



Manuscript Collections

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MANUSCRIPT RESOURCES for a study of state and local history are available in a wide variety of institutions in the United States. The largest and most important collections are in major historical societies, university libraries, a few state libraries, larger public libraries, and independent research libraries. Smaller collections can be found in a profusion of local historical societies, historical museums, historic houses, and smaller public libraries.

Collection and preservation of manuscripts has always been an important function of major historical societies. When Jared Sparks, history professor, president of Harvard, and a collector and editor of the papers of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, wrote in 1826 about the need to save the papers of important men from further neglect and destruction, he suggested that “. . . no better plan could be adopted, than that of societies in the several states expressly established for the purpose.”¹ J. Franklin Jameson, then a professor at Brown University, was thinking primarily of manuscripts when he reminded the members of the American Historical Association at the the end of the century that “. . . there is no other country in the world in which the libraries of historical societies have so important a place as they have among the libraries of the United States.”²

American historical societies began collecting manuscripts before the end of the eighteenth century. Jeremy Belknap of the Massachusetts Historical Society wrote to a friend in 1795 that he was “. . . prowling about like a wolf for the prey . . .” for manuscripts and other historical materials for that recently organized society.³ The New-York Historical Society, the Pennsylvania Historical Society, and societies in several New England states were collecting manuscripts by the time Jared Sparks made his plea for preservation, and other societies were established in the Midwest and the South during the

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1830's and 1840's.⁴⁻⁶ By 1905, thirty-seven major historical societies reported to the American Historical Association that they had manuscript holdings, and at least four others had deposited manuscripts in another library.⁷

Historical societies were the only institutions that made a sustained effort to collect manuscripts during most of the nineteenth century. The federal government acquired the personal papers of a few presidents and statesmen, but these were stored at the Department of State and (except for some papers that were published) were not available for research. The Library of Congress acquired a few important manuscripts after the Civil War, but the Library did not begin an active collecting program until a separate Department of Manuscripts was created in 1897.⁸⁻⁹

University libraries began collecting manuscripts about 1890, and became most active after about 1920. Harvard University Library paid little attention to manuscript collecting until 1914, when the Harvard Commission on Western History began acquiring material on western expansion.¹⁰ Hubert Howe Bancroft began gathering his private collection of manuscripts and books during the 1860's, but the University of California did not acquire it until 1907.¹¹ Duke University Library began extensive manuscript acquisitions in 1929.¹¹ The Southern Historical Collection was established as a division of the University of North Carolina Library in 1930, although J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton previously had acquired the nucleus of the collection during his years as head of the department of history.¹² Indiana University Library began the large scale acquisition of manuscripts during the 1950's.¹³ Collections of personal papers occasionally came to university libraries during the nineteenth century, but they usually were unsought and rarely were processed for use. The collecting programs that enabled the larger university libraries to rival the larger historical societies as manuscript depositories were twentieth-century phenomena.

Survey of Holdings

Some perspective on the different institutions that collect manuscripts can be gained through an analysis of the statistics reported to Philip Hamer in 1960 for his *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States*.¹⁴ Libraries provided descriptions of their manuscripts and rough estimates of their total holdings, usually by the number of manuscript pieces, but occasionally by linear or cubic feet. A few libraries did not give estimates of total holdings. To facilitate

comparisons in this paper, linear feet have been converted into number of pieces by assuming that there are 900 manuscript pieces per linear foot. Archival institutions have been excluded from the totals, although state historical societies that house both the state archives and a manuscript section or department are included.

The size of a library's manuscript holdings, of course, is only one indication of the importance of the library's manuscripts. One southern library, for instance, has a collection of the papers of a single iron works that is over twice as large as the entire manuscript holdings of a midwestern library that specializes in materials on the American Revolution and has one of the most important collections on the subject. Quantity and quality are obviously not synonymous, but statistics on quantity do give some indication of the manuscript resources of the various types of libraries.

Four major sections of the country are mentioned in the following discussion. The Northeast includes New England, the Middle Atlantic States, Delaware, and West Virginia. The Midwest includes the states created from the old Northwest Territory, and Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska. The South extends to Arkansas and Texas. The West includes North and South Dakota, Oklahoma, and the states farther west. As thus defined, the states in the Midwest all achieved statehood by 1867, while those in the West, except for California, Oregon, Nevada, and Colorado, did not achieve statehood until after 1888.

Thirty-three libraries reported to Hamer that they had one million or more manuscripts each. At least six other libraries that did not report totals probably had holdings as large as this, and some libraries have undoubtedly reached the one million mark since 1960. Among the libraries that probably had one million or more manuscripts in 1960 were twelve major historical societies, twenty university libraries, six major public, state and independent research libraries, and the Library of Congress.

A number of other libraries had at least 500,000 but less than one million manuscripts. These included five historical societies, two university libraries, and two other libraries.

The Library of Congress, which had over sixteen million manuscripts in 1960 and now has over twenty million, is the largest manuscript depository in the country. The New York Public Library and Yale University,¹⁵ which had about nine million manuscripts each, appear to have the next largest accumulations. Six other libraries reported that

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they had at least four million manuscripts. Among these were the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and the libraries at Princeton University, the University of Virginia, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Oklahoma.

The most extensive system of manuscript collecting by historical societies, university libraries, and a few state and public libraries is found in the Northeast, with neither historical societies nor university libraries clearly dominant. Large manuscript depositories are particularly numerous in New York and Pennsylvania. The New York Public Library, the New York State Library, the libraries of Cornell University, the University of Rochester, and probably Columbia University, each contain over one million manuscripts. The New-York Historical Society has about 750,000 manuscripts.¹⁶ Four libraries in Pennsylvania contain at least one million manuscripts each. These are the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the University of Pennsylvania Library, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College.

Elsewhere in the Northeast historical societies are dominant in collecting manuscripts pertaining to local and regional history, although several university libraries have extensive collections of manuscripts on other subjects. The Massachusetts Historical Society, the Connecticut Historical Society, libraries at Yale, Harvard, and Princeton universities, and the University of West Virginia have over one million manuscripts, and the New Hampshire Historical Society has over 500,000 pieces. Four other historical societies in the Northeast have less than 500,000 manuscripts, and two did not report their total holdings.

Historical societies dominate manuscript collecting in most of the Midwest. The Ohio Historical Society, the Western Reserve Historical Society, the Illinois State Historical Library, the Missouri Historical Society, the Minnesota Historical Society, the Nebraska State Historical Society, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and probably the State Historical Society of Iowa each have over one million manuscripts. Indiana University, with over one million manuscripts, has the largest collection in Indiana, although some collecting is done by the Indiana State Library and the Indiana Historical Society. The Historical Society of Michigan is the only major historical society in the Midwest that has not collected manuscripts. The largest manuscript depositories in Michigan are the Michigan Historical Collections at the University of Michigan and the Burton Historical Collection at the Detroit Public Library, both of which contain over one million

manuscripts. The William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan is also highly respected for its holdings of eighteenth and nineteenth century manuscripts. The only other libraries in the Midwest with one million manuscripts or more are the Newberry Library (Chicago) and the University of Chicago Library.

Historical societies play a secondary role today in manuscript collecting in the South. Numerous societies were established during the nineteenth century, and those in Virginia, Maryland, South Carolina, Georgia, and Texas have had a continuous existence.¹⁷ All of these have important accumulations of manuscripts, but they are relatively small compared to the holdings of six major university libraries and several state departments of archives and history.

The Maryland Historical Society is the only society in the South that reported over one million manuscripts in 1960. The Virginia Historical Society is highly respected for its research facilities and publications, but it had only about 500,000 manuscripts. Other major historical societies in South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Louisiana had considerably less than 500,000 manuscripts each.

Some southern historical societies have given their manuscripts to other institutions. The Alabama Historical Society gave its holdings to the Alabama Department of Archives and History when the latter was founded in 1901,¹⁸ and the Mississippi Historical Society followed this example the next year when the Mississippi Department of Archives and History was established.¹⁹ The Historical Society of North Carolina gave its manuscripts to the University of North Carolina for inclusion in the Southern Historical Collections,¹² and the Texas State Historical Association has deposited its manuscripts in the University of Texas Library.¹⁴ The Florida Historical Society's collections are now administered by the University of South Florida Library at Tampa,²⁰ and the Tennessee Historical Society plans to have its manuscripts processed by the Tennessee State Library and Archives.²¹

The major impetus to manuscript collecting in the South was provided in the twentieth century by J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, who traveled throughout the section acquiring materials for the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina. Partly because Hamilton showed what could be done, both historical societies and universities began collecting more extensively.²² Four university libraries now have holdings of over three million manuscripts each, and two others have at least one million manuscripts. These include the University of Virginia, the University of North Carolina, Duke

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University, the University of South Carolina, Louisiana State University, and the University of Texas. As Thomas D. Clark stated in 1953, "the South has come a long way in 50 years in the preservation of its records."²³

Nearly every western state has a state historical society that collects manuscripts. Many of the state universities and a few other libraries also do some collecting. With a few important exceptions, however, all of these libraries have extremely small holdings.

In 1910 the secretary of the Nevada Historical Society advanced several reasons for the paucity of historical materials then in western libraries. She pointed out that the West was more recently settled, that the migratory habits of westerners had destroyed much that once existed, and that the inhabitants of the region did not yet consider history important. "Unlike the East," she continued, "we have no prospect of large private endowments; unlike the central region, we have no certain support from the State."²⁴

There is greater public and private support for western historical agencies today, but only two university libraries and an independent research library have holdings of manuscripts comparable to those of larger libraries in the East and Midwest.

None of the western historical societies reported having as many as 500,000 manuscripts in 1960. Only the Historical Society of Colorado and the State Historical Society of North Dakota had as many as 400,000 manuscripts. Historical societies in California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington had approximately 100,000 items or less, and societies in Nevada, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Utah did not report totals. The Historical Society of New Mexico deposited its manuscripts some years ago in the Museum of New Mexico, which recently transferred them to the New Mexico State Records Center and Archives.²⁵ The Wyoming State Historical Society leaves manuscript collecting to the Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department.

The same situation prevails in most other western libraries. The Bancroft Library at the University of California, the University of Oklahoma, and the Henry E. Huntington Library in California are each well past the one million mark. All other western libraries, however, reported totals of less than 500,000 manuscripts each.

Many libraries in the United States have manuscript holdings ranging from a few items to 500,000 manuscripts. Among these are twenty-one major historical societies. Thirteen societies reported that they had at least 100,000 but less than 500,000, five had more than 10,000

but less than 100,000, and three had less than 5,000 manuscripts in 1960. Twelve major historical societies gave no estimates of total holdings.

Approximately 780 other libraries reported to Hamer that they had less than 500,000 manuscripts in 1960. These figures do not include ethnic and religious historical societies, archival institutions, seminaries, and medical and scientific libraries. Approximately 390 of the 780 libraries are located in the Northeast, 190 in the Midwest, 110 in the South, and 90 in the West. About 260 are colleges and universities, 200 are local historical societies, 90 are historical museums or historic houses, 220 are public libraries, and less than 20 are state libraries.

The vast majority have extremely small manuscript holdings. About 320 libraries reported that they have less than 1,000 manuscripts. Another 220 did not provide estimates of total holdings, but the descriptions in Hamer indicate that most of them have less than 1,000 items. Fifty libraries reported holdings as large as 25,000 manuscripts per library, and the holdings of about 200 libraries ranged from 1,000 to less than 25,000 manuscripts.

College and university libraries with moderate quantities of manuscripts are located in all sections of the country. There are approximately 75 college and university libraries in the Northeast with less than 500,000 manuscripts, 80 in the Midwest, 60 in the South, and 45 in the West. About 25 of these have over 25,000 manuscripts, 55 have holdings ranging from 1,000 to 25,000 items, 75 have less than 1,000 manuscripts, and 105 did not report estimates.

Local historical societies with manuscript holdings are located mostly in the Northeast and the Midwest. About 135 societies in the Northeast, 50 in the Midwest, 10 in the South, and 5 in the West have some manuscripts. A few societies have fairly sizeable holdings. About 10 societies have over 25,000 manuscripts each and 80 have holdings ranging from 1,000 to 25,000 manuscripts. Approximately 65 of the 90 societies that have at least 1,000 manuscripts are located in the Northeast, and 15 are located in the Midwest.

Approximately 40 historical museums and historic houses in the Northeast, 20 in the Midwest, 10 in the South, and 20 in the West have small holdings of manuscripts. Only 30 of them have as many as 1,000 items.

Public libraries with small holdings of manuscripts are also concentrated heavily in the Northeast. Approximately 135 public libraries

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in the Northeast, 40 in the Midwest, 25 in the South, and 20 in the West have holdings of less than 500,000 manuscripts. Only about 45 of these libraries reported that they had over 1,000 manuscripts, and about 135 public libraries reported that they had less than 1,000 manuscripts each.

Only a few state libraries collect private manuscripts. Four state libraries in the Northeast, in addition to the New York State Library, three in the Midwest, four in the South, and three in the West reported manuscript holdings to Hamer. Seven state libraries either did not give estimates for their total holdings or did not give separate estimates for private manuscripts and archival materials. Only one of the others had over 25,000 manuscripts. Five state libraries reported total holdings of between 1,000 and 25,000 manuscripts, and one had less than 1,000 manuscripts.

The size of the manuscript holdings of the various libraries has been affected by at least nine major factors. The length of time that a library has collected manuscripts, its total economic resources, and the goals of the library with the resulting allocation of available funds are of obvious importance. Also of some importance are the length of time that a state has been settled and the extent to which its inhabitants are aware that manuscript materials are important and should be preserved.

Three factors have been crucial: whether a library has had one or more directors who were intensely interested in collecting manuscripts, whether the collecting program has been active or passive in nature, and whether there are nearby institutions with strong collections of manuscripts and vigorous collecting programs. One can often find periods of rapid growth or stagnation in collecting that resulted primarily from a particular individual's interest or apathy. An institution that prepares a file of leads to possible sources of manuscripts and employs staff members to travel through the state to examine and acquire them will build its manuscript holdings more rapidly than an institution that relies primarily on chance information about the existence of manuscripts. When other institutions are able to obtain most of the manuscripts of a region, a historical society may decide to devote its resources to publication, a historical museum, school services, or some of the other important functions of historical societies. Other libraries may make similar decisions.

Finally, the quantity of a library's manuscript resources will depend on the extent to which the library seeks bulky twentieth-century

collections. A library that specializes in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century manuscripts will inevitably accumulate a smaller quantity than a library that attempts to preserve important twentieth-century materials.

Scope of Collections

Major historical societies usually collect manuscripts pertaining to the state in which the society is located. Some of the early private societies followed the example of the Massachusetts Historical Society, whose first constitution called for the collection of manuscripts and other historical materials that helped to “. . . mark the genius, delineate the manners, and trace the progress of society in the United States.”²⁶ Most societies have since adopted a more limited collecting policy, although they sometimes continue acquisitions in special fields of general American history in which they are strong. The New-York Historical Society, for instance, collects primary material on slavery, travels in America before 1850, the Civil War, naval and military history through 1898, and circus history, as well as New York history.²⁷ The constitutions of most state historical societies specified from the beginning that they were to collect manuscripts concerning their respective states, although these limitations were frequently ignored, particularly when there was no collecting program in a neighboring state.

Despite the statewide focus of their collection policies, most major historical societies have sizeable quantities of manuscripts pertaining to other states. These manuscripts usually concern the region in which the state is located, but frequently concern distant states. This results partly from broader collection policies in the past, and partly from the nature of most manuscript collections. The papers of a relatively obscure family in Illinois, for example, contain letters from a son describing an overland trip to California and gold mining in 1849, and letters from another relative who was a merchant in Pennsylvania. Families and individuals move from one state to another, and men who become prominent on a national or even a state level usually correspond with men of similar interests in other states. Few manuscript collections of any importance are exclusively concerned with one state.

Within their geographical limitations, major historical societies now collect manuscripts on a broad variety of subjects. At the end of the nineteenth century, professional historians criticized historical societies

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for being preoccupied with the period of settlement, the colonial or territorial period, early statehood, and with political and military matters.²⁸ Many societies are still strongest in these areas, but most societies now collect materials for social, intellectual, economic, agricultural, business, and recent history. One of the most extensive collection programs has been that at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, which has carried out special projects to collect manuscripts pertaining to business history, labor history, education, medicine, and mass communications with the aid of grants from the University of Wisconsin, the Rockefeller Foundation, the state Medical Society, and the state Federation of Labor.²⁹

When the Library of Congress began collecting manuscripts actively at the end of the nineteenth century, the Library sought to avoid competition with other libraries. Herbert Putnam, then the Librarian of Congress, suggested in 1901 that material pertaining to particular states or localities should be collected by local libraries, but that anything pertaining to the origin, history, and operations of the federal government should be left to the Library of Congress.³⁰ Later policy statements were similar, except that the Library's interests expanded beyond government and politics. A statement in 1950 expressed interest in acquiring ". . . papers of individuals or families or records of organizations that have played significant roles on a national scale," and particularly ". . . material of national significance in such fields as government and politics, diplomatic and military affairs, literature, music, and aeronautics. . . ." ³¹

Many major historical societies, nevertheless, have substantial quantities of manuscripts that are of national significance. Some of these were accumulated before the Library of Congress began collecting manuscripts on a major scale. Even today, however, many administrators do not accept, without some reservations, the thesis that state historical societies should limit themselves to materials of state or local significance.³² Important national events or developments usually take place within particular states, and the papers of nationally prominent individuals and organizations are often vitally important to the study of a state's history. When a man has been both governor of his state and an important United States Senator, therefore, the location of his papers is likely to depend on whether a major historical society, a university, or the Library of Congress approached his heirs first. The prestige of having family papers in the Library of Congress, however, often gives that Library a decided advantage.

The collection policies of many state universities are quite similar to those of major historical societies, although universities usually acquire manuscripts concerning English and American literature as well as manuscripts concerning the history of the state or a part of the state in which the university is located. Some major private and state universities acquire manuscripts concerning a region rather than a state. Harvard, Yale, and the Bancroft Library at the University of California have important collections concerning the Far West, and the manuscripts at Duke University and the University of North Carolina pertain to the entire South. Many major universities also have substantial collections relating to the history of early and modern Europe, Asia, Latin America, and general American history.

There is inevitably some competition in manuscript collecting between historical societies, other libraries, and private collectors. There have been occasional complaints from historical societies about competition with the Library of Congress.³² A questionnaire returned by major historical societies in 1962, however, indicated that they encounter competition with universities and other local libraries more frequently than with the Library of Congress.³³

Cooperative agreements have occasionally been worked out to reduce competition. In New Jersey, for example, the state historical society, the state university, a major public library, and several of the larger local historical societies agreed on specialized areas of collection.³⁴ Elsewhere, the State Historical Society of Missouri participated in a joint collecting project with the library and the department of history at the University of Missouri.³⁵ Joint collection programs between two different manuscript depositories are rare, but informal agreements similar to the one in New Jersey exist in other states.

Although efforts have been made to reduce competition, there is by no means general agreement that competition is wholly undesirable. One undesirable consequence of competition, at least from the point of view of libraries, is that competition increases the price of manuscripts. (Most libraries acquire the vast majority of their manuscripts through donations, but some manuscripts that are otherwise unobtainable are purchased.) Cooperative agreements are desirable because they ensure that manuscripts are placed in the most appropriate library. But lack of competition can mean that the libraries in an area are neglecting their responsibilities, and that manuscripts remain in private hands, frequently disintegrating from lack of proper care. L. Quincy Mumford, the present Librarian of Congress, conceded in

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1956 that there is considerable competition between the Library of Congress and other libraries, but he believed that competition is “. . . healthy for the reason that it provides the surest guarantee of the survival and preservation of historic papers.”³² Similar attitudes have been expressed by administrators in historical societies and university libraries.³⁶⁻³⁷

Staff

Numerous monographs have discussed the administration of manuscripts during the last several decades. Most of this literature, however, does not attempt to discover the extent to which recommended policies and procedures are actually practiced by major libraries, and much of the information about specific libraries is no longer current.

In order to obtain systematic current information, the author sent a questionnaire to forty-seven major historical societies and fifteen major universities. All of the major historical societies that reported manuscript holdings to Hamer were queried. Only major university libraries with holdings of at least one million manuscripts were included. Questionnaires also were sent to fifteen other libraries with extensive manuscript holdings. Forty-one historical societies, fourteen university libraries, and twelve other libraries returned the questionnaire. Eleven of the responding historical societies are located in the Northeast, thirteen in the Midwest, six in the South, and eleven in the West.³⁸

Information was requested about the size of the staff working with manuscripts, the nature of the card catalog and other published and unpublished guides to manuscripts, and policies on the use of manuscripts, literary rights, and photoduplication. Most questions could be answered with one word, but five required brief descriptions. Manuscript specialists in the various libraries filled out most of the questionnaires, but a few were answered by head librarians or directors.

Eighteen of the forty-one historical societies and all of the fourteen university libraries reported that they have a curator of manuscripts or a manuscript librarian devoting full-time to manuscripts (other titles are used in some libraries). Four of the societies with full-time manuscript specialists are located in the Northeast, ten in the Midwest, two in the South, and two in the West. Only two societies with one million or more manuscripts, one in the Midwest and one in the South, reported that they do not have a full-time specialist. These societies and the other twenty-one societies with smaller accumula-

tions rely on one or more staff members who spend part of their time on manuscripts. In some societies one librarian does all of the work in the library, including care of manuscripts. Eleven societies rely partly on volunteer workers to process manuscripts, but none relies entirely on volunteers. All but one of the university libraries have part-time student help available from time to time, but only eight historical societies have any student assistance.

A few libraries have had manuscript curators or librarians for long periods of time, but in most libraries this specialization is a relatively recent development. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin has had a manuscript librarian for about sixty years, and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania has had one for about fifty years. Libraries that have had a manuscript curator or librarian for at least forty years include the Minnesota Historical Society, the New York Public Library, the American Antiquarian Society, and the Henry E. Huntington Library at San Marino, California. Two historical societies and one university library have had manuscript specialists for about thirty years, three historical societies and nine university libraries have had specialists for periods of ten to twenty-five years, two historical societies and one university library have had specialists for periods of five to nine years, and six historical societies have had specialists for less than five years. A few libraries did not indicate how long they have had manuscript specialists.

The manuscript staff in most libraries is relatively small. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin has six to eight full-time staff members for its Division of Archives and Manuscripts, and the Kansas State Historical Society has a staff of five for such a combined operation. One university library reported that it has a full-time staff of six, one has a full-time staff of five, and two university libraries have a full-time staff of four. Three historical societies and five university libraries reported a full-time staff of three, and four historical societies and three universities have a full-time staff of two. The other libraries do not have a full-time assistant for the manuscript curator or librarian, although many have part-time assistants.

Most libraries undoubtedly need a larger manuscript staff than they now have. A questionnaire circulated in 1944 to some of the larger historical societies revealed that nearly all of them had large backlogs of unprocessed manuscripts.³⁹ The author's present questionnaire did not specifically ask for such information, but several societies com-

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mented that 30 per cent or more of their manuscripts are not yet adequately cataloged.

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin furnishes one of the best examples of the backlog that can accumulate when a society exerts itself to obtain twentieth-century materials. In the early 1950's, a staff of two professionals and one half-time student assistant processed from 15,000 to 25,000 pieces annually. Because of the numerous collection projects, manuscript accessions increased to an average of over 200,000 pieces per year during the 1950's. By revising processing methods and adding two full-time staff members and several part-time assistants, the Society was processing 300,000 to 500,000 pieces per year during the early 1960's. Nevertheless, the Society still had a large backlog of unprocessed materials.⁴⁰

Most libraries acquire less than 200,000 manuscript items per year, but annual accessions of 100,000 items are not uncommon. The papers of a single major public figure frequently contain over 200,000 items. The small manuscript staffs characteristic of most libraries serve as a bar to large-scale acquisition of twentieth century materials, and make it inevitable that most libraries will continue to have large quantities of unprocessed manuscripts in the foreseeable future.

Catalogs

The best recent discussion of manuscript cataloging is in Lucile Kane's *A Guide to the Care and Administration of Manuscripts*.⁴¹ Her discussion was based partly on the "Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress . . . for Collections of Manuscripts,"⁴² distributed to libraries in 1954 to help standardize cataloging and facilitate submission of entries to the projected *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*. Paul S. Dunkin's⁴³ article in an earlier issue of *Library Trends* is another useful discussion of changes in cataloging procedures. Kane and Dunkin provide bibliographies of writings on the subject up to 1960. Several other articles have been published since that time.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶

A few decades ago the ideal, if not the reality, was that card catalogs to manuscripts should contain at least three cards for each manuscript piece or item in a collection. These included cards for author, recipient, and date, and sometimes added entries for subjects. Such a system was suggested in manuals published by the Library of Congress in 1934⁴⁷ and by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1936.⁴⁸

The mounting pressures of unprocessed manuscripts soon forced

most libraries to devise methods of group description for most manuscript collections. This method generally includes a main entry containing a brief description of an entire collection, added entries for authors and subjects (the number depending on the size, nature, and importance of a collection), and occasionally analytical entries for particularly important individual items. A few libraries still retain the ideal of individual item cataloging for all collections, and many libraries use this method for particularly important collections. Individual manuscripts that are not part of a collection, of course, must be cataloged separately.

The "Rules for Collections of Manuscripts" distributed by the Library of Congress suggested the form and type of information to be included on the main entry. Added entries for authors, as developed by other libraries, generally consist of one card for any one author of incoming correspondence in a collection, citing the inclusive dates and the total number of letters by that author. Because of the large number of relatively insignificant correspondents in most collections, added entries for authors are usually prepared only for authors of numerous letters and for single items by more prominent correspondents. Added entries for subjects are generally used more sparingly than added entries for authors.

Because large manuscript collections are frequently so complex that the main entry in the card catalog can provide at best only a superficial description, libraries have also developed various types of more detailed guides to individual collections, usually available at libraries in typescript, and sometimes published for distribution to other libraries. An early form of guide was the calendar, which contained descriptions of individual letters or documents arranged chronologically. Another form was the author index, listing the specific dates rather than the inclusive dates of all letters by each author. A more usual form of guide today is the register or inventory, which contains biographical data and descriptions of manuscripts by containers rather than by individual items. Such guides sometimes contain information similar to that found in calendars and author indexes.

Main entries similar to those suggested by the Library of Congress are used by twenty-four of the major historical societies and nine of the universities that replied to the questionnaire. The systems in several of these libraries, though similar to that suggested by the Library of Congress, were developed long before 1954. Some libraries use the printed cards prepared for the National Union Catalog of Manuscript

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Collections and distributed by the Library of Congress. Most of the other libraries use a system of group description utilizing a main entry and added entries, although the form and type of information may differ from that suggested by the Library of Congress rules.

Individual item cataloging for all collections is still used by five major historical societies, four in the Northeast and one in the Midwest. One society in the Northeast uses the collection cards provided by the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections and makes temporary collection cards until they arrive, but the society also catalogs each piece by author, recipient, and (for the period before 1800) date. One society has only about 1 per cent of its manuscripts cataloged, but the society uses individual item cataloging for recent accessions and hopes to treat the backlog in the same way. Another society has about 60 per cent of its manuscripts cataloged. Individual item cataloging for some of the more important collections is used by two other societies in the Northeast and two in the South.

Added entries for authors of incoming correspondence are prepared by thirty historical societies and all but one of the university libraries that answered the questionnaire. Libraries that do individual item cataloging, of course, are not included in these totals. One society in the Northeast, one in the Midwest, two in the South, and four in the West do not prepare added entries for authors.

Added entries for subjects are prepared by thirty-five of the historical societies, and all but two of the university libraries. Six societies, however, prepare subject entries only to a limited extent. Such entries are not prepared by one society in the Northeast, one in the Midwest, three in the South, and two in the West.

Twenty-five historical societies and all but one of the university libraries have unpublished guides to manuscripts in addition to a card catalog. Eight societies mentioned calendars, four said that they have author indexes to a few collections, and the remaining libraries have inventories, registers, or other types of unpublished guides. Some libraries have calendars and author indexes for a few collections, but inventories and registers for the rest. Unpublished guides are not available in four historical societies in the Northeast, three in the Midwest, one in the South, and eight in the West.

Replies to the questionnaire indicate that many libraries have too limited a manuscript staff even to prepare an adequate card catalog based on the principles of group description. The situation is rarely as desperate as that at one western historical society, where the librarian

lamented that "our manuscripts are in a deplorable condition and have been neglected for years. I don't think any work has *ever* been done on them." But eight out of forty-one societies reported that they prepare no added entries for authors, seven societies prepare none for subjects, and sixteen have no unpublished guides to large collections. Even among the libraries that do prepare such entries and guides, the adequacy of the card catalog varies considerably. Several librarians commented that they consider their card catalogs for manuscripts quite inadequate. Not until funds are available for increased staffs, however, can improvements be expected.

Manuscripts pertaining to almost any subject of research are scattered about the country, often in libraries where scholars would never think of looking.⁴⁹ For many years historical societies and other libraries have publicized recent manuscript accessions in their own journals and news bulletins, and frequently in such publications as the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. Many libraries have also published comprehensive guides to their entire manuscript holdings, since few scholars can take the time to look through hundreds of statements concerning annual accessions. The majority of the comprehensive guides to manuscripts have been published since 1940, although some libraries published such guides earlier.⁵⁰

Ten of the major historical societies have published comprehensive guides to their manuscript collections. The Virginia Historical Society published a guide in 1901, which has not yet been revised. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin published one guide in 1906, a second guide in 1944, and a supplement in 1957. The Minnesota Historical Society published a guide in 1935 and a revision in 1955. Other guides were published by the Oregon Historical Society in 1940, the New-York Historical Society in 1941, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1949, the Ohio Historical Society in 1953, the Kentucky Historical Society in 1955, and the New Jersey Historical Society in 1957. The South Carolina Historical Society published a guide in a ten-part series in its journal between 1944 and 1947. Other societies have published less detailed guides, usually ten to fifteen pages in length, in their journals. These guides are listed in Hamer's *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States*.¹⁴

Most of the universities with one million or more manuscripts have published comprehensive guides to their holdings. The University of North Carolina, Duke University, the University of Rochester, and Louisiana State University published comprehensive guides during the

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1940's, and Columbia University, Yale University, and the University of Oklahoma did so during the 1950's. Bancroft Library at the University of California, the University of Michigan, and West Virginia University have published guides since 1960. Guides have also been prepared by colleges and universities with smaller accumulations of manuscripts. Four of the major universities that answered the questionnaire, however, have never published comprehensive guides to their manuscripts.

Partly because many manuscript depositories have never been able to publish comprehensive guides to their manuscripts, it has long been apparent that a national union catalog would greatly simplify the task of locating pertinent manuscript materials. Plans for such a catalog were developed during the early 1950's,⁵¹ and with the aid of a grant from the Council on Library Resources, the Library of Congress began the work that culminated in the publication of the first three volumes of *The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* (NUCMC), by early 1964.⁵²

The usefulness of a national union catalog of manuscripts depends partly on the number of manuscript depositories that submit entries. A national union catalog of books can be useful even though a relatively small percentage of the total number of libraries in the country participate, because most titles will be found in at least one of the reporting libraries. Since manuscripts are unique, complete coverage can be obtained only if all manuscript depositories participate in the project.

Most of the historical societies and university libraries that answered the present writer's questionnaire plan to participate in the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, but a few do not. Twenty-three historical societies and nine of the universities had submitted entries by September 1963, and most of the others expect to do so in the near future. Six historical societies and two universities said they have no present intention of participating.

Two of the societies that do not plan to participate are located in the Northeast, and four are in the West. One has about 500,000 manuscripts, and has had a manuscript librarian for about one year. The others have less than 100,000 manuscripts, and have extremely small staffs. Both of the universities have published comprehensive guides to their holdings, and they apparently believe that participation in the NUCMC is unnecessary for that reason. None of the six historical societies has published a comprehensive guide.

The NUCMC will ease some of the burdens of scholarship immensely, even without information on the holdings of libraries that cannot submit entries because of inadequate staffs. Also, the NUCMC staff will probably be busy for some years to come with processing entries submitted by libraries that are already participating. If the NUCMC is ever to approach completeness, however, some means of assistance, through grants or otherwise, will have to be devised for those libraries that are unable to prepare their own entries.

Use of Materials

Libraries have placed various restrictions on the use of manuscripts in the past, usually because manuscripts are unique, irreplaceable, and often fragile, sometimes because of conditions imposed by donors, and occasionally because sensational use of material might discourage potential donors from giving other collections to a library. Howard H. Peckham has said in an earlier issue of *Library Trends* that the obligation to preserve and the need to keep out thieves and persons who mutilate manuscripts means that a prospective reader should be able to identify himself. Peckham continued: "Many librarians and archivists go further: they prefer or insist that the user of manuscripts be a competent scholar. Their logic is that since manuscripts are non-expendable, they should be handled by as few readers as possible, and certainly the competent scholar should have priority over the idly curious, the unprepared, or the reader with a trivial purpose."⁵³

The author's questionnaire sought to ascertain the extent of this attitude by requesting a brief description of each library's restrictions on who can use manuscripts. Libraries were specifically asked whether manuscripts can be used by graduate students, undergraduates, local historians, and genealogists.

All but two of the historical societies and all of the university libraries indicated that they do not restrict the use of their manuscripts to scholars and graduate students (two groups that overlap in part), although many libraries do prefer that manuscripts be used only for serious research. Twenty-seven historical societies and seven universities said that any of the named categories can use manuscripts or that there are no restrictions except those occasionally imposed by donors. One western historical society interpreted the laws governing the society to mean that the society is required to allow anyone to use manuscripts under any circumstances. Four other historical societies and five universities indicated that there are no restrictions on

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any of the specified groups of persons per se, although use of manuscripts is limited to anyone with a "serious or legitimate interest," a "bona fide purpose," a "legitimate research request," or to "any serious researcher."

Several libraries said that manuscripts are usually not made available to genealogists, and some libraries that mentioned a serious or legitimate purpose probably discourage genealogists from using many manuscript collections. The general attitude, however, appears to be similar to that of the librarian of an eastern university, who said: "Local historians and genealogists are granted access to manuscript collections if they appear to need them and can use them with profit. My experience is that local historians and genealogists show more respect for manuscripts than many advanced scholars and research workers. Why discourage them?"

The criteria mentioned by other libraries were varied. The manuscripts of one historical society in a major metropolitan area in the East are open to any adult who has proper identifying credentials, can offer a satisfactory explanation of why he is interested, and can prove through conversation that he has performed preliminary research and is familiar with his subject. One midwestern society said that journalists who are looking for a "hot story" are occasionally "restricted by subterfuge," and that certain manuscript dealers and collectors are discouraged from using collections when the staff does not have time to watch them closely.

In general, libraries with restrictions almost invariably make manuscripts available to college and university faculty, graduate students working on theses or dissertations, and others who are working on articles or books for publication, but they will examine requests for use by undergraduates and others a little more carefully before making a decision.

One important problem for libraries and users of manuscripts is the question of common law literary property rights. In a discussion of the application of these rights to private correspondence, Ralph Shaw has said that they are the means by which the author of a letter ". . . or his heirs in perpetuity, may, under normal circumstances, prevent the publication of his letter, or, in rarer circumstances, may first publish it."⁵⁴ Unlike statutory copyright, common law literary property rights are perpetual and are terminated only by "general publication."⁵⁵ Some courts have held that the deposit of correspondence and other unpublished writings in a library where they can be read

by the general public constitutes "general publication" and terminates literary rights. Courts have not ruled consistently, however, and there has been no clear test case in the federal courts.⁶⁶

Because of the uncertainties concerning literary rights, libraries have often been urged to request donors to dedicate to the public whatever literary rights the donor may have in a collection. Otherwise scholars must face the onerous task of locating hundreds of authors and their heirs to obtain permission to quote, or they must publish with the threat of a possible lawsuit hanging over their heads. The problem is most acute with twentieth-century collections; there is considerably less likelihood of legal action resulting from publication of earlier materials. A committee of the American Historical Association recommended in 1951 that libraries should make every effort to persuade donors to surrender literary property rights.⁵⁷ David C. Mearns, chief of the manuscript division at the Library of Congress, said in an earlier issue of *Library Trends* that, whenever practicable, instruments of gift should include a dedication of literary property rights.⁵⁸ Libraries have been requested to include information concerning literary rights in entries submitted to *The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*.⁴²

The vast majority of American libraries have totally ignored recommendations that they secure dedications of literary property rights. Only eight of the forty-one historical societies, two of the fourteen university libraries, and seven of the other fifteen libraries now make any attempt to secure such a statement.

Most libraries that request the surrender of literary property rights began doing so after about 1945. The Chicago Historical Society and Louisiana State University have requested surrender of literary rights for about fifteen years, the Kentucky Historical Society has done so for about thirteen years, and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin has done so for about ten years. The Buffalo Historical Society, the Ohio Historical Society, the Illinois State Historical Library, and the Utah State Historical Society have sought surrender of literary rights within the last five years. The Virginia Historical Society reported that it has made such a request for over a century.

Other historical societies will probably begin requesting surrender of literary rights during the next decade. A successful lawsuit, upheld by the federal courts, against a scholar for failing to secure permission from an author or his heirs to quote letters consulted in a library would undoubtedly spur other libraries into acceptance of the practice.

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To guard against such a lawsuit, however, scholars must continue to do over and over what libraries could do once and for all when a manuscript collection first enters a library.

During recent years there have been frequent recommendations that libraries permit more extensive microfilming of their manuscript collections. Most libraries have long provided researchers with photocopies of a few items or parts of collections. Many libraries, however, have been reluctant to provide a microfilm of an entire manuscript collection to another library, particularly when a collection was acquired through purchase.

A committee on manuscripts appointed by the American Historical Association urged in 1951 that ". . . *it is of the utmost importance now and will be increasingly necessary in the future to permit the filming of large groups of manuscripts in order to make them available elsewhere.*"⁵⁹ The attitude of many librarians, however, was expressed by Howard H. Peckham when he said, "I think service is carried to an unfortunate extreme when libraries willingly or in response to a request reproduce a complete collection of manuscripts for deposit in another library."⁶⁰ Among other things, Peckham pointed out that a library's economic support depends partly on the number of scholars who come to the library to use its collections. Paul Angle has suggested elsewhere that the time may come when one library will provide a microfilm copy of a manuscript collection to another library only on the condition that the second library reciprocates by microfilming one of its collections for the first library.⁶¹

Replies to the questionnaire indicated that policies on photoduplication of manuscript collections have become increasingly liberal during the past decade or so. Twenty-six of the reporting historical societies and six of the universities are willing to microfilm an entire manuscript collection or a major portion of a collection for another library, and two other societies and one university might be willing to do so under certain circumstances. Only seven historical societies and five universities said that they are unwilling to microfilm a collection for another library. Six societies and two universities said that their governing boards have never established a policy, or that the question is too involved to answer in a few words, or they simply left the answer blank.

Reciprocation does make a difference with a few libraries. Twenty societies and five universities replied that they are willing to microfilm collections for other libraries regardless of whether there is reciproca-

tion. Four societies and one university, however, are willing to microfilm only on a reciprocal basis. Two societies are willing to microfilm on a reciprocal basis and doubt whether they would on a non-reciprocal basis. Two other societies and one university library thought they might be willing to microfilm on a reciprocal basis, and are sure that they would not on any other basis.

When statistics on collections actually microfilmed for other libraries during the past five years are examined, it becomes evident that historical societies have been more accommodating in this respect than major university libraries. Only two of the university libraries microfilmed a collection for another library during the five-year period, and they microfilmed a total of only three collections. Seventeen historical societies microfilmed a total of approximately ninety collections during the same period. The seventeen societies include four in the Northeast, seven in the Midwest, four in the South, and two in the West. Approximately twenty of the ninety collections were microfilmed on a reciprocal basis, and the rest on a non-reciprocal basis. Seven societies microfilmed one or two collections each, two societies microfilmed about five collections each, five societies microfilmed about ten collections each, and one society microfilmed about twenty collections during the five-year period.

The replies should not be interpreted to mean that any library willing to microfilm a collection for another library will honor all requests indiscriminately. Availability of technical staff imposes one limitation. Some libraries are willing to allow a local commercial firm to do the microfilming, provided that the firm can be trusted to handle manuscripts with care. Other libraries will not allow manuscripts to leave the building under any circumstances. Some libraries have their own photographic facilities, but they usually find it impossible to do all of the microfilming that other libraries might like them to do. Preparation of collections for microfilming is time-consuming, and libraries have to decide whether to use staff time for this or for working on manuscripts that cannot be used at all until they are processed. Some libraries are willing to microfilm a collection for a distant library, but they are reluctant to do so for a library within easy driving distance. Libraries occasionally refuse to microfilm manuscript collections because they have found that scholars sometimes give credit in their publications to the institution with the microfilm copy and fail to mention the location of the originals.

Most large libraries will provide photocopies of manuscripts for use

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on specific research projects whenever it would be difficult for the researcher to remain at the library long enough to study pertinent manuscripts adequately. All but two of the reporting historical societies and all of the universities will do a limited amount of photocopying for scholars or will have it done by a commercial firm. Libraries will rarely microfilm an entire collection or a major part of a collection for a scholar, although microfilms of large collections are occasionally available for loan.

Researchers are ordinarily expected to come to a library in person to read and to select pertinent material for microfilming. All but eight of the societies and two of the university libraries, however, will have photocopies prepared and sent in response to a request in a letter, provided that the request is sufficiently specific as to authors and dates, the items can be located in the card catalog or in other finding aids, and the staff time required to locate requested material will not take more than a few hours. Manuscript staffs will rarely read through collections to select items pertaining to a given subject (subject entries in card catalogs generally indicate that material pertaining to a subject can be found in certain collections, but do not list specific letters or documents). The amount of searching that a manuscript staff will do often depends on a subjective judgment as to the merit of the research project. When the amount of time required to answer a request is exorbitant, libraries will sometimes recommend outside researchers who search collections for a fee. There is rarely a fee for the search that the library itself undertakes.

During the last two decades the quantity of manuscripts available for use by researchers has increased enormously. Historical societies have expanded their collection programs, and university libraries have gradually accepted the responsibility of preserving manuscripts as well as printed materials.

There have been impressive advances in gaining bibliographical controls over manuscripts. Adoption of more efficient methods of processing and cataloging and larger staffs have made it possible for most major libraries to prepare fairly adequate finding aids for most of their manuscripts. A substantial number of libraries have been able to publish comprehensive guides to their manuscript holdings. Perhaps the most important development has been the application of the concept of a national union catalog to manuscripts.

In many respects, however, modern manuscript depositories are still in about the same predicament as King Sisyphus of ancient Corinth. If additions to a staff and more efficient processing procedures double the quantity of manuscripts that can be processed, acquisition of bulkier twentieth-century collections is likely at least to triple the quantity of accessions. If the last five years is any indication, more libraries will add a manuscript curator or librarian to the staff, and present staffs will be further augmented. But manuscript staffs are not likely to see a time when the stone stays put at the top of the hill and there is nothing further to do.

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