

## COORDINATION IN THE COLLECTION OF SOURCE MATERIAL: A NEW DEAL IN DOCUMENTS<sup>1</sup>

Book collecting may not be generally recognized as the greatest game in the world, but hundreds of private collectors will contend that it is the most fascinating. Given a limited field to cover, an assured though moderate income, and a few appreciative friends, there is no limit to the pleasure to be derived from the pursuit of books. In what other avocation is there an equal challenge to the qualities of good sportsmanship—scent, daring, caution, perseverance—or a surer reward in the durable joys of possession?

Librarians as servants of the public may sometimes experience the thrills of the private collector of books. These thrills quite surely await the fortunate librarian who has the privilege of building a highly specialized book collection. But what can be said of the librarian in a public library whose duty it is to gather together uncounted masses of pamphlets, serial publications and heterogenous materials to be stored away against some possible use in the undated future? The contrast is certainly impressive between the private collector picking with nicety the choice items which he may wish to acquire and the drudging librarian who must dutifully secure every available item within assigned limits, without regard to condition format, or accessibility.

I do not wish to speak in derogation of the *play* of the private book collector. He stimulates the publishing and sale of books and the material which he brings together is usually made available for public use. I wish rather to commend the *work* of publicly supported libraries in collecting on a large scale for the present and future needs of the entire country. I wish, moreover, to take advantage of this occasion to outline the document-collecting program now being undertaken by the librarians of the state of Washington.

The program in this state is part of a nation-wide movement initiated by the Social Science Research Council and later taken over by the American Library Association. The work is directed by a Committee appointed by the President of the Washington Library Association and gives representation to the principal libraries of the state. The Departments of Sociology of the State College and the State University are also represented upon the Committee.

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Activity began last spring with an investigation. Each of the larger libraries reported upon the following points:

1. The type of document material now being collected;
2. Additional types to be sponsored; and,
3. Types which each library was unwilling to sponsor.

A summary of the information received was presented at a Conference of the Association held at Victoria, B. C., on May 30, 1933. This information was informally discussed at the Victoria Conference and was later forwarded to the members of the W. L. A. Document Committee with the request for suggestions as to the improvement of the combined document resources of the state.

Replies received by the Chairman indicate a small amount of unnecessary duplication. What is far more serious are gaps remaining to be filled and the need for more intensive collecting. Each library has been asked to study its own needs and responsibilities with reference to the whole field of the social sciences. As in other cooperative programs carried forward by librarians of the Pacific Northwest, each library has been asked to define its own fields and declare its own aims. No obligations are recognized except those self-imposed for the general good of the whole group.

In planning the state program, the following categories of documents have been considered:

1. Official published documents of the state, and unpublished reports and records.
2. Publications and archives of semi-governmental or unofficial voluntary state organizations and agencies.
3. Local county and city official publications and records.
4. Local non-governmental or semi-governmental agencies, civic and social.
5. Newspapers.
6. Records of colleges and universities.
7. Records and publications of religious organizations.
8. Records of the industrial, financial and agricultural activities of the community.
9. Significant biographical material, including genealogies, family papers, letters, diaries, photographs.
10. Local histories, maps and atlases.

This is not the proper time or place to enumerate the action of each library with reference to the groups of document materials

above itemized. A few general comments, however, may prove of interest.

1. The official published documents of the state are being generally collected by the principal libraries and are accordingly well distributed over the state. The primary collection is naturally at the State Library in Olympia.

2. Documents of semi-governmental and unofficial state organizations are sponsored by the Seattle and Spokane public libraries and by the State College and State University.

3-4. Official and unofficial publications of cities and counties are regionally collected, but a great deal more attention is needed with reference to these elusive groups. The public libraries of Seattle, Spokane and Everett together with the State College and the State University seem to have been the more active in the past.

5. Newspapers have and should receive regional attention, each town or city library assuming responsibility for its own papers. The State Library and State College are each collecting the papers of the whole state and accordingly collect many papers issued by communities having no public library. The collection of newspapers is being stimulated by the active work now in progress of reporting holdings for the *National Union List of Newspapers*.

6. The State College and State University collect the records of all colleges and universities of the state. Spokane and Tacoma report the collection of nearby institutions. Bellingham Normal school is prepared to assume further responsibility for this class of educational material.

7. The records and publications of religious organizations have not been adequately covered. Seattle and Spokane and the State College and University have been collecting for their several localities and regions. The College of Puget Sound is covering the Methodist church for the Northwest.

8. Records of financial, industrial, and agricultural activities should be collected on a more intensive scale. Naturally here again the emphasis should be upon regional collection. The State College has a special obligation with reference to the agricultural history of the state.

9. Significant biographical material, including genealogies, family papers, letters, diaries and photographs have been and should in the future be collected regionally, each town and city caring for its own history. Such material should also be sponsored by the State Library and the State historical societies.

10. Local histories, maps and atlases, representing original material of importance should be collected regionally, each library taking responsibility for its own locality. Categories 9 and 10 should be strongly centralized in a few strategic locations within the state. Among points worthy of consideration may be noted: convenience of access, i. e., nearness to centers of population; service to students, i. e., nearness to research centers, where scholars congregate; availability, i. e., with reference to publication and photographic reproduction. Historical manuscript material is unique and therefore more available if located where it may be readily photostated, or better still, where its importance justifies, where it may be edited and published in historical journals.

The Washington Document Committee has already discovered serious obstacles to the accelerated collecting campaign which it seeks to encourage:

1. A lack of information in regard to locally published material. One of its first concerns is the provision for some form of bibliography or checking list showing what material is being issued currently, the names of organizations, secretaries, and the like. Such a checklist would prove a most useful aid in exhibiting the field to be covered and directing the way to the material desired.

2. Inadequate budgets to cover purchases, binding and even the requisite stationery and postage involved.

3. A most serious handicap is that of inadequate staffs to care for the work of a collection program.

4. Not the least of our difficulties results from the wholly inadequate appropriation given to the State Library at Olympia. We cannot go very far in state library programs without the direction of some central official agency. The State Library is the logical agency to centralize and direct coordinated activity in Washington. We have a capable state librarian eager to do just such work, but without even the modest sum necessary to make a fair beginning toward such an undertaking. In most lines of educational advancement, Washington stands high. With regard to state directed library activity, it is near the bottom of the list.

Our strongest asset in the document campaign is a fine cooperative spirit. The organization set-up is being perfected and with the return of more prosperous days there is reason to expect that Washington librarians will have provided a broader and surer foundation for study and research in the social sciences. Teachers and

investigators can give most substantial aid and encouragement by pointing out needs and materials, and by urging upon institutions, boards and private individuals the importance of supplying public libraries with printed materials and other records relating to their several institutions.

We not only have a fine cooperative spirit, but we are developing a technique of coordination which insures greater resources with an equal expenditure of money and effort. Other states have similar programs to our own and all considerable libraries of America will one day be tied together in a national network of information. The future scholar will have increasingly at his command the combined recorded data of the world.

The new spirit of coordination is the most promising aspect of modern library service. The service of the public library is altruistic and for this reason educators are asked to support every reasonable effort made by librarians to obtain for preservation and use all fundamental records of society as made from day to day. Libraries should be supported in so far as they are doing collective rather than individual work; are cooperative rather than competitive; stand for planned action rather than chance effort; seek to make their holdings available rather than inaccessible; acquire material for use not for show; collect accessible as well as scarce material and all material within self-imposed boundaries rather than the easy or attractive parts.

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