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# *Introduction*

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MANUSCRIPTS AND ARCHIVES are the most important sources of the scholar for only through them, supplemented by contemporary newspapers, broadsides, caricatures, and controversial pamphlets, can he hope to find the facts and the real flavor of the period of his studies. Years ago when manuscripts were mentioned the student thought only of a man's letters, diaries, and legal papers. Now the field has broadened and has become far more exciting and the librarian finds himself faced with the problem of collecting, processing, and administering the business papers of individuals and corporations, the archives of governments, states, and cities, the manuscripts of authors, the sketchbooks of artists and the scores of musicians. And, added to records on paper, he must now collect significant motion picture films, tape recordings of the careers of the great or of the pioneer, the records of famous singers, distinguished musical compositions, and the elusive folk song of the nation. He is even expected to collect the spoken dialects of vanishing Indian languages, the music of church bells, and the sound of great guns in battle.

The private collector and the dealer does much to preserve the historical manuscripts of the past but the librarian has the chief responsibility and the rare pleasure of bringing together these records and of making them available to the scholar. Not so long ago your editor found in a great mass of manuscripts which had been in storage since the Civil War the original document signed by Napoleon authorizing the sale of Louisiana to the United States. Imagine his delight in helping to save for posterity the parchment which gave us half of the territory of our nation,—one of the great documents of American history! Such adventures make the collecting of manuscripts one of the great joys of librarianship.

Manuscript collecting, as D. C. Mearns points out, is an art. Haphazard gathering of the unimportant letters of the great should be left to the beginning autograph collector. It is better to have an original

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letter from an obscure soldier telling of his tribulations at Valley Forge than a pass signed by George Washington. Besides, the latter may turn out to be a Spring forgery. Librarians, whether collecting books or manuscripts, should build on strength; they should gather large collections by subject rather than isolated pieces which have no relation with other materials in their libraries.

Though the alert librarian will occasionally find a manuscript in an auction or dealer's catalog which will fill a distinct gap in his collection, he should use his best efforts to gather large collections already assembled. He should make a systematic study of the distinguished families, the famous authors and the great collectors in his own region or, if he is a university librarian, among his alumni, who have such collections and who, generally, would be happy to find a final depository for them. Many an important collection is burned or sold for waste paper because the nearby librarian had shown no interest. If it is pointed out to a hesitant prospective donor that the commercial value of his collection may be deducted from his income tax, he will often decide to make the gift, especially if he is also reminded that if he sells the collection he will have to pay an income tax on the amount received. Personal gain is a great stimulus to generosity.

Most large collections, fortunately, come as gifts and when receiving them the librarian should make sure that the donor's letter of transmittal or deed of gift should relinquish to the library the complete rights to their public use and, if they are the donor's own papers or those of his ancestors, the publication rights as well. Many librarians do not realize that publication rights remain with the estate of the writer unless formally transferred to the owning library.

Having built up a respectable manuscript collection, the librarian is responsible for its physical care and preservation. He must keep his papers out of sunlight and away from artificial light or they will fade. They should never be framed and hung on the wall or displayed for very long in exhibition cases. Look what happened to the Declaration of Independence! They should not be stored where the air is too dry, too damp or affected by fumes, or where there are dust or insects. Frequently they must be mounted or repaired, but not with transparent cellophane tape!

Having insured the physical care of his manuscripts, the librarian must arrange and catalog them so that they will be useful to the scholar. No two librarians will agree as to how this should be done but a brief catalog entry which will help the scholar find the material he seeks is far better than an attempt at complete cataloging for no library has

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the funds or staff to do a thorough job of it and, anyhow, it is the duty of the scholar to select and appraise the manuscripts under his consideration. Of course chronological catalogs and subject entries are valuable and necessary when time permits but in most libraries a single card for a unified collection of hundreds of manuscripts will often suffice until detailed analytical cards can be made.

The growing use of manuscripts makes it necessary, if they are to be preserved for future generations, to protect them not only from dust and rodents but also from thieves and from the wear and tear they will receive at the hands of untrained and incompetent users. As Mr. Edmunds of the Ford Motor Company archives says, "Libraries exist for readers; archives, for writers" and by that he probably means, scholarly writers competent to handle these fragile and irreplaceable materials. For this reason, many libraries insist on proper introductions or assurances of scholarly ability before readers are allowed to use their manuscripts. The thorny problem of inter-library cooperation is admirably covered in H. H. Peckham's chapter which points out the injustice, in some instances, of wholesale microcopying from the collections of a sister institution. To transfer isolated originals or photocopies to a library already strong in the subject is admirable when possible but the wholesale copying from great collections for use in libraries having little or nothing original on the subject might well be questioned.

It is fortunate that many of our great libraries are publishing guides to their manuscript collections. It is of great aid to the scholar if, having shown him what manuscripts we have on his subject, we can also direct him to other depositories having related materials. The plan of the National Historical Publications Commission for a comprehensive guide to all the archival and manuscript repositories in the United States and the hoped for union catalog of manuscripts at the Library of Congress will be a great boon to librarians and scholars alike. Scholarly books are well covered by bibliographies and by the union catalogs but there is still a great need for a similar record of the whereabouts of manuscripts in American collections.

The bulk of business and institutional archives has made librarians hesitate before admitting them to their crowded shelves. However, there is growing interest in them among scholars as is shown from the steady sale of the three volumes of *Beekman Mercantile Papers, 1746-1799*, just published by The New-York Historical Society. Many large libraries and many individual business houses are now collecting in

this field but the problems of storage, weeding, and cataloging are many, as we learn from R. W. Lovett's chapter.

The unique problems of handling the government's vast collections of archives are of great interest to those of us who must refer our readers to the National Archives for aid and the similar, though lesser, problems of the state depositories are also of concern to all of us. Those of us who are mainly engaged in collecting personal and business papers are most fortunate that, in most of our states and at Washington, the bulky but invaluable public records are in the competent hands of others.

To many of us the collecting of films and sound recordings is a new field but one to which we must give our attention for we must all use these more recently developed techniques for the preservation of our history and so it behooves us to study the final chapter of our volume and the further references which J. B. Spear has given us.

The barker outside the circus tent who ballyhoos the performance does not have to be an expert equestrian or a high wire artist but he does need a certain sympathetic interest in the outdoor show business. The present issue editor is in a similar case with the same lack of skill but with a vast enthusiasm for his subject. He has not even had to crack the ringmaster's whip or become a lion tamer, for all of his performers were eager to do their stuff and prompt to come into the ring on cue when the circus band (in Urbana) played the tune.

Our acts may not be death-defying or even breath-taking but we are most grateful to the performers, nevertheless, especially since, in their enthusiasm, they did their parts without other remuneration than the satisfaction of being generously helpful in a good cause. All the editor had to do was to help select the subjects and locate the proper talent to make our circus a success. You, the audience out under the big top, must decide whether we have succeeded.