collection to this degree and supports the level of detail included in the catalogue.

For those books for which it was possible to identify the edition held by the library, extensive bibliographic descriptions have been provided that detail the physical characteristics of a representative copy of that specific edition. In cases in which the edition could not be determined, the possible editions are described and, where appropriate, a proposal of which edition seems the most likely is made based on research. The catalogue entries also include annotations for each item, placing it in historical context, and often give a brief history of the item and its creator, as well as any additional information that may be available, such as transcriptions of related documents and an identification of the relevant bookseller.

The appendices make the catalogue even more usable. Appendix A consists of a list of brief citations of each of the items, without the additional descriptive information found in the full catalogue. A subject index to each of the items constitutes Appendix B. Appendix C contains a transcription of Edward Everett’s recommendations of books on international law, prepared in 1851 in response to a request from President Fillmore. This list of recommendations also indicates which of these books were included in the library. To complement these appendices, the book includes a list of selected resources that were consulted in preparing it and a general index as well.

Ultimately, this book’s greatest strength is the information it provides about the individual titles Fillmore collected for the first White House library. For those interested in the history of either the White House or Millard Fillmore, the catalogue’s numerous insights into the selection process and detailed discussion of which editions were most likely included in the collection will also be useful. —Carli Spina, Research Services Assistant, Harvard Law School Library


Part of what makes Books Will Speak Plain unique in the field of bookbinding history is that it approaches the topic from a conservation standpoint rather than a curatorial one. Julia Miller has worked in the field of book conservation for more than 30 years, including ten at the University of Michigan Library, and her experience as a conservator is evident in this work.

Miller offers a history of the handmade book and its distinguishing characteristics, but her stated objective is ultimately preservation of, and access to, these items in library collections. In the introduction, she states that the purpose of her book is
training the custodians of collections to look at books and make judgments about what to record and why—whether it is an element common to a type of book or an unusual feature. She sees this as fundamentally a preservation issue. Furthermore, in the process of assessment and documentation, greater access to “hidden” collections is provided, which Miller believes will ultimately advance the work of binding scholars in the future.

The first four chapters provide an historical survey of the book from the early codex to 1900. This discussion has been meticulously researched, and Miller supplements her discussion with footnotes ranging from standard bibliographic citations to fascinating sidebars about recent developments in book history. Although the chapters are heavily illustrated with diagrams and black-and-white photographs, the absence of color in the photographs reduces the level of detail, making it difficult to recognize what is being portrayed. Presumably this was a cost-saving measure when printing the book, because the images are all available in color on the supplemental DVD, which will be discussed later in this review. It is worth noting that a number of the photographs throughout the book have captions indicating that they are drawn from the collections at the University of Michigan. Given Miller’s long-standing relationship with the university, it is not entirely surprising that many of the photographs in the book are taken from materials housed in its special collections. Although this might initially appear to be a shortcoming of the book, the broad range of examples provided suggests that the collections have sufficient depth to illustrate a book of this kind.

The three final chapters move from the historical survey into the descriptive portions of the content, including the why and how of identification of historical bindings. Chapter 5 does a thorough job of describing traditional binding materials, structures, and decorative techniques. Fortunately, in this chapter the illustrations temporarily transition to a series of color plates, making them far more useful than the black-and-white illustrations elsewhere in the book, particularly to a reader with an untrained eye.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Miller lays out a “plan of attack” for how to begin the process of describing a binding, as well as sample survey categories, and then presents ideas on how to proceed with addressing the needs of binding collections in the future. Her template allows the individual who might be otherwise overwhelmed with the daunting task of describing a binding to follow a logical and comprehensive outline for the description. Rather than leaving the determination of which features are important to the whim of the person evaluating the binding, Miller’s plan ensures that all relevant features are described.
One might be surprised to discover that nearly half of the volume is composed of appendices and end matter, but these contents are invaluable to the book as a resource for the binding scholar. Appendix 1 offers a hierarchy of descriptive terminology relating to historic bindings. For styles and structures, Miller proceeds from the general to specific in supplying recommended terms, as well as a section of black-and-white photos to illustrate many of the terms. In many respects, Appendix 2 is more useful. The first significant difference is that the photographs in this section are in color, providing an additional level of clarity for each image. Miller also provides sample MARC records for binding descriptions and examples of “case studies,” where she includes a sample description for each of the bindings depicted in the color plates.

The glossary is an excellent resource for someone not familiar with binding terminology, and even someone more experienced can benefit from this comprehensive set of binding description terms. Miller provides bibliographic sources for the definitions where appropriate. For those without citations, one must assume that the definitions have been created by Miller herself. Finally, Miller has assembled an extensive bibliography and has divided it topically. As well as providing full citations for the sources referenced in the book, it also includes additional information about sources for study of bookbinding and book history. Assembling a list of this kind was clearly a significant undertaking and enhances the value of the book as a resource.

Perhaps the most notable feature of *Books Will Speak Plain* is the supplemental material. The book is accompanied by a DVD containing color images of all of the bindings cited in the printed volume. Clearly, the organization of the DVD was given significant thought. Not only does Miller divide the images into a series of manageable files, with each image containing a descriptive caption, but she provides an additional PDF document to make the images searchable. In this document, she lists all of the captions for the images she has included, allowing the reader to do a keyword search for specific styles of characteristics. Part I of the DVD offers color images for black-and-white photos within the text, while Part II contains supplementary images divided into 13 groups, based on distinguishing characteristics. The variety of images provided attests to the depth of research Miller has conducted and the richness of the collections that she has accessed in their compilation.

*Books Will Speak Plain*, with its supplemental DVD, is an important resource for any staff member or volunteer faced with the description or identification of historic bindings. Although it is somewhat unlikely that an inexperienced volunteer would be prepared to take on the necessary level of description based on a reading of this
book alone, Miller presents a strong foundation for institutions contemplating the use of volunteers in such a capacity or simply training their existing workforce to take on these new responsibilities. What sets *Books Will Speak Plain* apart from other binding texts is not only the preservation-oriented approach that Miller takes but also that she does not focus her efforts on the presumption that every reader will be working with collections of luxury bindings. In doing so, she makes this book relevant for a much wider audience than those that simply focus on the loveliest examples binding history has to offer. —Jennifer K. Sheehan, Ph.D., Curator, Rare Books, University of North Texas Libraries


Kathleen Whitley’s *The Gilded Page* is a mixture of excellent and wretched, satisfying and frustrating.

Let’s look at the excellent first. The content is amazing, filled with an abundance of information on the history and technique of gilding, coming from an experienced gilder. In 1969, D.F. McKenzie wrote his landmark essay “Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices” in which he talks about “the need for what might be called ‘scientific’ investigation in bibliography” which comes from “a strict regard for certain fixed bounds of physical fact” (p. 1). Among many other things this article preaches is that scholars should not write about things of which they are ignorant. For instance, he cites those who make claims about how much a printer could have produced in a day as careless scholars who have never printed.

It is refreshing, then, and reassuring to have a book about gilding written by an expert in the craft. When she is talking about gilding, Whitley is a reliable witness, a practitioner whose descriptions of techniques, materials, and tools are trustworthy.

But as a historian, she is much less an expert, and though the volume is filled with information about the history of books and gilding, she needs some basic coaching on the rules and conventions of scholarly writing.

In many places, she exhibits the same problems that many students show: a careless disregard for sources. Page after page of information is presented with only a cursory, inadequate parenthetical citation now and then to a source. These citations