

# Museum Roundup

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## A Good Book Lasts Forever

by Charles Brandt

I am always delighted and sometimes pleasantly surprised by the variety of artifacts that enter my conservation lab: a Maclure or Rattenbury architectural drawing, a Shadbolt acrylic triptych, an incunabulum, a Walter Phillip's watercolour, and from time to time an old family bible -- though seldom a bible of the same calibre as the Bowron Bible.

When flyfishing along the shores of the Bowron Lakes in 1980, it never occurred to me that I might have future contact with either the Bowron family or Barkerville Historic Park.

At that time, my colleague and I had parked the CCI Mobile Lab in the heart of Barkerville. We were greeted by the director and conservator, who took the opportunity to point out various items requiring attention: a charcoal drawing, pieces of ancient wallpaper, and the need to properly monitor the environments of the buildings and displays, etc. We witnessed summer employees in period costume strolling about and gold being panned from a small stream that works its way through the town's centre. Altogether, it was an extremely attractive and well-displayed historical representation.

I had certainly heard of the Bowrons and knew that the lakes that I fished were named in their honour. But it wasn't until 1988, after winning a contract with the provincial government to restore the Bowron family bible, that I looked closely at their history.

The Bowron Bible is currently the property of the Provincial Government and has been on display in Barkerville for a number of years. Both town staff and family members became concerned at the deteriorating condition of the book. The leather had become dry and fragile along the hinges and spine and small openings indicated either past or present insect infestation. There was concern that the paper itself might be in need of stabilization.

When the bible was sent to my studio on the Oyster River (near Black Creek) for conservation treatment, it was with some anticipation and delight that I opened it for the first time. The births and deaths of the Bowron family members had been carefully entered throughout the years. First recorded was the name of John Bowron, an overlander who, in 1862, traversed the continent, partly inspired by the same hope that infused thousands of others -- that of discovering gold. John Bowron served 44 years as postmaster, mining recorder and gold commissioner, earning the appreciation of the government and the honour implicit in the naming of the "Bowron" Lakes. The bible is an historic link with his family and the community he served so faithfully.

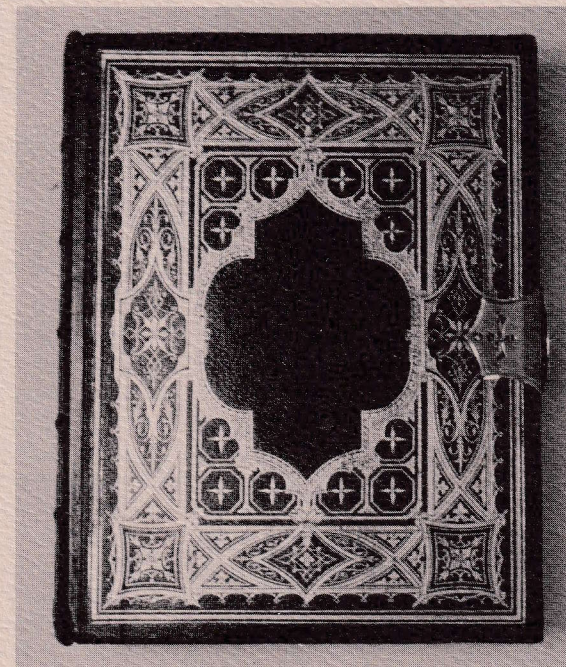
Following usual procedures, upon receipt of the bible photographs were taken (a condition/treatment report had already been sent out and approved by Barkerville staff), tests were performed to determine the paper's acidity and the solubility of print and inks, and careful measurements were taken. After consultation with the fumigation experts at the CCI, the bible was placed in the deep freeze for two weeks to destroy any insects that may have been present.

When the two-week period was up, the bible was carefully removed from the freezer and the entire book was taken down (all of the thread removed) so that the individual leaves could be separated and readied for washing, deacidification, and buffering in an alkaline solution of magnesium bicarbonate. After they were dry, the leaves were flattened and then mended using oriental paper and wheat starch paste. They were then resewn on linen tapes with unbleached linen thread. The book was then rounded and backed, new acid-free boards were attached and new leather was added to the worn corners and spine before reattaching the original spine leather.

The Bowron Bible now stands restored and conserved in Barkerville. Instructions for its long-term survival accompanied the bible on its return journey: relative humidity between 50 and 55 percent; temperature at 21 degrees (plus or minus two degrees) and cooler if possible; storage and/or display away from direct sunlight; and exposure to incandescent lighting no greater than 50 lux. Once every five years the leather binding should be treated with a mixture of anhydrous lanolin (40 percent) and neatsfoot oil (60 percent). If these instructions are followed, the Bowron Bible should last well into the future.

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*Charles Brandt photo*



The Bowron Bible