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ONSERVATION GUIDELINES

Edge Stamping of Bound Library Materials (HCL)

These guidelines for edge stamping of library materials in the Harvard College Library (HCL) reflect current practice in Conservation Services, Widener Library. The goal of the program is to increase the security of the collections. In general, edge stamping policies should be developed in collaboration with security and circulation staff.

Edge stamping is a prominent, permanent property marking that is readily visible to security personnel. As a theft deterrent, the edge stamp is difficult to eradicate or conceal. Since 1995 it has replaced general HCL bookplates as the primary ownership mark on Widener books and bound serials.

Selecting a stamp:

Use permanent, quick-drying black ink and wood block stamps that read, HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY—WIDENER LIBRARY. (Edge stamps are library specific.)

Widener stamps have a sans serif typeface (Arial) for clarity and ease of cleaning. The standard Widener stamp has 14-point type. A larger stamp that reads, HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY has 16-point type and is used on materials that are processed by Conservation Services but not housed in Widener or the Harvard Depository.



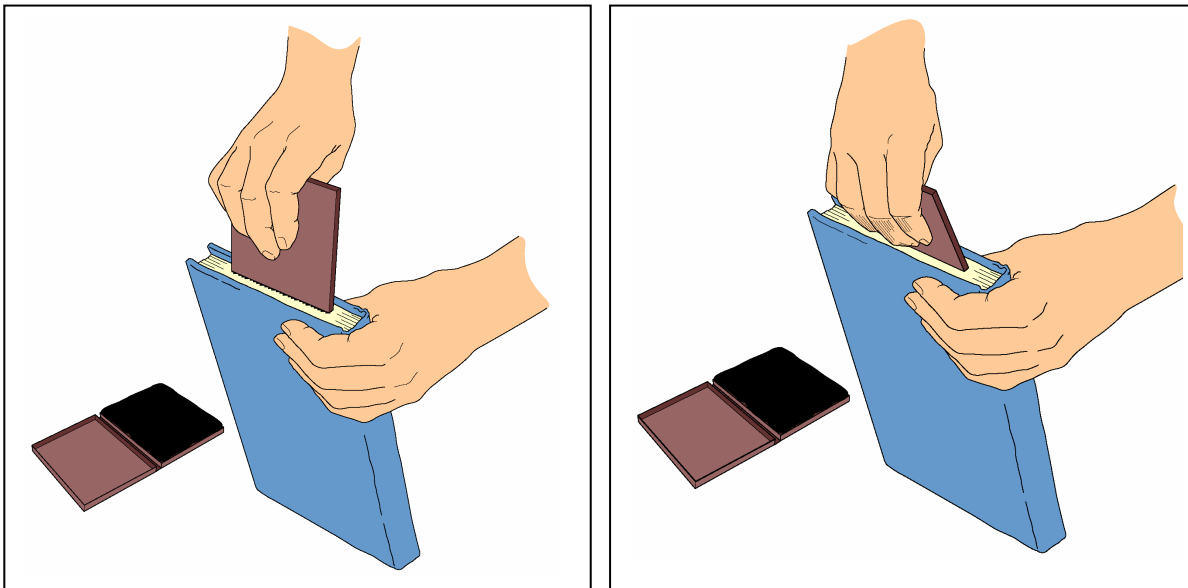
Both the ink and stamps are purchased from Bob Slate Stationers (1288 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge). Specifications call for a “peg stamp” on a 3-inch wooden base. Orders are usually filled in two weeks.

Stamping techniques:

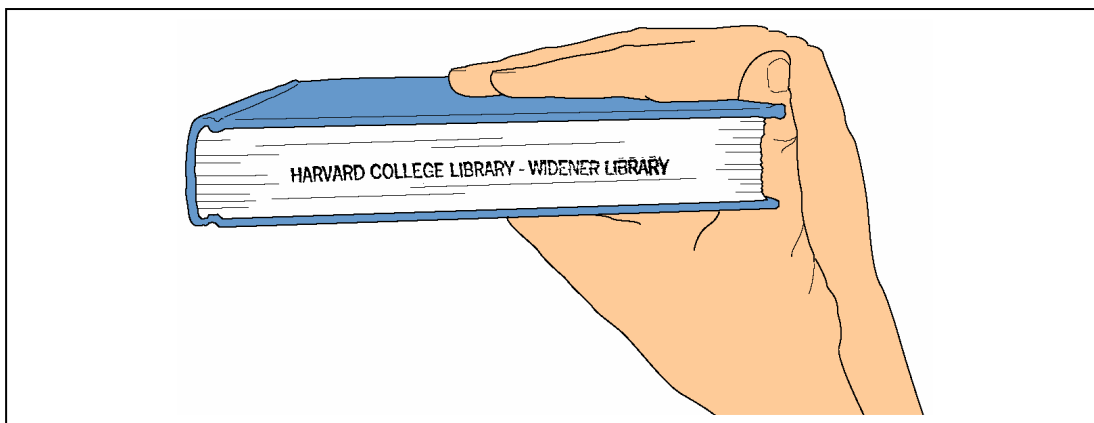
Books processed for the Widener Stacks or the Harvard Depository, whether new acquisitions or older items that have been repaired, filmed, or otherwise treated by Conservation Services, are stamped. Exceptions to this rule are noted at the end of these Guidelines.

When stamping, grasp the book firmly so that the edge of the text block presents a smooth, solid surface (rough, untrimmed edges cannot be stamped). Ink the stamp before each application. Apply the stamp in three places: top edge, fore edge, and bottom edge of the book. For both ergonomic reasons and to maintain a clean, clear image, it is important not to

stamp with too vigorous a motion or too much pressure. Both can lead to injuries to the wrist, slipping of the stamp, and smudging of the image.



It is important not to stamp the book repeatedly. While it is desirable to have a clear image, do not make multiple images with the intention of trying to create a “perfect” one. In edge stamping, as in all other aspects of conservation, treat the book gently. Neat, well-centered work is the goal. Books should always be processed in a manner that reflects proper care and handling techniques and sound ergonomic practice.



Exceptions:

1. Special collections material should never be edge stamped. Materials in the Theodore Roosevelt Collection in Widener, for example, are not stamped, even though they circulate. Materials in departmental libraries are not stamped.
2. If a book has already been stamped for Widener Library with any one of a variety of stamps that have been used in the past, it is not necessary to re-stamp the book. This will only create a messy text block.
3. Books with gold leaf should not be stamped on their edges. The ink will not adhere to page surfaces.
4. Books with edge treatments (fore edge painting or other decoration) should not be stamped.
5. Stamping will not be visible on volumes with black or dark colored edges so do not attempt to mark them.
6. Books with text blocks that are narrower than stamp should not be stamped. The stamp may inadvertently ink other surfaces.
7. Media should be labeled, not edge stamped. Most media formats are too fragile for firm handling and their housings are usually made of plastics. The ink will not adhere to the plastic surfaces or to glossy paper.
8. Stamping is not effective on books with rough or irregularly trimmed edges and may lead to inadvertent inking of page surfaces.
9. Edge stamps are library specific. Use only the stamp that is appropriate for the library where the volume will be housed. Always consult with Access Services personnel before stamping special materials.
10. Materials transferred from other libraries raise issues for the library that receives them. Attempting to remove or cover previous markings is difficult and potentially damaging to the structure of the text block or appearance of the book. Usually the best choice—and certainly the most cost effective—is to do nothing, allowing the book to be routed based on the ownership markings on the date due slip.

For further information, please consult the Binding Librarian, HCL Conservation Services. See [Preservation and Imaging Staff Directory](#).