
The Acquisition of Government Publications

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ALTHOUGH A FEW LIBRARIANS still complain about the disappearance of the "free" document the myth that government publications are inexpensive has finally been recognized. While it is true that great quantities of government publications are available without charge to federal depository libraries or can be acquired for the asking by other libraries on request to issuing agencies, librarians have long since learned that the original purchase price is but one part of the necessary expenditure to procure and process acquisitions. Just keeping government serial publications up-to-date is an expensive annual undertaking. Adequate acquisition of government publications at all levels, federal, state, local, foreign, and international is a major budget item for all university and research libraries and should be so treated.

Many of the larger university and public libraries have recognized the need for trained personnel with special knowledge of acquisitions and servicing of government publications and have set up separate Document Divisions or Departments. Wherever this has been done, excellent collections have resulted. Unfortunately, there are still too many instances in libraries where the acquisition of government publications is large and the staff to handle them is too small. Even free document acquisitions cannot function adequately with an inadequate professional staff to keep them recorded and up-to-date. Whether a library maintains its own professional staff for acquisitions or takes part in a cooperative venture like the Documents Expediting Project the acquisition of government publications will not be free.

More and more development of government documents collections must be considered cooperatively on a national or regional basis. When funds and space could be had for the asking, two or more libraries in a metropolitan area could boast of having the sessional papers of all the British Dominions and Colonies plus comprehensive sets of all the publications of the forty-eight states. The immediate needs of the

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community and the current and immediate future needs of the university's research program did not need to be thoroughly considered. Instead the factors of selection could be self-sufficiency, prospective future, and the possibility of occasional use. Now that funds for materials and buildings are tight and probably will continue to be so, the acquisition of government publications needs serious consideration on a coordinated national level.

Three trends affecting document procurement are discernible. First is the development of a system of regional depository libraries to store and make available to all libraries and scholars in the region little used sets of government publications. The best example of this type of regional library is the Midwest Inter-Library Center in Chicago. Libraries in the region need to duplicate this material only in cases of actual constant or steady demands for it, using the regional library (1) to borrow items on inter-library loan, (2) to send scholars directly to it, and (3) to secure photographed or microphotographed copies from it.

Second, the collecting of government publications by university, research, and college libraries is tending to be done only in terms of immediate needs and current research programs. While many of the collections might become substantial in size, this plan eliminates the idea of acquiring for prospective use material which would become only a storage problem.

The third type of acquisition and that which effects the largest number of libraries, particularly the public libraries, is the trend toward selective collection for reference and local interest needs limited, for example, to the type of government publication listed in W. P. Leidy's *Popular Guide to Government Publications*.¹ Additionally, it might be noted here that microreproduction is increasingly a factor in acquisitions planning in the area of government publications.

Despite the several decades of excellent work by the Committee on Public Documents of the American Library Association, one centralized source for the acquisition of all United States government publications has not been attained. Decentralization seems permanently entrenched due to the multiplicity of agencies and their wide use of such printing devices as the mimeograph, the multigraph, and offset. Substantial progress has been made however in providing better bibliographical tools for acquisitions and other purposes. The *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications* continuously becomes more comprehensive for so-called processed publications. In February and August it contains in a special cumulated section, "Semi-

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annual List of Periodicals, Releases and Statistical Statements," periodical and other serial publications of the federal government. Many more departments and agencies are making available better and more comprehensive checklists and indexes of their own publications, for example, the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and State and the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

United States government publications still are acquired chiefly by purchase through the Superintendent of Documents Office or by gift from the issuing agencies. As of September 1, 1953, 557 designated depository libraries enjoyed the free distribution of the printed publications selected by them from 1,346 items available from the "Classified List."² Libraries attain this permanent depository privilege through designation by a representative or senator. Each representative may designate one library in his congressional district and each senator may designate one in any part of his state. Depository library privileges may be terminated only by the written request of the library to the Superintendent of Documents or by the Superintendent of Documents' decision that a depository library has failed "to meet the standards required by law" or has shown "consistent disregard of notices and instructions so as to cause unnecessary expense to the government in administering the program for that particular library."³

In 1954 the Superintendent of Documents was forced for the first time to make a pro rata charge to all depository libraries for postage for mailing depository shipments. By law this could have been done as early as 1895.⁴ Only about 30 depository libraries to date have protested these charges and as of October 25, 1954, only three have failed to pay the charges or stated that they do not plan to do so. In passing, it is interesting to note that strictly speaking there no longer is an "all" depository, one which receives automatically everything printed and made available. Probably no more than ten now receive all 1,346 items available in the *Classified List* and only 57 select at least 1,300 of the total.

U.S. government publications may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents (1) by coupon, (2) by money order or its equivalent, and (3) by establishment of a deposit account. Coupons of five cent face value in blocks of twenty may be purchased in quantity from the Superintendent of Documents and forwarded in sufficient amount to cover each order. This procedure is particularly useful for orders amounting to less than a dollar. Deposit accounts may be established by forwarding certain cash sums to the Superintendent of Documents in advance of any purchase and thereafter maintaining a

credit balance in excess of purchases. After the deposit account has been established, all items can be ordered with the request to charge the cost to the deposit account. The Superintendent of Documents through this medium sold \$56,240 worth of publications to 506 libraries during the fiscal year which ended June 30, 1954.

When the Superintendent of Documents announced by circular letter of April 28, 1952, the discontinuance of standing orders for periodicals and other serial publications, a valuable service to libraries was abandoned because of expense. Periodical subscriptions through the Superintendent of Documents Office again must be renewed annually by all libraries. An immediate result was the springing up of agencies offering this service such as Dennis & Co., Inc., Buffalo, New York, Bernan Associates, Washington, D.C., and now Documents Index, Arlington, Virginia.

Libraries interested in acquiring the so-called processed federal government publications can now acquire them: (1) By requesting them directly from issuing agencies; (2) By subscribing to the Documents Expediting Project; or (3) By subscribing for the microprint edition of all non-depository items in the *Monthly Catalog* from the Readex Microprint Corporation, New York City.

The Documents Expediting Project⁵ was initiated in 1946 by the Joint Committee on Government Publications of the American Library Association, the Association of Research Libraries, the Special Library Association, and the American Association of Law Libraries as a medium through which federal government publications might be secured collectively by a group of libraries, especially the processed publications not available through the Superintendent of Documents Office. The project has been given office space in the Library of Congress and now has 70 participating members. Each member contributes annually from \$100 to \$500 and receives service and publications to the extent of its annual contribution. The project has prepared a *Classified Checklist of United States Government Processed Publications*, chiefly periodical and serial publications, and will make arrangements for any member library to receive regularly any title on the list.

Beginning with the January 1953 issue of the *Monthly Catalog of United States Government Publications*, the Readex Microprint Corporation has made available in microprint form all items contained therein not distributed to depository libraries by the Superintendent of Documents. Distribution of the microprint edition is made monthly covering at one time the contents of an entire issue of the *Monthly Catalog*. No separate items can be attained in microprint, only the

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entire contents of a monthly issue. In January 1956 Readex Microprint plans to issue, in addition, those items distributed to depository libraries indicated by a black dot in the *Monthly Catalog* and in 1955 the so-called Serial Set of U.S. government publications.

It is well to point out that an increasing number of federal government publications are now becoming available in microphotographed form in addition to the microprint items. For example, microcards can now be secured of the *Annals of Congress*; the *Federal Register*, v. 15-17; and the *Official Gazette* of the U.S. Patent Office, v. 630-665. Also microfilms can be obtained from University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan, of the *Congressional Record* beginning with the 82nd Congress as well as the hearings, committee reports and committee prints of the 82nd Congress and Microphoto, Inc., Cleveland, has made available the *Official Gazette* of the U.S. Patent Office, 1930-1952.⁶ An excellent medium for determining what federal and other government publications are available on microfilm, is the *Union List of Microfilms* prepared at regular intervals by the Philadelphia Bibliographical Center and Union Library Catalog.

The Superintendent of Documents now allows federal depository libraries to substitute for permanent keeping any microfilmed edition it may purchase of regular depository items. The originals in the depository library may then be disposed of after application to the Superintendent of Documents for instructions as to whether they should be returned to him, sent to another library, or disposed of in another manner.

Libraries which still have the pioneer spirit may write to federal agencies requesting all publications issued or certain specified items. Two directories necessary for securing names and addresses of existing agencies are the *U.S. Government Organization Manual*⁷ and the *Official Congressional Directory*,⁸ while a useful guide to publications for sale has been compiled by N. M. Bowman.⁹

In another article in this issue Mrs. Jenkins offers helpful advice on the acquisition of patent literature and governmental research reports.

As with federal government publications, none of the states have a complete central distributing agency for their publications. Many state libraries make extensive distribution of state publications chiefly by exchange but the supply of copies is generally restricted or limited. Some state universities as well as state libraries now share the privilege of using state publications for exchange. A few states have a central agency for purchase of publications offered for sale. In at least two

states, California and Louisiana, a state depository library system has been set up similar to the federal depository system.

The issuing agency still appears to be to a large extent the chief source of acquisitions. Therefore an adequate collection of the tools of acquisition for state publications becomes an absolute necessity. General tools covering all forty-eight states are the biennial *Book of the States*,¹⁰ issued by the Council of State Governments and the *Monthly Checklist of State Publications*¹¹ issued by the Library of Congress. The former is particularly valuable for its directory of state officers and officials with similar functions or purposes. The *Monthly Checklist of State Publications* has undergone a number of changes in recent years resulting in more prompt appearance of monthly issues, expansion of subject coverage in the annual indexes, and improved listing in the checklist. Although still only an accession record of items actually received by the Library of Congress, greater pressure has been exerted upon the states to send all their publications to the Library of Congress. Periodicals and series publications are included.

Two types of reference tools, state manuals or yearbooks¹² and the periodic checklists of publications are useful in securing state documents. It is through the individual state manual or yearbook, official or unofficial, that a thorough knowledge of government organization, its function and operation is attained, while the checklists provide the necessary specific information about current releases.

The growth of the periodic checklists of individual state publications is most encouraging. This undertaking has been chiefly the work of the state library or the state university library. Periodic checklists are now issued for thirty-one states as follows: by the state libraries in California, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington; by the state university libraries in Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, and Hawaii; by the Public Archives Commission in Delaware; by the secretary of state in Louisiana; by the archivist, Hall of Records in Maryland; by the Bureau of Publications, Department of Property and Supplies in Pennsylvania; by the Historical Commission in South Carolina; by the Department of Archives and History in West Virginia; and by the State Historical Society in Wisconsin.¹³ It is hoped that this trend will spread until all forty-eight states have checklists and that eventually these efforts can be pooled more effectively in some way with the *Monthly Checklist of State Publications* of the Library of Congress.

In general, three procedures may be followed in the acquisition of

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state publications: (1) by using the directory information in the *Book of the States* or individual state manuals, to write to the agencies from which publications are desired requesting everything issued or specific types of publications; (2) by using the *Monthly Checklist of State Publications* or individual list of publications of the state to request specific titles as recorded therein; (3) to a more limited extent by setting up exchange arrangements through a state library or state university library. Except for the Jenkin's Project at the University of North Carolina in association with the Library of Congress, there appears to be no extensive effort to microphotograph state publications.¹⁴ It should be noted that a number of state publications, even some of those acquired from the issuing agencies, are no longer free.

The acquisition of municipal and county government publications might well be restricted to municipal reference libraries and a limited number of the larger research libraries. This is particularly true of publications from cities under 100,000 population and from most counties. Publications from the various departments of cities of over 500,000 population could, on the other hand, supplement a state document collection wherever held. In most cases, one extensive collection within the state of the municipal publications of any one state should certainly suffice.

General sources for locating current publications of municipalities are the periodical publications of state leagues of municipalities, periodicals in the field of municipal government, such as *American City* and *Western City*, and periodic bibliographical lists from municipal reference libraries. Local daily newspapers are another source which should not be overlooked. While municipal reference libraries will assist and aid in acquiring the publications of the city in which they are located, none can be considered the source of acquisition. The municipal reference libraries of Chicago and New York City have, however, for some time issued periodic checklists of their municipal publications and the Milwaukee and Los Angeles Municipal Reference Libraries also issue checklists from time to time. Municipal and county government publications are usually acquired direct from the issuing agency particularly for the larger cities; in smaller cities, the city clerk's office or its equivalent may be of assistance. Many state libraries, particularly the larger ones such as California and New York, maintain collections of the publications of the cities and counties within the state. University and college libraries would do well to acquire only sufficient municipal publications to satisfy curriculum and immediate research needs.

The documents and publications of foreign governments present

a fertile field for microphotography ventures. Strangely enough, only one major project has been undertaken and is now nearly completed—the *Sessional Papers of Great Britain, 1800–1900* by the Readex Microprint Corporation. The same firm also plans to undertake the *Sessional Papers* before 1800 and the *House of Commons Journals* from their beginning to date. University Microfilms, Incorporated, is now issuing a microfilm edition of the *Journal Officiel De La Republique Francaise*, beginning with the year 1952. Because of the ever increasing difficulty in securing originals, *Sessional Papers*, *Parliamentary Proceedings and Debates*, and *Official Gazettes* should be undertaken as microphotography projects whether by private interests or collectively by a group of research libraries.

Like domestic documents, there appears to be no short cut to the acquisition of foreign government publications. Language difficulties have always presented difficulties in solicitation. When possible, it is best to write requests for publications to the issuing agency in the language of the country concerned. Acquisition of current or recent material is easier than securing older files or sets from volume one. Often, the service of a reputable dealer is necessary. Any acquisitions program for foreign government publications requires a good collection of national checklists, government organization manuals, yearbooks, and statistical yearbooks.

Much foreign government material can be obtained by gift or exchange although many foreign countries are becoming increasingly rigid with monetary demands for their publications. American libraries of international reputation such as the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library enjoy an enviable position in this respect. Many government agencies send their publications unsolicited to the Library of Congress for deposit therein or with the hope of receiving Library of Congress cards for them. By State Department executive agreements, some forty foreign countries exchange certain of their publications with the Library of Congress for certain United States government publications. While this program at present is only about 25% automatic with the forty countries, it does provide the national library with a method of obtaining unsolicited individual items and sets. For other libraries, exchange arrangements with the national library may work best.

Experience has taught many of the larger research libraries not to depend entirely on gift and exchange. Many of them now have standing orders with reputable dealers or a central government distributing agency for major items such as *Sessional Papers*, *Parliamentary De-*

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bates, and Official Gazettes. An example of a central source is the acquisition of British Colonial documents and publications from the Crown Agent for the Colonies in London. Current publications and assistance in obtaining older publications is often acquired from consular offices and information services of foreign governments located in the United States. An example of this type of service is that offered by the British Information Service in New York City for British documents and publications.

In the field of foreign government publications acquisition, there is a great need for collections on a regional basis as well as an over-all national plan of acquisition. With the rapid development of communications, there is no need for wholesale duplication of foreign government publications.

The documents and publications of the United Nations and its specialized agencies are of increasing value and quantity. Methods of acquisition of these documents and publications are regular features of the *United Nations Documents Index* published monthly by the Documents Index Unit of the United Nations Library in New York City. Each January issue contains general information for the United Nations and each specialized agency as to the acquisition of documents and publications by purchase as well as the free distribution policy of each. The February 1954 issue contained a list of periodicals and press releases of the United Nations and each specialized agency with a statement of subscription rates. Part 2 of each April issue is a *Consolidated List of Depository Libraries and Sales Agents and Offices* for the documents and publications of the United Nations and its specialized agencies throughout the world. The *United Nations Documents Index* itself is a monthly checklist of the unrestricted documents and publications, mimeographed and printed, of the United Nations and its specialized agencies by symbol numbers with a subject index. Only unrestricted and limited issue items are obtainable so this *Index* generally omits all restricted items. The United Nations has been slow to declassify any restricted items even in early issues, 1946-1949, and there is still a considerable body of literature not available to libraries and others. While the Documents Index Unit has nearly completed the publications of the so-called back-log checklist, *Check Lists of United Nations Documents*,¹⁵ by body or agency, the documents and publications contained therein have long since ceased to be available in original form. The World Peace Foundation in Boston has been issuing on microfilm the unrestricted documents of the United Nations only. Beginning early in 1955, the Readex

Microprint Corporation issued in microprint form all unrestricted United Nations documents beginning with the period 1946-1953. Eventually this project will undertake the current documents as well. This latter project will give libraries the first opportunity to acquire in permanent form all the unrestricted documents of the United Nations. Nothing similar is available for any of the specialized agencies where the earlier issues of their documents and publications are no longer available, especially Unesco.

The United Nations Library has the privilege of using United Nations documents and publications for exchange, either for other publications of approximate value or for reference services received. Therefore some libraries, especially university and college libraries, might make arrangements to exchange publications of their institutions for United Nations documents and publications.

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