

# Poison in the Stacks?

## Ongoing Research on Heavy Metals in 19th Century Books

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Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) Preservation Committee  
Professional Development Alliance Webinar, April 30, 2024, 1-2:30pm

### Key Takeaways

- 1. Research is ongoing.**
  - We're still learning about the presence of heavy metals in pigments used in book binding, as well as the potential risks associated with these hazards.
- 2. Mediate access to 19<sup>th</sup> C. collections.**
  - We can't control how patrons handle books outside the library, but staff-mediated, on-site access provides an opportunity to educate users and support safer handling.
- 3. Wash hands after handling.**
  - The most likely cause of ingestion is transfer from hands. Do not eat, drink, or smoke while handling. Avoid touching eyes, mouth, and face.
- 4. Wear nitrile gloves.**
  - Gloves prevent particulate transfer to hands, and serve as a great reminder to avoid touching your face.

### Further Reading

- **Poison Book Project**, University of Delaware/Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library
  - Project website: <https://sites.udel.edu/poisonbookproject/>
  - Arsenical Books Database: <https://sites.udel.edu/poisonbookproject/arsenical-books-database/>
- **Handling Books that May Contain Arsenic**, University of Chicago Library
  - <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/about/directory/departments/pres/arsenic/>
- **Heavy Metals in 19<sup>th</sup> C. Books**, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
  - <https://www.library.illinois.edu/preservation/heavy-metals-in-book-cloth/>
- **Upcoming article**, Northwestern University
  - Russick, S. "Can we call it *arsenic* yet? The 19th Century Green Books Project at Northwestern University Libraries", American Institute for Conservation General and Concurrent Session Postprints Vol. 2 (2023)
- **Studies in Conservation Journal**, upcoming special issue on toxic material found in books
  - <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/ysic20>

### Contact Us

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- **CARLI Preservation Committee**, Preservation Resources and Past Blog Series, Events, & Webinars, <https://www.carli.illinois.edu/products-services/collections-management/preservation-resources>