

## The Conservation Treatment of an American Revolutionary War Diary

Josiah Smith was an American merchant and patriot who, along with a number of other prominent US citizens, was taken captive by the British in 1780. He wrote an account of his captivity in a series of small notebooks that detail his capture, transfer to a war ship, and the conditions of his nearly two year imprisonment in St. Augustine, Florida. These notebooks were later bound together in a full leather binding.

The past few centuries had resulted in severe iron gall ink deterioration throughout the manuscript. Heavily inked letters were cracking and several leaves had split in half entirely along heavily ruled lines. The paper had darkened due to deterioration, which further obscured the writing and made the leaves fragile and difficult to handle safely. In addition, the sewing and adhesives on the spine had failed, resulting in loose leaves and gatherings.

The Library of Congress utilizes a treatment tree methodology when assessing and planning for the conservation treatment of items exhibiting iron gall ink damage. Typically this methodology is used for single item treatments. For the diary, testing and treatment protocols were modified to allow for the batch treatment of 150 leaves. Examination of the ink in each entry to document its characteristics prior to treatment led to a greater understanding of the ink and the parameters for its treatments, especially as it became clear that the same ink and pen were consistently used throughout the manuscript. Based on the results of the examination the decision was made to further disbind the textblock and wash the folios, followed by stabilization using calcium phytate-calcium bicarbonate treatment, and end with resizing with gelatin. The folios required extensive mending to fill losses and rejoin bifolia and stabilize cracking inks for which a variety of paper types and adhesives were used.

While the assumption of the conservator was that the ink would be problematic, it became clear after the treatment of the textblock that the rebinding of the manuscript was going to present challenges. The original binding style was no longer suitable for the treated book, as it was partially the cause for the breakdown of the diary. The much discussed choices were: reuse the present binding cover; re sew the gatherings as the individual pamphlets that they once were; or to create a new binding. Ultimately the decision was based on evidence that was collected during treatment, choosing a style that would best address the needs of the conserved diary leaves and retain a sensitivity to the visual appearance of books.