

DVD Review

By Sandy Cohen (Guild of Book Workers 2008).

Michael.L.Chrisman: Vol III: Tips from the Bookbinder's Bench Part 1: 2007, two DVD set.

Vol IV: Binding an early 19th Century Book in Period Style Leather: 2007, two DVD set.

These DVD's are part of a series. Vol.I is Getting Started & Cloth Repair. Vol.II is Restoring a Family Bible. Tips from the Bookbinders Bench (running time 2 hr 53min) covers some of the most basic, but most essential skills a beginner should master, such as his technique for sharpening bookbinders knives.

As we all know, if you gather any six bookbinders on a small desert island, you will soon learn at least nine best ways to sharpen and hone a paring knife. The techniques Chrisman demonstrates are certainly quick, inexpensive and effective. He also shares his methods of sewing silk headbands, rolling various period-style headbands, repairing cloth and leather book corners, making hollow tubes, consolidating dry powdery leather with Methyl Cellulose (methylcellulose, if you prefer) paste, installing early 19th century style single sheet endpapers, guarding, making and tooling spine labels, and using gold foil. (A future DVD set will cover tooling with gold leaf.)

Binding an early 19th Century Book In Period Style Leather (3 hrs 50 min) demonstrates Chrisman's techniques for re-binding an early 19th century book in leather appropriate for the period and style of the book. Mr. Chrisman emphasizes in this series that he is working as a restorer here, not a conservator. As this 2 DVD set progresses, he takes a coverless, woeful orphan of a book, evaluates it's needs, cleans the spine, guards, re-sews in the original round, laces in new boards, pares and dyes the leather to a colour more appropriate for the period, covers the book, makes a leather label, tools in gold foil and blind, "ages" the leather, corners and headband to make the binding seem less newly minted. Restoration binders, both novice and veteran, will find these DVD's especially informative and useful.

Though he is quite proud (who wouldn't be) of the one on one tutoring and critiques he received in the early 1990's from Bernard Middleton, Michael Chrisman is a largely self taught binder. As such, many of the techniques he demonstrates on these DVD's don't always follow the traditional path. That, of course, is not a bad thing; his techniques are often innovative new pathways to book restoration whose effectiveness have proven themselves over decades of use.