

# A FIRST EDITION FRAME

By Jodie Prymke, CGF

THE VALUE OF ANTIQUE BOOKS CAN BE PRESERVED WITH REMOVABLE FACE FRAMES THAT ALLOW DIFFERENT PAGES TO BE DISPLAYED SO THE IMAGES, AND THE FRAMING, CAN BE ENJOYED

Many framed pictures originate from antique books. As the bindings deteriorate and the books fall apart, the colored plates are often still vibrant, having never been exposed to light. Some hand-colored images from antique books are quite valuable. John Gould's birds, for example, can fetch thousands of dollars for a single page. His first edition books were elephant folio size (27"x21"), and the lithographs were hand-colored and enhanced with gum arabic. Unfortunately, the temptation is sometimes to cut the pages out of old or valuable books (known as "breaking books") in order to make a profit. But imagine how much more valuable a book is if kept complete and intact. If you think of a book as a valuable piece of art, would you consider cutting it up? Of course not. One of the first things picture framers learn is, "Don't trim or glue valuable or original art."

So what do you do when a client walks into your store with a completely intact, valuable book and says, "I want you to frame the lithographs inside this book"? Do you oblige their wishes, take out your X-acto knife, and cut the pages out? Think about it for a moment and hesitate. Maybe your client doesn't know any better.

Here is an opportunity for you to educate your clients and get creative at the same time. There is a better way—one that will save the book from destruction and help its value appreciate while also allowing you to give clients truly unique, custom-made frames to house their valuable treasures.

This antique book was framed intact, in a box frame with a removable face frame. Framing the book like this enables the beautiful pages to be displayed one at a time (helping preserve the images by protecting them from light), and the book can easily and completely be removed from the frame, so it can be read and enjoyed. In this case, there are three volumes of *Flora and Sylva*, published by

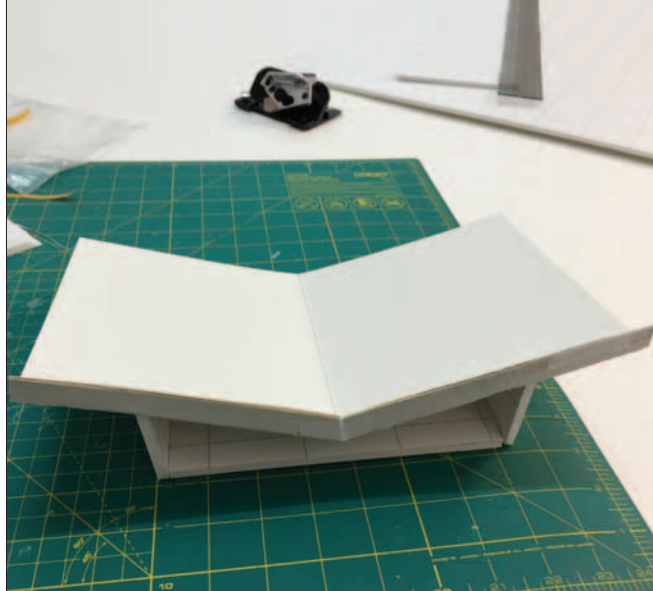


One of three valuable and complete volumes of *Flora and Sylva* by William Robinson 1903-1905. The face frame can easily be removed to display different colored plates or swap the volumes out completely.

William Robinson in London, 1903 to 1905. The illustrated periodical series contains full-page chromolithographic plates of flowers and garden designs as well as wood-engraved text illustrations. The books can be swapped in and out of the frame, further aiding their preservation.

Some research revealed that, ideally, antique books should not be displayed vertically or with their pages open and completely flat. Because they are often heavy and the spines can be fragile, displaying them in this manner can put too much pressure on the spine and cause distortion. They need to be supported in a way to reduce as much pressure as possible.

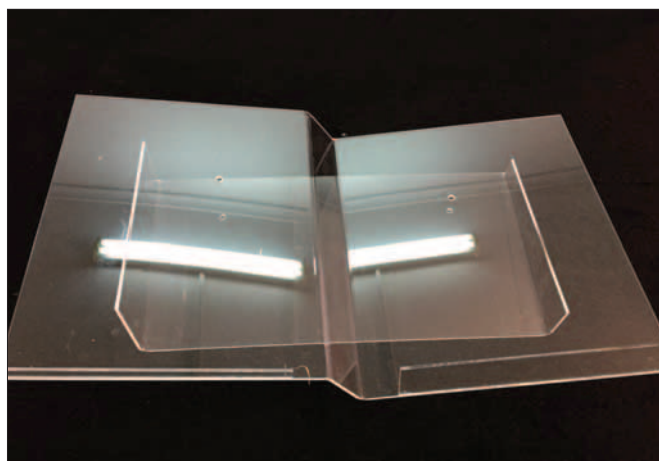
A custom-made acrylic book mount was designed especially for these antique volumes of *Flora and Sylva*. The books measure 13"x10"x2" each. The mount was fabricated to display pages in the middle of each book; a differently shaped mount would be needed to display pages at the beginning or the end of the book. The



*The first "draft" of the book mount was made of foamboard.*

is deep enough to house the book on its mount sufficiently without it touching the glass. At that stage, the rabbet was gilded since a small portion of it would be visible when the face frame was removed.

The sides of the box were lined with Antique White Alphamat to match the mount's backing board. As a visual break, a gold leaf fillet was inserted between the join of the box frame and the backing board, and then the backing board was screwed into place at the back of the box frame. Paper backing, strong D-rings, and hang-

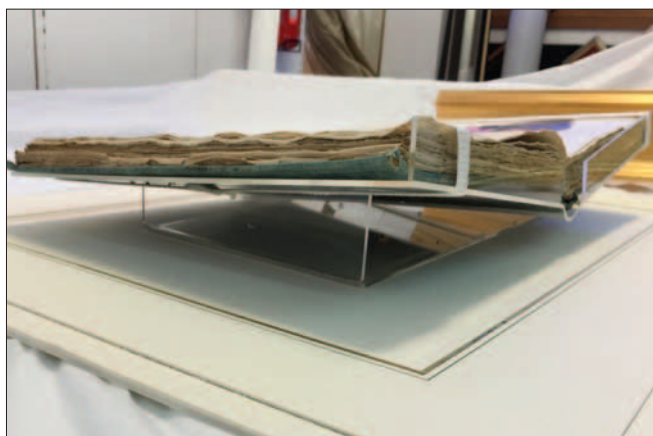


*This custom-made book mount was designed to display pages at the beginning of the book only.*

mount cradles the spine perfectly, reducing the pressure, and it also displays the pages at an angle so they are not pulled back tight and flat against a backing board but rather slightly closed. The base of the mount is also angled back, like an easel, so the book will not fall forward, which reduces the need to hold the book in place artificially. Gravity is a friend, in this instance.

The book mount is held in place to the Antique White Alphamat board and GatorBoard substrate by two small bolts. They thread from the back to the front and through two holes drilled into the mount and are held in place by two nuts.

Next, a very wide 5" gold leaf moulding was chosen for the sides of the box frame. Cut vertically, the frame



*The custom-made book mount shows the book slightly closed, reducing pressure on the spine and angled back to stop the book from falling forward. This design also alleviates the need to hold the book in place artificially.*

ing wire were then attached. The remainder of the construction was done from the front.

A gold leaf slip was glued inside the rabbet of the box frame to cover the lined sides. A  $\frac{1}{8}$ " step remained visible between the gold slip and the top of the box frame, which helps to hold the face frame in position. The gold slip is only visible when the face frame is removed. Four holes were drilled into the gold slip to



The book mount, shown without the face frame, is positioned inside the frame. The clean finish of the gold leaf slip can also be seen.



A 5" wide moulding was cut vertically to create the sides of the box frame. The face frame fits neatly inside the gilded rabbet of the box frame.

house four strong, gold-plated, rare-earth magnets that hold the face frame in place. The magnets were glued with quick setting, two-part epoxy glue. Instructions for removable face frames with magnetic closures can be found in *The Complete Guide to Shadowboxes and Framing Objects*, by Jim Miller, MCPF, GCF.

The face frame was then cut to fit inside the rabbet of the box frame. Museum Glass was inserted into that, followed by another gold leaf slip to hold the glass.

Four metal washers were screwed to the back of the face frame to correspond with the magnets on the box frame. They hold the two components securely together (magnetic charge does not diminish) and make the face frame easy to remove.

Last of all, the antique book was set on its mount. A 1/2" wide band of Mylar was slipped over each side of the book and mounted to gently hold the pages in place. **PFM**

**Jodie Prymke**, CGF, is an international award-winning frame designer and PFGV Certified Guild Framer. Her boutique framing gallery, Jodie Prymke Fine Art Framing, in North Adelaide, South Australia, opened in March 2008. She specializes in unique frame designs, French matting, and frame restoration.



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