
Acquisition of Microforms

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SINCE MICROFILM FIRST APPEARED on the library scene, it and its relatives have been hailed as everything from salvation to damnation by librarians and users alike. They save space and are inexpensive; they require expensive equipment and are an eye-straining nuisance to the user. Acquisitions librarians attempting a satisfactory compromise must perfect a balancing act that would bring a green glint of envy to the eye of an accomplished acrobat.

But why get it at all in this day of the ubiquitous copying machine and the gratifying increase of reprint publications? Librarians are thoroughly familiar with the rewards available in low cost acquisition and storage. The user is not impressed. He can occasionally resign himself to a microform if it is pointed out to him that paper prints can easily be made from transparencies and that the Xerox Corporation has recently developed a copier-enlarger which will print from opaque microforms. Further, the national, not to say international, sores of microform reproductions make acquisition increasingly quick and easy. Low cost can sometimes be palatably presented as a means of broadening acquisition capability. The reluctant user can also see some point in acquiring, or even producing, microforms as reserve or back-up copies of valuable, fragile or vulnerable publications. Even in the face of the completely obstinate user, the librarian must sometimes decide to acquire microforms of particularly vulnerable or very seldom-used material. To date no one has reported the removal of pages from a microfilm. And, finally, microform provides a means by which reproductions of manuscripts, early American imprints, rare legislative reports, and other unique or unobtainable items may be obtained.

Types of Materials Available

Any copyable publication or manuscript can be acquired in micro-

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form. But in spite of recent advertisements to the contrary, few libraries want everything in miniprint. There are some very bulky publications, printed originally on poor paper, consulted seldom but of vital importance to research collections which come easily to the attention of acquisitions librarians. Among these are newspapers, journals and government documents. Libraries collecting large numbers of U.S. government-supported research reports can acquire them on microfiche through the ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center), and the Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information.

Theses and dissertations, many of them no longer available on interlibrary loan, are available on microfilm either from University Microfilms or from the library having the original copy.

In selected cases "binding" copies of journals can be acquired on microfilm. It must be noted here that almost always these must be second copies, since publishers understandably require that libraries subscribe to the original publication. There is also a considerable lag (up to six months) in the production of a journal volume on film.

Certain of the large producers have developed microform projects by which new libraries or libraries developing retrospective research collections can acquire large quantities of publications in microform. Usually these are based on well-known standard bibliographies.

The Formats

It is not the purpose of this paper to explore the technical aspects of either the formats or the equipment required for reading and storing microform. The acquisitions librarian, however, must know enough about them and their differences to make intelligent choices or to recommend the acquisition of necessary equipment if a new format is vital to a collection. Having decided *for* some variety of microform, perhaps in spite of the availability of reprints, the next set of decisions involves the specific form to be chosen.

Some publications have been reproduced in more than one microform with reduction ratios of 15:1 to 25:1. The availability of reading (or enlarging) equipment needed for use may determine the format although most research libraries find it necessary to own equipment capable of accommodating all of the formats. Comparatively small amounts of space are required to store microforms, but seldom can they be satisfactorily housed on book shelves. Most of the formats call for specially designed storage units. An important point to bear

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in mind is the cost of this equipment; it can cut sharply into the money saved by the low cost of the microforms themselves.

The 1969 edition of *Guide to Microforms in Print* lists ten different transparent or opaque formats. The transparencies include rolls of microfilm in either 16 m.m. or 35 m.m. sizes and microfiche (a sheet of microfilm) in several sets of dimensions. Sizes appear to have been standardized, at least for the moment, on 35 m.m. for roll microfilm and four by six inches for microfiche. A relative newcomer to the transparent scene is the PCMI (photochromic microimage) ultra-high reduction process which uses a reduction ratio of 200:1. One publisher, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., has already announced a series of subject collections to be available on four by six inch ultramicrofiche beginning in the fall of 1970. A different breed of readers and reader-printers will have to be used. Theoretically the transparencies may be available in either negative (white print on dark background) or positive (dark print on white background) film. In practice, and if no specification is made, libraries usually receive positive film, especially from commercial producers. The opaque forms are represented by four sizes: three by five inches, six by nine inches, five by eight inches, and four by six inches.

Selection

There are no selection guides for micropublications.¹ The editor of *Choice* has promised microform reviews and hopes that they "will provide a sense of sanity in a confusing field of acquisition."² These reviews will, of necessity, be primarily concerned with the technological reproduction of publications already reviewed for literary content, authority, scope, etc. As Veaner points out in an admirable list of "Criteria for Evaluation,"³ there is more to it than technology. The producer has copied the original publication, using, perhaps, more than one copy of the original in pursuit of perfection. The prospective buyer of the micro-publication is concerned with the success of the producer's work, including fidelity to the original, the identity of the original and the standards used to control the quality of the product.

Another very important consideration, particularly where a bulk of publication is involved, is the control which provides access to the photographed material. Some of the publishers have arranged for sets of catalog cards, others for printed indexes or bibliographies, still others depend on existing indexes or bibliographies. These are external controls and at least have the advantage of being readable by the

naked eye although the quality of them varies widely. Those systems or projects which include internal controls or controls also in microform are less satisfactory for the user who, on the whole, resents having to use a reader for any part of his work.

Where no review or evaluation can be located, the prospective buyer can insist that the publisher cite the technological standards he has maintained, such as those of the United States of America Standards Institute.⁴ If his prospectus or catalogs do not make any statement regarding production standards, inquiries are in order. No library has the staff time to check incoming microforms, not to say periodic checks on the state of preservation of earlier purchases.

Since new micropublishing projects abound, as do young and rapidly developing libraries, there is enormous temptation in the "comprehensive" microform subject collections. These represent, at least theoretically, publications long out of print and probably not heavily in demand. If the project is based on a standard and well-known bibliography such as the Readex Microprint Corporation's effort to photograph every publication listed in Charles Evans' *American Bibliography*, a library feels relatively safe in indulging. But what of the new and unknown company proposing to supply thousands of volumes of classics at relatively low cost per volume? It sounds good; the prospectus glows but lacks a few basic facts. To whom does the wary acquisitions librarian turn for advice?

The American Library Association in 1958 established the Micropublishing Projects Subcommittee of the RTSD Resources Committee to serve as a coordinating agency for both libraries and publishers of microforms, to advise on the desirability of proposed publishing projects, to recommend micropublishing projects and to keep an eye on the quality of the photography and the bibliographic controls. An acquisitions librarian with serious doubts about a purchase under consideration may address an inquiry to the Subcommittee. He may also recommend it for review in *Choice*.

The Sources

It would be convenient indeed, if purchase orders for microforms could be enclosed in the same envelope with the purchase orders for books. To date few such possibilities exist; indeed, there are not even jobbers who will take on all of the microforms. The acquisitions librarian must go to the producers and these are many. Often one must locate a copy of the publication needed and order a microfilm from

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the owning library. Since a large number of books and journals have already been copied by commercial microform producers, however, it is easiest to try these sources first.

Although there are various union lists and continuing effort is producing more and better central controls, no microform acquisition program can do without a file of publishers' or producers' catalogs. The list of more than fifty publishers represented in *Guide to Microforms in Print* is an excellent one although it includes only American producers and not all of them. Acquisitions librarians are well advised to send for the catalogs of these publishers and request representation on their mailing lists.

The catalogs must be carefully read. A producer may make a blanket statement about incomplete runs of a journal rather than list the exact contents for each title. If excessively brief bibliographic listings are given, inquiries may be necessary. Occasionally a producer does not list prices. The reasons can be several including a "not yet published" status or requirement of the owner of the original that individual permission to reproduce be given.

Foreign sources are not so easy to identify but methodical perusal of lists of new publications in library journals often brings to light new sources and lists. Three good ones are listed under the "Selected Sources of Microform" section near the end of this article. Foreign book and serials dealers will occasionally acquire microforms for regular customers. If they are unable to supply, they are good about referring purchasers to a better source.

Since the bulk of the material required by American research libraries is already in at least one American library, a copy of *Directory of Library Photoduplication Services* is indispensable. This handbook, used in conjunction with *National Register of Microform Masters* and the *National Union Catalog*, often turns up either a microform master or a copy of the publication which can be photographed.

It is incorrect, however, to leap to the conclusion that copying automatically follows location of the publication. Copying processes are hard on books and an owner may consider that his book is too fragile or too tightly bound to be copyable. Or he may simply want to preserve its uniqueness. In the case of exceptionally valuable materials not available on interlibrary loan and owned by a library without copying equipment, once again a prospective purchaser must do without.

If the owner is willing to have his book photographed and does not

have the equipment to make the copy, an acquisitive library has three choices: 1) it can arrange to borrow the book on interlibrary loan, with permission to copy clearly given, and make its own copy, 2) it can place a purchase order with a commercial firm such as University Microfilms or MicroPhoto, informing them of the location of the book, or, 3) it can request the aid of a research library with photoduplication facilities and also near the owner of the publication.

Acquisitions Procedures

Placement of orders for microcopies can be done in several ways. It is not unusual for correspondence, perhaps between interlibrary loan librarians, to precede preparation of a purchase order. It may take place when an original to be copied is sought. Appeal to the National Union Catalog division of the Library of Congress for help in locating a copy, assuming one cannot be found in a nearer source, is quite in order. Since copies of publications are often sent in lieu of originals, microforms may be acquired through interlibrary loan, either on the standard "Interlibrary Loan Request Form" or on a similar "Library Photoduplication Order Form." Both of these ALA designed forms are available from library supply firms. Acquisitions librarians will probably prefer their own purchase order forms. Some libraries with large photoduplication departments such as the Library of Congress or the Library of the British Museum, have work order forms which they request purchasing libraries to use. Their use does not preclude the preparation of the purchaser's own purchase order.

Whatever form is used, the supplier must be told what format (if there is a choice) is expected and, in the case of transparencies, whether a negative or positive is wanted. For the most part, unless a negative is specified, a positive will be supplied. If the publication has never before been photographed, the purchaser requesting a positive may have to bear the cost of two films but probably will receive only the requested positive. Commercial firms accumulating a bank of negatives usually do not charge for the negative. Publications listed for sale in a producer's catalog are made from master negatives which are retained by the owner. If the purchaser insists on a negative, as he may if he wants to make prints, he will probably get a third generation copy, which may lack clarity since there is some loss in definition as copying moves further from the original.

Every acquisitions librarian is familiar with the anxious user who, suffering from the conviction that librarians do not really understand

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the exquisite proportions of research, have indulged in lengthy and detailed correspondence with the owner of an obscure manuscript or set of a rare journal. Indeed, the librarian may only be handed the bill to pay—or even be asked to arrange for reimbursement of the scholar who has not dared to trust. This is not all bad, especially if the owner of the publication is a private individual or a very small and special foreign library not yet caught up in the clutches of mass-produced collections. Careful and painstaking correspondence, preferably in the language of the owner, is sometimes the only way to successful acquisition. Faculty members ready and able to write, giving the detailed explanation of his research, as is sometimes required, are to be welcomed by the acquisitions librarian. Presentation of an American purchase order form, most especially one of the nasty little three by five inch multiple forms with cryptic abbreviations and incomprehensible directions, if unaccompanied and unheralded by appropriately respectful correspondence, is quite likely to be ignored. Sometimes, after agonizing delay, a letter of inquiry will result reflecting puzzlement and a degree of indignation which could have been avoided by a little diplomacy.

This kind of purchase may require prepayment, or sometimes American publications are specified as payment. The invoices may be presented by a commercial firm to which the copying work has been given and it may be especially difficult to relate the invoice to the product.

If the scholar does bring to the acquisitions librarian a citation in a 1912 journal to a manuscript held in a library which was destroyed in 1942, tracking down the manuscript (which may very well have been saved) can be an interesting task. Getting it photographed, once it is located, is another challenge. Appeal to a large research library in the country of the owner may be extremely helpful and is usually more successful than an arrangement made by the purchaser with a commercial firm.

In the course of correspondence with owning libraries to discuss ways and means of having a copy made, a precise cost quotation may be requested and given, prepayment may be required, or the purchasing library may be specifically requested to pay only on receipt of an invoice.

The correspondence may also bring out facts about the condition of the original publication which would make a copy unsatisfactory, or at least not of high quality. This is often the case with very old

books, tightly bound books, manuscripts and stained or otherwise damaged material. In this connection it is perhaps well to point out that, having been warned and having, in any case, ordered a "custom" job, the purchasing library may not return a copy or refuse to pay for it. Responsible craftsmen, either in library photoduplication departments or commercial firms may be expected to replace poor workmanship and, if there is any question about the reasons for poor work, inquiry should be made.

On occasion a library will want to acquire a copy of a publication protected by copyright. In the case of a commercial firm which offers the copy for sale, it may be assumed that release from the copyright holder has been secured. If in doubt, however, inquire. Libraries asked to make copies either refuse or request the purchaser to get permission to copy.

Earlier mention has been made of microform projects, the big commercial productions coming out over a period of years and intended to supply basic research material not available or terribly space-consuming in the original. As in the case of subscriptions to periodicals in microform, standing orders may be placed for these or, if the project is completed, arrangements can be made to spread payments over a period of years.

Libraries with large photoduplication departments and correspondingly large resources, sometimes allow for deposit accounts. The Library of Congress does this and so does the Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information as well as other government-owned facilities. The advantages in this sort of financial arrangements do away with the necessity for time-consuming pursuit of price quotations and individual prepayments. Since microforms, especially those in lieu of interlibrary loan, often are quite inexpensive, considerable administrative cost can be saved with deposit accounts.

Selected Sources of Microforms

In addition to the list of publishers in *Guide to Microforms in Print*, the following are a very few special sources or publishers. There are many more and new ones appear constantly. This short list is only representative.

A.C.R.P.P. (Association pour la Conservation et la Reproduction
Photographique de la Presse)

4, rue Louvois
Paris (2^e), France

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This producer's catalogs of serial publications have an impressive representation of French periodicals and newspapers.

Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information
U.S. Department of Commerce
Springfield, Virginia 22151

This arm of the U.S. government supplies on microfiche unclassified research and development reports listed in the *USGRDR Index*. Libraries can establish deposit accounts and buy coupons which also function as purchase order forms. Microfiche cost 65 cents each or, if subject subscriptions are placed, 28 cents. The Clearinghouse has a Fast Announcement Service which sends out lists of reports by subject. It puts out a fairly constant flow of brochures and announcements about its services.

E.R.I.C. Document Reproduction Service
National Cash Register Co.
4936 Fairmont Avenue
Bethesda, Md. 20014

This unit supplies on microfiche, at 25 cents each, research reports in the field of education. They are indexed in *Research in Education*, published by the Educational Resources Information Center of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Interdocumentation Co., AG
Poststrasse 9
Zug, Switzerland

This company publishes a wide range of subject catalogs and produces both microcards and microfiche.

Micro Methods, Ltd.
East Ardsley
Wakefield, Yorkshire
England

This producer has an extensive stock of microform masters, primarily of serial material. He will accept purchase orders for single items and locate an original to photograph.

Aids and Lists

The following list of news sources, handbooks and bibliographies is highly selective and representative but includes the basic tools for the acquisition of microforms.

British Manuscripts Project; A Checklist of the Microfilms Prepared in England and Wales for the American Council of Learned Societies, 1941-1945, compiled by Lester K. Born. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, 1955.

This bibliography lists materials which were filmed to record them in case they were destroyed during World War II. It includes a few very rare printed books. Copies of the films are available from the Photoduplication Service, Library of Congress.

Directory of Library Photoduplication Services, compiled by Cosby Brinkley, Chicago, 1966. Distributed by the Photoduplication Department, University of Chicago Library.

This handbook, currently in its third edition, lists in tabulated form the services of 157 libraries offering fairly complete photoduplication services. There is an additional list of over 600 other libraries which offer limited services. A new edition is in preparation.

Guide to Microforms in Print-1969, edited by Albert J. Diaz, Microcard Editions, 1969.

This bibliography, representing over fifty American producers of microforms is an annual, listing in alphabetical order by main entry books and journals but no theses or dissertations. It is not intended to be a union list in any sense since it does not include library holdings. There is a companion volume, *Subject Guide to Microforms in Print*, which is also annual.

List of National Archives Microfilm Publications. Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1968.

This annual catalog lists, with brief descriptions, many series of records held in the National Archives. It is supplemented by another catalog, *Federal Population Censuses, 1790-1890*. Prepayment is required for these films. The two catalogs give clear directions and order forms.

Microfilm Clearinghouse Bulletin.

This source of news about various microform projects and publications is published irregularly as an appendix to the *Information Bulletin* of the Library of Congress. Libraries investigating the feasibility of microform projects may ask for inquiries to be published in the *Bulletin*.

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National Register of Microform Masters, compiled by the Library of Congress, with the cooperation of the American Library Association and the Association of Research Libraries, 1966—

This bibliography is intended to prevent costly duplication of photographic reproduction. Its listings depend on reports from libraries and commercial producers. The masters listed are those used only for the purpose of reproducing copies for purchasers. They must meet the standards set up by the American Standards Association and, if possible, the requirements set up in *Specifications for Library of Congress Microfilming*. It includes foreign and domestic books, pamphlets, serials, newspapers and foreign doctoral dissertations. It does not include technical reports, typescript translations, archival manuscript collections or U.S. dissertations or theses. Locations are indicated by National Union Catalog symbols.

News From the Center.

This semiannual periodical begun in 1967 includes occasional articles as well as news notes. It is concerned with manuscript copying and is available from the Center for the Coordination of Foreign Manuscript Copying, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. It was originally published as an appendix to the *Library of Congress Information Bulletin* but is now appearing separately.

Newspapers on Microfilm, compiled by the Union Catalog Division of the Library of Congress, 1967.

This sixth edition of a valuable union list includes both negative and positive microfilms of newspapers held by both American and Canadian libraries.

Periodiques et Publications en Serie Concernant les Sciences Sociales et Humaines Liste de Reproductions Disponibles dans le Commerce (Microforms et réimpressions). Periodicals and Serials Concerning the Social Sciences and Humanities; Current List of Available Reproductions (Microforms and Reprints). Paris, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1966. 2 vols.

This alphabetical list gives publishers or producers, prices, years covered and format. When a title is available in several formats, this list provides useful comparative information.

Union List of Microfilms, compiled by the Committee on Microphotography of the Union Library Catalogue of the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area. Ann Arbor, Michigan, J. W. Edwards, 1951.

Here in one alphabet are publications of all kinds and the locations of the negative masters. A supplement covering the years 1949-1959 was published in 1961. It does not list materials such as newspapers and dissertations covered by other lists.

A Union List of Publications in Opaque Microforms, compiled by Eva M. Tilton. N.Y., Scarecrow Press, 1964.

This is a second edition of a bibliography arranged alphabetically by main entry, of commercial reproductions. Both American and European publishers are represented.

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3. *Ibid.*, pp. 450-452.
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