

Frank Mowery

Recipient of The Laura Young Award 2010

Frank Mowery was president of the Guild of BookWorkers from 1984 to 1994, a ten-year span of service only surpassed by Laura Young herself...

His term saw the rise of the major features that characterize the Guild today: the development of regional Chapters that now number ten, the establishment of the annual Standards of Excellence Seminar, and the creation of the video program based on those seminars. Together those developments were responsible not only for the dramatic rise in membership numbers but for the impressive dissemination of information and training that brought the quality of American binding to a new high level. The ripple effect spread to the far corners of this country and beyond. Frank promoted these changes with energetic dedication, feisty determination and a courageous willingness to try what others said could not be done – and then did it.

The first step was to move the focus of Guild out of New York City, thought to be an impossible feat. With Frank as president in Washington, members of the GBW Board soon came from all parts of the country, and meetings were held by conference call. Since then, the organization has had “its feet planted firmly in thin air” – and has been all the better for it. Local regional Chapter activities have carried much of the responsibility, with the national Guild serving primarily as an umbrella organization.

The second step was the founding of the Standards Seminar, first hosted by Frank in Washington in 1982. Tentative at first, and always experimental in format, it evolved as a model for demonstration workshops that has been emulated worldwide. Teaching hands-on techniques to small groups proved to be remarkably effective. Frank himself – who holds the record for attending every Standards Seminar – was a frequent presenter. The annual gathering of the clan in various locations across the country provided a forum for discussion that unified the membership and advanced the cause of the book arts, both regionally and nationally.



The third step was to address the limited exposure of the Standards Seminar information to the membership at large, and to broaden it by video taping the sessions. Seeing the possibilities and understanding the importance, Frank initially jumped in with his own home video camera to document the sessions. Still today the

GBW videos stand as a remarkable record and an invaluable resource.

Beyond the Guild, Frank built an impressive career. Returning to the USA from his training in Hamburg, Vienna, and Florence, Frank became the Head of Conservation at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington in 1977. Realizing the need for apprenticeship experience, he created Internships at the Folger that provided important training for book and paper conservators from this country and abroad. At the same time he made significant contributions – too numerous to list - to the emerging conservation field through his frequent lectures and workshops.

Meanwhile Frank continued to produce spectacular fine bindings that reflected his early German training. In 1982 the Metropolitan Museum of Art held a one-man show of his work, the only American binder to have been so honored. His alum tawed binding, “Amazon Birds”, was chosen to be included in the Guild’s 100th Anniversary Retrospective Exhibition. In addition he organized the Guild’s 80th Anniversary Exhibition, and later the Guild’s exhibition in Paris, appreciating the importance of exhibitions to raise the awareness of American binding.

A busy man, Frank has won the respect and admiration of his peers through his many accomplishments. He deserves – ten fold – the thanks of the Guild and the recognition of the Laura Young Award for service to the Guild. The Guild today is to a large extent the result of the groundwork laid by Frank Mowery.

Betsy Palmer Eldridge
Research and Article