedures, acid-free paper, which is also more durable, is now being used to “bind” all unbound periodicals. For the oversize periodicals, a piece of acid free mounting board the size of the periodical plus an inch at the top, bottom, and right hand side is placed behind the last issue in the volume. Adding the mounting board makes the volume more sturdy. Thus, it no longer “flip-flops” and is easier to handle. The extra width on the sides helps to protect the edges of the periodical by providing a sturdy edge for the “binding.”

Tying the volume with 16 ply string or flat cotton ribbon wrapped around the volume only once and tied in a bow on the right hand side allows the researcher to open the volume quickly and locate the desired page without first unwrapping a package. Similarly, the volume is easily retied.

Through the years, several advantages to “binding” volumes with acid-free paper, instead of sending them to the bindery, have evolved. The volumes are protected. They are easily removed from and returned to the shelf. They are convenient to use. They are much easier to photocopy by any method. And last, but not least, The Historical Foundation does not have the expense of binding periodicals — an expense which is now often cutting into the acquisition budget of some libraries. In fact, this method of preservation has worked so well for periodicals that we at The Historical Foundation have used

it for other types of materials — primarily books that have lost their original binding and older volumes that need additional protection.

Recording Periodical Holdings

In order to keep an up-to-date file on all of our periodical holdings, the title, volume and serial numbers, and dates of all volumes preceding 1970 have been entered on magnetic tape. From the tapes, we made catalog cards using a simple format. A sample follows:

Per	The Christian at Work		
O	New York, Christian at		
WH10	Work Association		
I	See also Christian Work		
C.W.	v 1:2	Feb.	1869
	v 4:2	Feb.	1871
NcMHi	v 10:23	June 8,	1876
1975	v 13:11,12	Mar. 13,20,	1879
	v 43:6	Feb. 9,	1888
	v 53:19	May 11,	1893

This information can be easily updated and can be readily used to produce cards and/or information for various union lists and the CONSER project when we reach that stage. In addition, we have set up a complete periodical Kardex file and keep it current for our holdings from 1970 to date.

Now The Historical Foundation has its periodicals in order on the shelves, is preserving its volumes, has a listing of its periodical holdings, and any member of the staff can readily retrieve the volumes. In addition, we are now able to embark on the next stage of our periodical project — acquiring the missing volumes and issues either in the original, by photocopy, or or some type of microform. Ultimately, we have been able to provide better service.

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