PERIODICALS AND DOCUMENTS

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At mid-20th century any librarian must be impressed with one need in particular—the need to choose wisely in order to keep the library collection for which he is responsible within a practicable size for giving the best possible service to his patrons. Elimination in selection requires the knowledge of and the intelligent use of available tools and of the local community needs as well as more courage than is exercised in quantitative acquisition. Certainly with the quantity of material available in both periodical and document form the need for intelligent selection is imperative. It is the more imperative because you as the librarian are the agent for bringing together the materials containing the information and the people wanting the information. Yours is the further duty of making the people want the material you are able to supply. Thus an informed community is in a large measure your responsibility. Today periodicals and government publications provide some of the best sources for reliable and timely information on current affairs, both domestic and international, on developments in research in all fields of knowledge, and in improved methods for carrying on the common tasks of everyday living. In many cases only the government has sufficient resources for carrying out a survey of such magnitude as that of the decennial census for example, the results of which are issued as government publications.

At this Institute we are concerned with exploring as many as possible of the practical tools and methods used in selecting and acquiring the materials. There are many magazine articles and books available for a comprehensive study of serials, which includes both periodicals and documents. If your interest and time is sufficient, I recommend that you secure, by borrowing from your state library if necessary, and read the recent book Serial Publications, Their Place
and Treatment in Libraries¹ to give you an over-all representation of the advantages and problems posed by serials. The many references throughout the text and the selected bibliography at the end will lead you to an almost endless amount of materials that will stir your imagination as well as inform. Working with periodicals and documents can be as exciting as any form of library work, and as rewarding too.

Let us consider first the aids to selection of periodicals. There are lists of basic titles suggested for the library of small or medium size and though we will all readily agree that no librarian should build his collection solely by consulting such a list, the use of a good one serves as a point of departure. One very helpful such list is Periodicals for Small and Medium-Sized Libraries, originally compiled by Frank K. Walter, with the listing in the 7th edition (1939) resulting from answers to questionnaires sent to 295 workers in small public libraries, branch libraries, extension agencies, and seven library schools.² Thus from a cross-section of libraries varying widely geographically and culturally a list of basic periodicals evolved, admittedly so workable that it is now in its 8th edition, this edition having been prepared by a Subcommittee of the Editorial Committee of the American Library Association.³ The titles listed in the Abridged Readers' Guide⁴ form another good basic list for the small library, and those listed in the regular Readers' Guide⁵ for the medium-sized library. If your library also serves the entire county or the school libraries in your community, you will need additional selection aids. There are lists of periodicals recommended for school libraries. The Cundiff list of 101 Magazines for Schools, Grades 1-12 contains titles "for curricular use and for leisure reading" with brief annotations.⁶ Laura Martin's Magazines for School Libraries covers magazines for elementary and secondary schools, with recommended grade levels and evaluative annotations for each title along with page size, name of editor, price, frequency, etc.⁷ The new edition of the ALA Basic Book Collection for Elementary Grades contains a section on periodicals listed under broad subject groupings.⁸ Additional titles for the seventh and eighth grades may be found in the ALA Basic Book Collection for Junior High Schools.⁹

Once the librarian has used prepared lists and possibly examined some sample issues in order to establish his own list of titles considered basic for his collection, he must then

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¹ Laura Small, Library, by Frank List
² Laura Small, Library, by Frank List
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⁴ Laura Small, Library, by Frank List
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consider the titles required by the known special interests of the community the library serves. As an instance, the head librarian in our own community reports that a few years ago a group of townswomen developed a great interest in hand-weaving so that it became practical to have a magazine covering that phase of handicraft. Other local hobbies would suggest other titles. The addition of pertinent titles would be demanded if a library were located in an agricultural area, or in or near an industrial area, or where there were very active women's study groups. The closeness of another library, such as a college or university library, would be another factor influencing choice of periodical titles.

Aids for periodical selection may be summarized then as lists of basic titles recommended for your size library, titles included in whatever periodical index is available to you, known special interests in your community, and to some extent titles listed in agents' guides. A short list of these aids will be found at the end of this paper.

In securing the titles you have decided upon there seems to be little doubt among librarians that using an established magazine subscription agency with a reputation for good service to libraries is the best policy. Discounts given do not vary greatly now. As long ago as 1948 they were considered to be "substantially standardized." Therefore, the kind of special services given by the subscription agency is an important consideration in choosing an agency in preference to subscribing directly, or subscribing through a local agent, or using club combinations. Some of the services to be expected are the automatic renewal of a subscription until it is cancelled by the library; the prompt supplying of indexes and title pages issued separately the claiming of issues not received or the replacement of issues received but later missing; the information supplied and adjustments made in price and subscription expiration dates when publications cease or merge; the attempt to have all subscriptions expire at the same time so only one renewal operation is required annually; and the lower rates often obtainable for 2-year or 3-year subscriptions. It is obvious that any or all of these services represent a great saving of time to the librarian.

If you are interested in changing from a single year to 2-year or 3-year subscription periods, there is a good article explaining a method for the conversion by William Kurth. Though he uses a base of $9,000 in annual payments to be
converted to 3-year payment terms over a period of nine years, the system could be applied to smaller amounts quite easily.

The various subscription agencies also supply the librarian with periodical guides containing much useful information. They include such indications as where a magazine is indexed, frequency of issue, when the current volume starts, subscription prices including any limit on the length of time for which a subscription will be received, a subject grouping of the titles listed, dates when you may expect to receive issues of the most popular periodicals, and often sufficient advertising to acquaint you with the character of many magazines of rather wide appeal.

Securing a sample copy of a periodical is recommended by Osborn, especially if only one title is to be selected in a given subject area, or if there is any doubt as to the usefulness of a certain title. He suggests that the librarian compile a list of the titles in the particular subject field, solicit sample copies of each and make a choice only after comparing the publications.13 If you are unable to secure sample copies from the publisher or the subscription agency, possibly you could borrow from your state library for purposes of examination. It should not be necessary to say that, once subscribed to, a title need not remain on your list indefinitely. Here is an opportunity for the alert librarian to practice the elimination in selection mentioned earlier.

It is to be hoped that you do not have to ask for bids before placing your subscriptions, for neither libraries nor agents find such a system wholly satisfactory. However, if by law you must secure bids, you should examine them with certain considerations in mind. These considerations have been identified and explained quite clearly by Osborn in a section on bids.14 An "escalator clause" which allows the agent to increase his charges as the publishers raise subscription rates is advantageous to library and dealer alike, for without such a clause the dealer must make his bid high enough to cover such possible losses. Also the librarian must realize that the agent who has accurate and up-to-date subscription rates may submit a higher bid than the agent who has not secured current information. However, the former will not have to make additional charges as a consequence, whereas the latter, though lower in initial bid, will have to cover such losses with additional charges later.
We may conclude then that the librarian should be able to fit the acquisition of periodicals into a tidy little routine because the subscription agencies not only provide in some form a reference list of titles available but also attend to all subscription duties. Not so with government documents, or "documents" as they shall be designated most often here. True, there is one major listing (the Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications) and one major acquisition source (the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D.C.), but unlike periodicals which are renewed annually, documents require a recurring selection of individual titles.

Notwithstanding the general feeling of desperation one perceives when documents are mentioned, my mission is to show you that the situation is not so bad as it seems, that there are selection tools, and that there are ways of securing the publications.

Government documents encompass almost all areas of knowledge and are presented in popular and in technical form, as informational, as factual, and as statistical publications. All writers on government publications agree that certain of them are necessary tools for reference work, but I also like McCamy's approach in his study made for the Public Library Inquiry. He is more concerned with the publications that will interest the general reader than with those primarily of value as reference tools. Since we are considering our responsibility for all facets of the collection, we must not follow McCamy's interest to the exclusion of those titles that are primarily reference tools or of those borderland publications of both reference value and limited general interest. So we shall consider the selection aids for all classes of documents.

Of the several selection aids the most inclusive is the Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications. The Monthly Catalog is received soon after the first of each month and contains the most complete single listing available of publications issued during the preceding month. Each issue has an index with entries by subject and by series titles, and the annual cumulative index also contains entries by corporate authors and selected individual authors. A list of depository libraries appears in the September issue. It is well worth the $3.00 per year subscription price and is recommended for any library intending to secure a consider-
able number of documents or needing to identify materials to be secured on inter-library loan. The list of depository libraries mentioned earlier would be useful in locating a library from which to request such a loan. Most of these libraries have a liberal loan policy. By securing some titles in this manner, the small or medium-sized collection can be augmented for special use without filling its shelves with infrequently used materials.

Probably the most used list in the small library or in the medium-sized library securing only a few documents is the biweekly Selected United States Government Publications, also issued by the Superintendent of Documents and available free upon application. McCamy especially recommends it as a selection tool due to its variety of coverage, inclusion of items most apt to be of general interest, and its brevity as compared with the quantity of items covered by a single issue of the Monthly Catalog. A brief annotation is included for each title. The individual issues of the Price List series, put out by the Superintendent of Documents and also available free upon application, are useful for selecting documents. There are over forty issued currently, each one covering a broad subject or related subjects and listing with a brief annotation the materials available from the Superintendent of Documents. For example Price List 36, 83d edition, August 1956, entitled "Government Periodicals" lists all periodicals for which subscriptions are received by the Superintendent of Documents; Price List 50, 40th edition, July 1956, is entitled "American History"; others, such as "Homes," "Construction," "Maintenance," "Furnishings," "Home Economics," "Foods and Cooking," and "Education," cover a wide variety of topics. These lists are frequently revised, most of the popular ones annually. The Superintendent of Documents has a fourth type of publication useful in the selection of documents. Issued irregularly, these lists may cover one subject or may be simply a miscellaneous group of current publications. Examples of lists under subjects are Your Child, "a must list for parents...23 popular government publications covering CHILD CARE from birth to the middle 'teens'," or Hobby Publications, 1955 edition; examples of the miscellaneous lists, which are collected under titles designed to catch one's attention and interest, are Helpful Government Publications on Subjects from A to Z, or Whether You're a Doctor, Lawyer, or an Indian Chief "you'll find something
to interest you in the thousands of fact-filled government publications..."

Also, once you have ordered a publication from the Superintendent of Documents you will be given an opportunity to receive notices of similar materials. When the publication ordered is received it will contain a card "If you are interested in being notified when future issues of this publication or other publications of a similar nature become available, please fill out and return this post card." (The code numbers at the bottom of the card are to identify for the Superintendent of Documents the "nature" of the publications.)

Other recommended sources for listing of documents are Leidy's A Popular Guide to Government Publications, 17 and Hirshberg and Melinat's Subject Guide to United States Government Publications. 18 These last two works complement each other. Hirshberg emphasizes publications of "great potential reference use"19 while reference and statistical works and bibliographies are among the classes excluded by Leidy. 20 Hirshberg includes such annual publications as Statistical Abstract of the United States, the United States Government Organization Manual, and such periodically revised titles as The Constitution of the United States of America (annotated) and the Biographical Directory of the American Congress. Leidy concentrates on such information publications as the often revised Children's Bureau publications on infant and child care (Infant Care, Your Child from 1 to 6, Your Child from 6 to 12 are but a partial list of titles), or the volume entitled 100 Things You Should Know About Communism Series, and Spotlight on Spies issued as House Document 136 of the 82d Congress, 1st Session, 1951. Leidy also includes publications about the Constitution, such as United States Constitution, Text, Index, Chronology, and Leading Quotations (Senate Document 210, 80th Congress, 1949). The Leidy and Hirshberg lists are of course bounded by definite periods of time while the Superintendent of Documents lists previously mentioned focus on current materials.

There are innumerable magazine articles giving lists of popular government documents. Some good examples are those by Lillian Briscoe, 21 Sylvia Mechanic, 22 and Carl Melinat. 23

Having acquired some of the selection aids mentioned, you are now faced with the problem of determining how to secure the materials themselves. At least we are prone to think of
the acquisition of documents as a problem. Actually it need not be one, because all the aids mentioned, with the exception of the Subject Guide to United States Publications, contain all the information necessary for securing the publications listed. Each has a device for indicating for each publication whether it is priced or free, to be ordered from the Superintendent of Documents or the issuing agency, or is issued for administrative use only and so is not distributed to the public. This last device appears in the Monthly Catalog only. In most cases an order blank is included and instructions are given for the method of payment, since prepayment is required by the Superintendent of Documents and usually by an issuing agency.

The two most satisfactory methods of payment to the Superintendent of Documents are by coupons or by a deposit account. Coupons, in 5¢ denominations, are purchased from the Superintendent and are good until used. If few documents are purchased, this method would be preferred. The deposit account is recommended for convenience if documents are ordered with any regularity. Any sum of money, with a $5.00 minimum, may be deposited with the Superintendent, who then supplies the library with an account number and deposit order blanks. The librarian orders against that account, always being sure that a sufficient balance is maintained. The Superintendent returns your original order with your current balance indicated, so there is very little paper work necessary. A file of the returned original orders would answer such questions as the actual status of an order or of your account and would be useful for estimating amounts required for future deposits; also, in case of error in an order, the original order must be returned to the Superintendent of Documents. If a publication is not supplied due to being temporarily out of stock or the supply exhausted, the reason is indicated by means of a symbol. All symbols are explained on the verso of the order blank.

Another method for purchasing documents has developed partly because of the discontinuance in 1952 of the standing order section of the Government Printing Office. There are firms which will maintain a standing order service on all government periodicals and series as well as a procurement service for separates. Bernan Associates, P.O. Box 5664, Washington 16, D.C., and the Documents Index, Box 453, Arlington 10, Virginia, are examples of such firms.
You still may expect to secure some publications free either from the issuing agency or through your congressman, though there are not as many available free as formerly. Mr. Wilcox indicates that the idea of "free" and "inexpensive" documents is a "myth," 24 and Ullman also mentions the general trend toward availability through purchase instead of free distribution by an issuing agency or a congressman. 25 Sometimes you will find that an agency is able to supply a publication to a library even though it would not be able to supply the same publication to an individual. Your congressman should be addressed as Hon. [name in full], U.S. House of Representatives, House Office Building, Washington 25, D.C. You soon will be able to determine what you should try to secure free and what you should order.

The majority of the Senate and House documents and some of the Committee prints are free. The free Senate and House documents may be secured by writing to the U.S. Congress, Senate (or House) Document Room, The Capitol Building, Washington 25, D.C. The free Committee prints should be requested from the committee issuing the publication or from your congressman. A recent Senate document is No. 152, 84th Congress, 2d Session, 1956, How Our Laws Are Made, by Charles J. Zinn. Another one is Our Capitol, Factual Information Pertaining to Our Capitol and Places of Historic Interest in the National Capital, 84th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document No. 13, a well-illustrated 57-page pamphlet which was first printed in the 83d Congress and has been so much in demand that a later printing was ordered in the 84th Congress. The House and Senate reports usually are reports to accompany public or private bills before Congress so there are only occasional reports that would be of general interest. One such exception is Organized Communism in the United States, prepared and released by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 83d Congress, 2d Session, House Report 1694, 1954. This issue is listed without a price but the original printing in 1953 is listed at 35¢. In such a case I would assume it could be secured gratis until proved otherwise.

One Committee print issued annually with data as of January 1, Organization of Federal Executive Departments and Agencies, is accompanied by a separate chart which may be posted. The print for 1956 (Senate. Government Operations Committee, Committee Report No. 16, 84th Congress,
2d Session) is listed at 25¢, the chart at 20¢, both to be ordered from the Superintendent of Documents unless you are able to secure them through your congressman. The Monthly Catalog, previously mentioned as a selection tool, contains a listing of these Congressional materials with indications of source, price and availability.

State documents present more difficulty in securing than do federal documents. Some states, especially those having a state depository system, issue checklists of state documents. The Louisiana semiannual list, Public Documents, is issued by the Secretary of State; California State Publications, a quarterly listing cumulated annually is compiled by the State Library. Indiana documents are listed in the State Library quarterly, Library Occurrent, as "Indiana Documents Received at the State Library," with an indication of availability from the State Library or the issuing office.

The Monthly Checklist of State Publications, issued by the Library of Congress Processing Department, lists each month all of the state documents received in the Gift and Exchange Division of the Library of Congress. It is not possible of course to indicate the availability of the documents, and the completeness of the listing is dependent upon the completeness with which a state furnishes its publications. If there is no listing of state documents available from your state, it would be entirely proper to send a letter of inquiry to your state library or to an issuing agency. You find it helpful to maintain a mailing label file once you have established the source for obtaining a document.

The state documents collection in your library probably would be limited to your own state with only a few exceptions. A possible exception would be the need for some state manuals other than your own. Hotaling has compiled the needed information for securing these, giving frequency and approximate time of issue, whether priced or free, and the source from which to be ordered or requested.26

Even the small library has a responsibility to collect local documents, municipal and county. Osborn points out that such publications as those issued by local government bodies probably are more easily collected at the local level. He also believes that local libraries are able to relieve the larger libraries of this responsibility.27 This is another instance of possible cooperation.

Your collection of United Nations publications probably

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will be held to a minimum also but some UN material seems necessary in every library today. Taylor recommends the United Nations Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, as a source for some free materials. It is an official United Nations office and will supply background materials and posters to libraries but not to individuals. An inexpensive reference publication issued by this Department is Everyman's United Nations, 1945-1955. The monthly U.S. National Commission for UNESCO Newsletter contains general information and selected publication announcements. It is free upon application. The Commission also issues fact sheets, pamphlets, posters and other materials on UNESCO. If you are on a mailing list to receive free materials regularly, do not fail to return the letter or card that will be received periodically asking if you wish to remain on the mailing list. Government offices are required by law to make this periodic canvass as a measure of economy.

Of course the best single reference tool for the United Nations and its specialized agencies is the annual Yearbook of the United Nations, first issued for 1946-47 and now issued for the calendar year, but it would be considered an expensive item in a limited budget. The International Reporter, issued by the International Documents Service, is a bi-monthly listing of printed publications of the UN and its specialized agencies. It is not annotated and probably would not be useful for the very selective collection.

The foregoing represents only a minimum of examples of interesting as well as valuable informational and reference materials available in documents from federal, state, and municipal governments and from the UN and its specialized agencies. It has been designed to try to dispel your hesitancy, if you have any, in adding documents to your collection, and to point out that, after all, it is not too difficult for even the library of small and medium size to select and acquire a workable and useful group of government publications. These publications, like periodicals, with their emphasis on the present, help to bring your book collection up-to-date and keep it so.

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References


14. Ibid., pp. 54-56.


16. Ibid., pp. 34-35.


19. Ibid., p. v.

20. Leidy, _op. cit._, p. xii.


27. Osborn, *op. cit.*, p. 44.


Free and Inexpensive Aids to the Selection and Acquisition of Periodicals and Documents

Note: The publications starred (*) are priced; others are free upon application.


How to Decode Expiration Dates. The Mayfair Agency, 40 N. Van Brunt Street, Englewood, New Jersey.


