

WILLIAM MINTER

Recipient of the 2017 GBW Laura Young Award

**William (Bill) Minter:
Friend, Colleague, Challenger**

The first time I remember hearing the name ‘Minter’ was when I was learning to put down a pastedown using “minter mix” as the adhesive. Later I learned that the encapsulation machine I had been using in different institutions was invented by a guy named Bill Minter. During a presentation a couple years ago, I watched Bill do a brush technique that I use virtually everyday now. These are just a few of the ways that my practice and knowledge have been impacted by Bill Minter, our fellow Guild of Book Workers member. Many of us have shared this, as Bill’s influences are myriad — from a presentation or a publication, a technique in book conservation or bookbinding, a machine or tool invented by him, a question asked or answered on a listserv or in a newsletter, as a colleague and a friend.

As recipient of the Laura Young Award this year, we recognize William (Bill) Minter because of his years of dedicated and loyal presence, passionate participation in the life of the Guild—especially at ‘Standards’, service as an active and generous member, acting as mentor to many, and informal leadership roles during his 45 years of membership. He has exhibited his fine bindings widely with the Guild, Chicago Hand Bookbinders, and other groups. Minter is an accomplished instructor and has contributed much to the field through his writings, conference presentations, and his development of the ultrasonic welder, a tool that is now considered an essential element of most book conservation labs, used for the encapsulation of brittle and otherwise endangered flat materials.

Minter’s first experience as a book worker was not actually as a bookbinder but as an editor and photographer for the employee magazine of the Chicago-based printing company The Cuneo Press, a national printing company known for magazines such as Time, Life, and Hearst Co. publications (Good Housekeeping, Cosmopolitan and Harper’s Bazaar). Built in the mid-1890s near the Chicago river, the company began as The Henneberry Printing Company until it was taken over by John F. Cuneo who quickly expanded the printing facilities until it was the second largest printer in the city. Even in its earliest manifestation, The Cuneo Press offered fine binding as one of its services, being one of the few printing companies to offer book publishers composition, printing, and binding under one roof. Newspaper giant William Randolph Hearst, while he toured the facility for the first time was to famously have said, “Anyone who maintains a fine leather binding studio like this, is the company that will print my publications”.

Minter began work at Cuneo in the early 1970s where he met the then current head of the binding studio, William Anthony. A reputable hand bookbinder, and noted fine design binder and book conservator in Chicago, and also a well-known member of the Guild, the two immediately hit it off. Anthony’s first true apprentice, Minter began a seven-year informal apprenticeship while still keeping his day job, and had the opportunity to work on many books, including Northwestern University Libraries’ first edition of the four volumes of Audubon’s *Birds of America*. As Minter advanced his skills, Anthony advised that he should not split his time from bookbinding any longer and recommended Minter commit to one vocation. At the end of his apprenticeship in 1978, Minter opened the doors to his own bookbinding and conservation business which ministered to university libraries, museums, rare book dealers and private collectors.

Collaboration and information sharing is a vital part of Minter’s process, and discovering the Guild of Book Workers became a pivotal moment. When speaking about the role the Guild played in the earlier part of his career, he says, “the Guild was that bridge...in the 70s, because there was no easy way to share information nor even to be aware of what colleagues with similar interests were doing across the country. [The Guild] allowed members to connect and to collaborate, not just in one’s own city, but across regions.” The first ‘Standards of Excellence’ conference was held in Washington, DC, in 1980, and was “absolutely phenomenal” says Minter. “The later meetings allowed us to share our techniques and to understand what others were doing. The annual meetings also gave us the opportunity to interact directly with vendors... We would not have had that without the Guild and ‘Standards’. Minter has been in attendance ever since. When asked if he has attended all of the ‘Standards of Excellence’ meetings, he exclaims: “Well, I know that I’ve missed two that I can think of because one was during the birth of my son...” he sighs. “It just couldn’t be helped.”

Minter has presented at ‘Standards’ multiple times. What he finds most memorable is that “many of the presenters share a technique — such as a binding style, or papermaking, or marbling — and we, the audience, will readily absorb that information. However, I really and truly appreciate when the presenter says, ‘You could do it this way, but I feel the end results are better when it is done this way,’ — this then truly touches on the whole premise of the conference, standards of excellence.” He goes on to say, “(to) stand in front of one’s peers and have the fortitude to be challenged — when one has to justify why you use this material or that technique — is fantastic. As binders, we spend a lot of time (on a book) so the materials and the techniques are important to the longevity of the piece. When we can challenge the presenter, we all learn from the discussion. There are, however, times, when we simply have to accept our differences of opinion. My all-time and

life-long discussion with one colleague has been about titling along the spine. That binder insists that the titling must be from tail-to-head, whereas I disagree.” Minter then adds: “One of the true benefits of American binders, is that we are not tied to a particular binding tradition — such as an English, French, or German way. Tradition is very important, but sometimes there are alternatives and we should be able to choose what we feel is best for the finished binding”.

Through his active membership Bill has represented the mission and ideals of GBW and is an inspiration to us all. Throughout the nomination process and interviewing with members and colleagues, there was consistent mention of his generosity with his knowledge and time, and a willingness to entertain a new idea or consider another way of doing things. Pamela Leutz, who nominated Minter this year, said regarding his introduction to bookbinding, “Hook, line, sinker, (he) lived and ate and slept bookbinding—and I don’t think he’s ever lost that enthusiasm for what he does.” Jeff Altepeter, Awards Committee member and Director of Bookbinding at North Bennet Street School, remembers meeting Bill when he was a student and being “amazed at his willingness to engage with me in discussion, offering advice and listening to my “naive ideas”. It is hard not to view Bill as an unofficial “father figure” and mentor for many in the Guild.

In 2014, Bill was appointed Senior Book Conservator of The Pennsylvania State University Libraries, University Park, PA. This position is an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funded position, and the University’s first position in book conservation. Currently, he is at the beginning stages of construction planning for a new conservation center. His current research with a small group of conservators involves looking into why contemporary leathers are failing while much older examples age well, and working with the leather tannery Pergamena (NY), to develop an ultra soft parchment. As a constant innovator of our field, he says “(I’m) not looking for challenges, but if we can do something easier, simpler, and cheaper, then why not? The ultimate goal is to do the very best that we possibly can.”

- J. Goodman, GBW member since 2012, Lone Star Chapter