

Limp Bound book



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I took a very basic book binding class through the Guelph School of Art last fall, and the infatuation with the ability to make my own little wee journals was born. My skills are basic and my equipment is even more so and decided to turn my attempts to a limp bound book to hold A&S notes and comments in something that looks a touch more appropriate than the battered notebook that I haul around currently.

Fortunately, there are a number of extant examples of limp bound books in the 15th and 16th centuries, some bound in linen (Figure 1), some bound in leather (Figure 2), many more bound in vellum (Figure 3). It is not a style that is well researched as it was often the rough and ready bindings done out of convenience, rather than the fancy bindings meant for show. (Birch, 2015)



Figure 1 Medieval Limp binding 1451-1452 National Library of Sweden

I decided to keep it fairly simple and go with long stitch and link stitch on the bindings and a simple leather cover, which is consistent with extant examples, as shown in Figure 2. (Szirmai, 1999) I spent entirely too long at the art store selecting paper, but finally decided on a fairly heavy paper which had the advantage of being quite inexpensive to allow for screw ups. The cover is a piece of leather generously gifted to me by Henry Foster. I decided to use leather for the cover as there seem to be a wide variety of covers, and this gave me the opportunity to do a very tiny bit of experimenting with leather.



Figure 2 Limp bindings (Szirmai Fig 10.14)

The paper came in very large sheets which needed to be cut down to my final size. I learned during this process that no matter how many rulers, grids, careful alignment, and swearing I employed, I am apparently incapable of cutting a straight line. A fair bit of trimming later, and my leaves were generally the same size and mostly straight.



Figure 3 Estonian lumber record book, 1539
(Langwe Berg article)

I then folded the paper, and assembled them into six signatures of four leaves each. Fortunately, I am better at folding than cutting. Measured out the sewing holes and punched each signature against the template with a basic awl into a cork trivet.

I decided against having a fold over flap of leather as part of my cover, as the book I was modeling did not have a fold over flap. Under Henry's tutelage, I added a very simple bit of tool work to the cover. As it's a very basic book, I didn't want the cover to be too fancy and out of place with the rest of the book.

The linen thread that I used is an 18/2 thread that I waxed before using it to sew through the signatures and the leather cover. As I was aiming towards something akin to Book 931 in Figure 1, I went for a long stitch and chain stitch sewing, which gives the right look as the book in the picture. I decided against using the buttons, as I preferred the clean lines and I find ties on my books to be irritating. After sewing the pages in, I did a little bit of trimming to offset any shifting during sewing, but I found I made more of a mess than not, so there was very little trimming done.

Previous books that I've made have used cardstock as a cover, and I found leather to be quite a bit more frustrating to sew through, largely because I'm not entirely familiar with working with it. It does make for a rather handsome book, however. I am looking forward to continuing to experiment with limp bound books, with a variety of cover types and expanding into more complicated binding types.

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