
Literary, Artistic, and Musical Manuscripts

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THIS SEEKER AFTER TRENDS in regard to literary, artistic, and musical manuscripts felt keenly his need to supplement the news appearing in the current publications which he sees as subscriber or as an adjunct to his daily labors in these fields. To probe for the most recent attitudes and policies in these collecting areas, a questionnaire comprised of six parts, some of which offered alternate responses, was sent to 107 libraries. The composition or complexion of the list queried may contribute to evaluating the validity of statements advanced in this survey.

The form was directed to forty-four state historical societies or agencies, thirty-three art museums, institutes or schools, twelve leading conservatories or music schools and departments. It went also to thirteen college and university libraries, principally those of more than a million volume book-stock. Five major public libraries of large size, including the Library of Congress, were addressed and four other public libraries were among those in other categories, mainly in larger cities at widely scattered geographic points; these four were included to assure better national and subject coverage.

Eighty-two responses to the form were received. The university and college group and the public libraries had equally excellent records: in each of these classes only one institution failed to answer or acknowledge the inquiry. The poorest showing in returns was made by the historical societies: fifteen of forty-four produced no reaction to the form. Irksome as questionnaires may be,—sometimes because of poorly phrased composition,—one might conclude there is a greater lack of professional spirit or curiosity in these societies than in library circles.

The first two questions propounded were aimed at discovering how actively the institutional groups were collecting, whether some were moved by policies of recent determination and the nature of spatial or administrative provisions.

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Fifteen of the historical societies report they are collecting actively; three of those in the negative column are there because of nearness to large universities which are active, a fact which must be credited to positive thinking and not to neglecting an opportunity. However, only two societies have adopted an affirmative collecting policy for these categories of manuscripts during the past ten years. By contrast, the colleges and universities are exemplary; out of a total of seventeen approached, that were in any way related to this probe, thirteen report positive collecting activity. Among public libraries, those located mostly along the eastern seaboard and having departmentalized organization and endowments, either inherited from long deceased benefactors or local collectors with civic pride, continue to lead in collection of such manuscripts. In the mid-west, the major municipal libraries, of non-endowed character, are not greatly active. In Texas there is a glimmer of interest. On the Pacific Coast the Los Angeles Public Library collects literary and musical materials; but in San Francisco the public library is not seeking such. It appears that the Bay area leaves these matters to the universities.

The "Friends of the Library" organizations appear to be a source of impetus and support for the collecting power of the colleges and universities. Only three of twenty-nine historical societies indicated existence of a group of this kind. Over half of the collegiate institutions reported their presence on campus, and in numerous instances membership was not confined to alumni but was open to the general public—the same field from which the societies might reap assistance. The vigor of this movement is attested by several examples of such support established before World War II which were revived at the close of hostilities as well as many others of unbroken existence. Centers of art and musical instructions do not appear to be convincing those friends who support the gifts of artistic materials and published scores that original sketchbooks, music scores in manuscript, and the papers of the artists themselves are worth collecting, that they are of documentary significance in their respective areas. There is one exception in the art field which will be dealt with later in this section.

The matter of special funds designed to honor work in art, music, and literature appears to have been given a serious set-back by unhappy experiences of some major libraries during this decade. There is a noteworthy lack of special funds or grants in the control of historical societies for encouragement of work above the undergraduate level. Among the older historical societies such funds usually

go to the support of the general publications program. More should follow the Wyoming example of grants-in-aid or scholarships for graduate theses on county history, with the resulting manuscripts ear-marked for the society collections. Similar aid funds at the Huntington Library and Art Gallery and a recent grant to the Newberry Library in support of certain cultural studies centered upon Chicago are producing literary studies of significance and merit. The Minneapolis Public Library is completing plans for awards honoring an adult book and a juvenile book, or the author thereof, identified with Minnesota. It would be surprising, indeed, if the librarians directing these programs or awards permitted the original manuscripts of these works to escape. One eastern university is successfully directing an awards program in the field of historical writing. More of this kind of encouragement and recognition of meritorious literary work should be supported by librarians; it can have the double result of exploiting the collections in hand and of bringing new materials to their custody.

The most impressive illustration of the creative power of special funds is the work of the Library of Congress in the music field. The commissioning of new compositions, and their performance before public audiences, has been made possible by three endowed foundations, the Coolidge, the Whittall, and the Koussevitzky, which are administered at that library. Twenty years ago seven such concerts were given, ten years ago they had risen to twenty-six and in 1954-55 to thirty-two. The Library of Congress holdings in music manuscripts have grown apace with these concerts, including modern popular American composers' papers as well as scores and autographic items of classical composers both domestic and foreign. Moreover Mrs. Gertrude Clark Whittall's final bequests provided the funds from which the Library is able to broaden its collecting in the field of poetry and literature. The most recent annual report of the Librarian of Congress records a gift of \$25,000 to step up progress in another type of music work, the making of long-playing recordings of American folk-music and folk-lore.

Another recent example of winning financial aid for a special project likewise devoted to an aspect of music is furnished by the Dance Archive of the Music Division of The New York Public Library. A grant of \$37,500, to be applied over a three-year period to the indexing and cataloging of about 25,000 items comprising this archive, was received from the Rockefeller Foundation early in 1956. This constitutes recognition of the growing public interest in the ballet especially, and conviction that a special collection of meritorious

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character ought to be prepared for more effective use. When an institution presents a well-defined program or project of special significance, support from a philanthropic foundation or benefactor can be found in musical work, it appears. Only two independent music schools or conservatories reported any interest in collecting musical manuscripts; the universities and the large public libraries having separate music departments are carrying this responsibility. Perhaps the conservatories are failing to exploit the possibilities which exist.

The replies from art librarians or institutions show eight of them professing active interest in collecting pertinent manuscripts. Of these, five have reached this decision within the past ten years, which raises higher hope of the salvage and preservation of these sources than prevailed before the decade. In the larger universities and public libraries the existence of art and architecture, or prints and graphic arts, departments may have exercised some influence in favor of gathering them. This survey revealed several instances of local understanding of their value. In Montana, the state historical society at Helena and the Russell Gallery in Great Falls, share the idea that Charles Russell materials should be saved for Montana. At Tulane University, in New Orleans, the emphasis has been on gathering or accepting original drawings, sketches, and papers of locally significant architects. In Washington, at the Library of Congress, Whistler letters may be purchased with income from the Pennell Fund, primarily a prints collection fund. In Washington, too, the American Institute of Architects is displaying interest in gathering data on the architect in American culture. The Art Institute of Chicago professes to collect artists' sketch-books. One can understand a museum director's preference for an engraving, a painting, or statue. However, two instances of the overlapping of manuscript and subject field are supplied by very successful exhibitions of recent years; they should put all librarians and museum officials on guard against the delusion that subject areas of the kind under discussion can be kept rigidly apart.

As an exhibition of medieval art the great display of illuminated manuscripts assembled by Dorothy Miner, of the Walters Art Gallery, in Baltimore in 1949 was highly effective. Four years later the Museum of Art of the relatively smaller city, Toledo, Ohio, presented an excellent show of medieval and renaissance music manuscripts. Surely the works of more recent artists and craftsmen can be studied more understandingly if there is enlightening information about them available from written records left by their creators. Recent years have

witnessed the growth of a project having this objective and now going forward steadily at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

The Archives of American Art was nurtured during a year and a half of infancy by approximately 150 financial supporters in the Detroit metropolitan area; by late 1955 it had come to maturity and since then has had the support of a sizeable foundation grant. The fundamental purpose of this archive is to collect in one place (Detroit) original records of American painters, sculptors, and craftsmen. It seeks to become a complete working collection of documentary materials for the convenience of the specialist and for stimulation of serious study of our artistic history. Its major accomplishment to date has been extensive copying in microfilm form of source materials in the Philadelphia and New York City areas. In the former, more than ninety rolls of film (108,000 frames) have been acquired; in New York City, approximately twenty-three rolls had been made from holdings of the manuscript collection in the Public Library alone, by July, 1956. It plans to issue, in due time, a checklist of the microfilms it is gathering; this should be a guide of great value to art historians and librarians. Only one response from an art or museum librarian queried in relation to this survey indicated an awareness of the Detroit project and called attention to its purpose; this positive reaction came from Cincinnati. The increased tempo of exhibitions and restorations work is apparent in demands on manuscript custodians. Programs of training for such work, on the graduate level of the Winterthur Museum-University of Delaware arrangement, or the more popular summer seminar like the one of the New York State Historical Association, will compel manuscript curators to pay more attention to collecting the documentation essential to this related profession.

Whoever scans the bulletins and gazettes published by the libraries of this country or the quarterly reviews of the national associations of those who teach literature and the social sciences cannot fail to be aware of institutional pride over the possession of literary manuscripts. Only a quarter of a century ago the competition for these collections was confined principally to the larger libraries along an arc from Washington to Cambridge. Two decades ago the report of the Librarian of Congress mentioned only two noteworthy new accessions of literary papers. His report of such acquisitions during the year 1955 describes as new gifts the papers of ten "writers," additions to six such collections previously received and another annual installment of the editorial files of a leading American literary monthly.

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Likewise, he noted with pleasure, readings, and lectures under the auspices of the Whittall Poetry and Literature Fund. Library professional journals, through their news sections, show clearly the spread of this competition for literary papers into other sections of the land. There are keen-scented trackers in the Chicago area where Newberry Library has the archives of *Poetry* magazine. In the far South, Florida State University's new library, with suitable exhibition quarters convenient to a modern stack and work area, is sparking a drive for literary manuscripts and papers of Floridian authors. Planning and new building at Indiana and Illinois focus close attention upon better quarters and closer administrative supervision over their greatly expanded manuscript and rare book resources. At Syracuse modifications in the present structure are in process in order to provide an up-to-date "special collections" area. This is representative of the trend in new college or university library buildings to provide a centralized location and better safe-guards for rarities.

However, several of the larger older eastern university and research centers are experiencing a fragmentation of administrative responsibility (due to numerous extensive collections and to departmental stresses) and an embarrassment of riches in materials which is inducing attacks of indigestion. Unhappily, the prescription to remedy this later discomfort is a matter of disagreement among the doctors in attendance, some favoring drastic surgery, others, dietary reform or a mild anti-acid.

In the meantime, the customers, that is, the professors of literature and of American studies, are scouring the country in search of literary sources. They do not want to centralize them in one spot in the manner of the Detroit art project; they just want to record their existence and location.

Under the direction of the American Literature Group, within the Modern Language Association, a Committee on Library Manuscript Holdings circulated a checklist of nearly two thousand names of American writers, from the earliest period of settlement to the present. By a system of symbols this checklist would enable the committee, headed by Joseph Jones of the University of Texas, to tabulate the type and extent of surviving papers of those included in it. As this chapter is written the chairman reports that 116 libraries have returned the checklist and that a total of 1,614 authors are represented by surviving muniments. This census has proven its worth to scholars, despite handicaps which mitigate against its publication for another four to five years.

In the field of publishing these documentary records of American literature, there are no tremendous, long-term projects similar to the several underway in purely "historical" manuscripts. While the Yale edition of Horace Walpole's correspondence has issued a total of twenty-one volumes and the same university's new Boswell series has put out five volumes of a planned forty to fifty, these are English literary personages. There is, however, cause for optimism that there shall be, in our time, definitive editions of our literary texts and correspondences. Through the support of a generous gift of money from Gilbert Montague, a New York philanthropist, Harvard has published a painstaking, definitive edition of Emily Dickinson's poems, comprising three volumes. Volume IV of the letters of William G. Simms, prepared for the press by a trinity of editors, was issued by the University of South Carolina Press in 1955; a fifth volume will shortly complete this remarkable collection. Librarians must give these publication projects their approval and recommendation; they cannot subscribe to the theory that our political figures are more significant than our literary ones in shaping our national culture.

To review the trends in these categories of manuscripts, the author shall attempt a distillation of the data received through the eighty-two replies received out of the 107 sources probed and those reports gleaned from personal reading of current news notes in the professional journals. The writer wishes to thank numerous informants who supplemented the questionnaire by full and thoughtful enclosures.

The most active, alert collecting in these categories is being done by the larger university and college libraries, or endowed public libraries. The former are making special provisions in new building plans for closer supervision and up-to-date quarters for manuscript or special collections departments; they are also exploiting the "Friends of the Library" movement more effectively than the historical societies and music conservatories or art institutes and schools. In the encouragement of musical manuscript compositions and collecting, the Library of Congress has advanced to a pre-eminent role. Two different methods of solving the problem of bringing manuscript resources under control are represented by the Archives of American Art, in Detroit, which aims to centralize the material for its subject in one location through the wide use of microfilming, and the census of literary sources being taken by the American Literature Group within the Modern Language Association, a bibliographic form of control rather than a physical one. Generally, interest in literary source materials exceeds that in music or art. Finally, it is clear that monetary

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support for library sponsored projects of real merit, or meeting a new need, can be gotten even for ephemeral materials. With respect to publication of documentary sets or definitive editions, our literary figures are not receiving attention and support on a scale with that being given our political leaders or statesmen.