

Susan Martin

Recipient of The Laura Young Award 2011

Eighty-five years after its founding in 1906, the Guild of Book Workers got around to honoring its long time members with an Honorary Membership, often shortly before they died. Twelve years after that, in 2003, the Executive Board voted to bestow awards on Guild members for their contributions and services to the Guild: *The Laura Young Award*. At the same time, they extended to *Honorary Membership Award* to members and non-members for outstanding contributions to the field of bookbinding and the book arts.

This year's *Laura Young Award* will be awarded to Susan Martin, Supply Chairman for eighteen years – 1987 to 2005, member since 1982. In addition to compiling and editing the Supply Directories we have all found so valuable, Susan organized the Vendors' Room at the Standards Seminars since the early 1990s. She has done this with calm efficiency while holding a full-time job as conservator in the Gladys Brooks Book and Paper Conservation Laboratory of the New York Academy of Medicine and running her own freelance studio in book conservation.

Both activities as Supply Chairman have brought Susan in contact with suppliers all over the world. David Lanning, proprietor of J. Hewit & Sons, Ltd., in England, says:

Setting up a trade fair so far from home, with all the logistics of having our goods delivered safely to a room in a 'far-flung' hotel can be complicated and fraught with problems. As the trade fair organizer, Susan Martin was always the friendly, helpful and obliging contact for the yearly Standards conference. She always worked tirelessly to make the fair run smoothly for the various suppliers. More than once, Susan helped us track down missing packages, normally stuck in US Customs. Her being there was especially important during those first few years when everything was rather new and a little intimidating. I was delighted to learn that the Guild had decided to honour Susan with the *Laura Young Award*. It is richly deserved.

Many vendors will, no doubt, echo David's praise.

Susan, a graduate of Mt. Holyoke College, began her training in bookbinding at Harcourt Bindery as a private student of Sam Ellenport after she and her husband had moved to Worcester, Massachusetts in 1973. Susan had been 'hooked' by bookbinding when, as newly-weds, they had moved into the top floor apartment in Carolyn Horton's Chelsea townhouse in New York in 1967. Every day she walked past the bindery on the first floor, often chatting with the binders there and sometimes being shown what they were working on. Among them at the time were Deborah Evetts, Sonja Weil, and Nancy Clark. The move to Worcester, Massachusetts and the birth of



her first child stopped classes for a time. But, in 1978 they moved back to New York with their two children, and Carolyn Horton hired Susan as her office assistant. On Carolyn's advice she studied bookbinding with Laura Young and Jerilyn Davis. Eventually, Carolyn took her into the bindery as an Assistant Binder, where she worked under the wing of Elaine Schlefer. At the time Louise Kuflik, Ursula Hofer and Leah Maneaty were binders there. When Carolyn Horton retired in 1984, she was approached by Peter Gimbel to restore a five foot high stack of money that had been retrieved from the sunken "Andrea Doria" (and frozen). With Jane Bultman, another of the Horton Associates, Susan worked for about two years, each in her own home studio, restoring "all that beautiful currency".

She continued to study bookbinding with Jeri Davis and, now a GBW member, to take all the workshops and lectures she could find, finally setting up a modest conservation studio of her own. In 1987, Elaine Schlefer, now Head of the new Gladys Brooks Book & Paper Laboratory of the New York Academy of Medicine, asked her to join them. Susan continued to work at NYAM until she retired in 2007 to work in her own studio – Archival Conservation: Book & Paper Conservation, on New York's Upper West Side.

Also in 1987, Jeri Davis asked Susan to run for the office of Supply Chair of GBW, which she happily agreed to do. She won the office, of course, and stayed with it for eighteen years. At first, the job consisted of gathering vendor information and publishing the Supply Directory, but in 1994, at the Boston Standards Seminar, she saw a group of suppliers with all their wares that the local committee had organized and she realized that it was her responsibility to see that it continued. She says, "It was a fabulous job and I have been privileged to work with the most amazing suppliers and artisans all these years. It has definitely become a firmly established component of our Standards meetings."

Susan's retirement from NYAM after twenty years coincided neatly with the Guild's Centennial Celebration in 2006. She was succeeded as Supply Chair by Sylvia Ramos Alotta in 2005. The old system of publishing a hard copy of the Supply Directory, Susan felt, was cumbersome and always out of date by the time it could be published. She thought that Sylvia was the perfect choice to usher in the new digital version of the Directory. In the last few years, the details of organizing the Vendors' Room at Standards has been taken on by the Standards Chair and the local arrangements committee. It continues to be a well loved and important aspect of our annual meetings. But Susan did it First!

Margaret H. Johnson