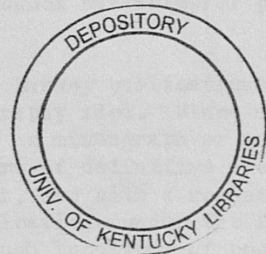




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CATALOGS AND FINDING LISTS
OF LOUISIANA SOURCE MATERIALS

(A paper read by W. C. Bennett, Supervisor, Early American Imprints Inventory, Louisiana Historical Records Survey Project, Division of Professional and Service Projects, Work Projects Administration, before the Louisiana Library Association Convention, Lafayette, Louisiana, April 26, 1940. Republished from The Bulletin of the Louisiana Library Association, vol. 4, no. 1, September, 1940, pp. 8-12.)



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of Historical and Service Records, State
Library Administration, before the Louisiana
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5-11.

It gives me pleasure as a representative of the Professional and Service Division of the Work Projects Administration to discuss with you some of the activities of the Federal Government in designing "new tools for research." I know that you, as librarians, are interested in the acquisition, preservation and use of source materials whatever their form, and because of the calls made upon you for such data, you wish to know whether or not certain specific materials exist, and if they exist, where they may be found. Before entering upon a discussion of these various activities, permit me to indicate what motivated the Federal Government in undertaking its program for encouraging the preservation of source materials and making them more accessible by utilizing the man-power and financial resources of the Work Projects Administration. Federal and local governmental agencies have been concerned primarily with providing useful public work rather than the dole for unemployed persons; those of us who have been in charge of various projects units have been preoccupied with producing a socially useful product and in the retention and improvement of workers' skills. Late in 1935, it was determined to survey the quantity, nature and location of source materials in the United States by preparing keys to the enormous quantities of raw and relatively inaccessible materials for research. Local initiative in such activities here and there throughout the nation indicated that a mass attack on the problem might be successfully carried out on a more or less uniform basis. This involved an administrative organization and work procedures to meet the need of uniform mass production, and utilizing the services of large numbers of professional, clerical and white collar workers who had little enough training or back ground in bibliographical work. From January 1936, until October 30, 1939, there existed a nationwide project known as the Historical Records Survey, which was set up to prepare inventories, lists, guides, calendars, and similar controls over the basic materials for research in American history and related subjects such as Federal, State and local public archives, manuscript collections in public and private hands, including church records, and newspapers and early American imprints. The two general principles governing activities prosecuted under Historical Records Survey Projects are:

1. The public records, manuscript and printed materials dealt with shall be placed under primary controls, i. e., a newspaper file or a record series (such as the deed books) described as to exact title, inclusive dates, number of volumes, general nature of information contained and location. A secondary control such as an index by name or subject to the contents of the newspaper file or the deed books would not be a normal activity of this type of project.
2. The work shall as far as possible yield a product suitable for publication and distribution.

A third but seldom enunciated practice governing Survey publications is that sometimes referred to as the progressive bibliography idea. Since most of the publications are in low-cost near-print form such as mimeograph or multi-graph reproductions, products which we know to be short of definitive are reproduced as of a given date for what they may be worth, and with a request for critical comment. For example: a dozen or more publications under the Early American Imprints Inventory have been released, although locations of books, pamphlets and broadsides are still being listed throughout the nation. The distribution of such publications to interested specialists has yielded a wealth of additional and corrective data. In other words, the issuance of

second and third editions in some cases has become a part of our work procedure designed to effect a progressively more comprehensive listing.

Various factors growing out of the passage of the Emergency Relief Act in June, 1939, resulted in the establishment of a consolidated records project in Louisiana, sponsored by the Department of Archives of Louisiana State University. On March 2 of this year the statewide Historical Records Survey project in Louisiana was set up to 1) clean, sort, arrange and renovate state, parish and municipal records, 2) inventory state, parish, municipal, church, and labor unions records, manuscript collections, early American imprints and newspapers, 3) index state, parish and municipal records series, and 4) prepare for publication inventories of state, parish, municipal and church records, manuscript collections, early American imprints and newspapers.

It is not my intention to discuss each task being prosecuted under the present project in Louisiana, but I wish to take up three phases of work in which I believe the most of you will be interested, the early American imprints inventory, the newspaper inventory, and the manuscript inventory.

The great number of libraries to be entered on the imprints inventory made necessary the adoption of some briefer means of identification than the full name of the library in these published bibliographies and check-lists. The system of location symbols used by the Union catalog of the Library of Congress had been tested by use and had shown that it was flexible and capable of indefinite growth. The American imprints inventory, therefore, adopted it as a basis of its system. The work of the inventory required symbols for a host of libraries not reported in the Union catalog and to get these thousands of additional symbols the cooperation of the director of the Union catalog, Mr. George A. Schwegmann, Jr., was solicited. The first edition of the Location Symbols for Libraries in the United States, approved and endorsed by the Union catalog of the Library of Congress was duplicated by the Louisiana project in October, 1939, and contains a total of 258 pages of Location Symbols for Libraries in all states in the Union.

As you know, American book bibliography is very inadequate and inaccurate up to the year 1876, when the American Catalog was established. In 1895, the Cumulative Book Index and the United States Catalog was begun, overlapping for a few years the American Catalog, which went out of existence in 1910. Charles Evans undertook the tremendous task of compiling a catalog of American publications from the beginnings of the American press to the year 1820, but he was unable to complete his work, American Bibliography, beyond the middle of the alphabet for 1799. Joseph Sabin undertook to list printed material of American interest in his Dictionary of Books Relating to America. This work, suspended several times because of Mr. Sabin's death and because of changes of later editors, has recently been brought to conclusion under the editorship of R. W. G. Vail, under the auspices of the Bibliographic Society of America. This publication covers roughly the last half of the 19th century, with a few inclusions of earlier dates. From 1860 to 1876, many other attempts were made to produce a catalog of publications, but none of these was conclusive, nor did any survive. Before 1876, therefore, we have no adequate catalog of United States publications.

Both Evans and Sabin locate titles, but many titles for which no location

is given are included in both, as well as others for which no definite authority is given to warrant their inclusion.

To fill in the gaps in early American book cataloging, the Historical Records Survey, in 1937, undertook through the Early American Imprints Inventory the task of compiling a finding list of early American printed materials. These include broadsides, since in many cases broadsides of broadsheets were the first product of a printing establishment; pamphlets, which often have contemporary historical, literary, or political significance; and books, which of course are still our main source of information. A nationwide organization was set up under Work Projects Administration procedures, with central headquarters in Chicago under Douglas C. McMurtrie as national consultant to the director of the Historical Records Survey. Since 1937 workers have gone into libraries, public, private and institutional, and have listed, according to a certain set form, all books in each library published in the United States through 1876, with the exception of those published in Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Utah, for which states the date limit is 1890. The worker's rough copy thus made is sent to the state office of the Historical Records Survey Project where it is edited for correctness of form, spelling, and the inclusion of information sufficient for identification of the book, after which it is typed on a sheet known as a Form 22HR which has four spaces of catalog card size. The typed forms are then sent to the national editorial office in Chicago where they are cut, sorted alphabetically by state of publication, then filed chronologically by years under each state and alphabetically by author or title within each year. Since the same title may be found in a number of depositories, the next step involves the consolidation of location symbols on a single master card for each title. It is only natural that a certain number of discrepancies in titles received in Chicago would be found, and something like 5% of the forms are returned to the various state projects or to the custodian for verification or correction of information. When the inventory for any given state is near completion a preliminary check-list such as that recently published for Alabama is typed and then duplicated in the state.

Many books have been published that are no longer in existence, but which are known because notices concerning their publication or sale were printed in contemporary newspapers and periodicals. To make a complete listing, workers are going through newspaper files, chiefly before 1840, transcribing every item concerning the publishing trade. These items may inform us that a certain press was in operation in New Orleans at one time, although publications from the press are no longer existent. They may tell us that a book was published and for sale, that a newspaper was established, or that a certain firm dealt in products of the publishing trade. Any such information will help us to form a more adequate picture of printing in the United States. Examples of the use to which such information is put may be noted in the two volumes of the Kentucky check-list which are on exhibit just outside the door of the auditorium.

Librarians, in looking through published check-lists have checked them with their own holdings and have written to the office of the Survey, making corrections and additions. These changes will be included in future editions or supplements and the final result will, we believe, be a listing as accurate and as inclusive as it is possible to make.

Our aim is to prepare a basic list of books, from which bibliographies of

all sorts may be prepared, whether subject, author, or publisher, or any other type of bibliography that may be used in research. A scholar who has studied exhaustively a specific subject will have encountered printed material dealing with his subject that he never thought existed. He will also have become aware, through various references, of numerous publications necessary to his work that he is unable to locate. The great Union catalog at the Library of Congress and other local union catalogs such as that under discussion here yesterday will help the situation tremendously; but since filing in these catalogs is by author only, they cannot be of much value in studying a specific subject, unless the student knows thoroughly the publications in his field by author. With an adequate inventory of locally printed material of the early years of the community such as the Early American Imprints Inventory is striving to produce, he will be able to locate these publications wherever he may be; and either through an actual visit to the depository or through interlibrary loan may make use of needed material. Such a finding tool will be of inestimable value to historians and to others doing research work for which printed material is needed.

In April, 1938, the first groups of imprint writers in Louisiana were assigned to work in New Orleans in the Howard Memorial Library, and in Baton Rouge at the New Hill Memorial Library. Since that beginning, 173,346 imprint entries have been written in 303 libraries in the state, including public, institutional and private libraries. As many as 70 workers have been engaged at one time. Work is still being carried on in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Alexandria, and Shreveport, but with the exception of a few high school libraries in the smaller towns and cities and a few private libraries not yet inventoried, the Early American Imprints Inventory in the State of Louisiana is complete. Work is now underway on a preliminary check-list of Louisiana imprints which will be distributed for checking and additions.

Newspapers are an important source of historical data, whether political, commercial, or social. Here we find a contemporary record of the events of the day in current phraseology, interpreted in the light of contemporary public opinion and coordinated with other related concurrences, giving, over a period of time a complete and correlated picture of the development of the locality. The condition of newspaper files, especially the wood pulp papers, makes this inventory almost emergency in character. As Miss Anderson said in another manner this morning, unless we can learn just what papers exist and where they are and preserve them by some means such as microphotography, the next generation of students is very unlikely to have an opportunity to make use of the newspapers of the period after 1880.

Very few libraries have extensive newspaper holdings; and guides to this type of material are few and inadequate. In 1937, Miss Winifred Gregory, under the auspices of the American Bibliographic Society, published her American Newspapers, 1821 to 1936, commonly known as the Union List of Newspapers, but owing to the fact that her data was necessarily obtained through correspondence with custodians of major depositories and that the information given was in some measure governed by the answers received, many important holdings were left unlisted. Edward L. Tinker compiled a "Bibliography of French Newspapers and Periodicals in Louisiana," and Clarence S. Brigham a Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690 to 1820, but neither of these give the holdings of the newspapers listed, although the bibliographical information included is excellent.

Rowell's American Newspaper Directory and Ayer's annual Directory of American Newspapers also give full bibliographical information, but make no attempt to give the holdings of any newspaper listed.

To meet the need of a check-list of Louisiana newspapers and Newspapers in Louisiana depositories, the Early American Imprints Inventory of the Louisiana Historical Records Survey, has begun the preparation of such a finding list. Workers have entered public libraries, newspaper offices, and private homes to list the papers on file, giving all obtainable information concerning the newspaper itself, and checking each issue in the holdings of the depository. The completed forms on each newspaper file will be deposited with the Gregory file in the Library of Congress. A check-list supplementary to the Union List is being compiled in Louisiana.

Since the beginning of the newspaper inventory in January, 1939, the work has been carried on in thirty parishes throughout the state. Fifty-three different depositories have been entered in thirty-two cities; and 759 different titles have been inventoried.

The Inventory of Manuscripts in Louisiana will result in the publication of three different guides to such materials. The first of these is the Guide to Manuscript Depositories in Louisiana. The final draft covering 35 Louisiana manuscript depositories is presently in Washington awaiting publication approval. The second type of publication will be the Guide to Manuscript Collections in Louisiana. The first volume of this guide, describing the manuscript collections in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, has also been completed and is presently awaiting publication approval by the Librarian of Congress. The third type of guide which has been prepared in the state, is the calendar to a selected manuscript collection. A number of these have been published including the Calendar of the Yucatecan Letters, the Calendar of the "Taber" Collection, and the Guide to the C. I. Fayssoux Collection of William Walker Papers.

I regret very much that it has been impossible to discuss with you other types of catalogs and findings lists of Louisiana source materials which are being prepared by the Historical Records Survey Project in the state. I can merely call attention to such tools as the Inventory of the Parish Archives of Louisiana which is now being published at the rate of approximately two volumes each month; to the Inventory of State Archives, volumes on which will be issued by departments, and to the Municipal Archives Inventory, a volume of which is being issued describing the records of each city in the state.

I wish to express to you my appreciation for intelligent and friendly cooperation which you, as librarians throughout the state have afforded us in the work which we have underway. We realize that there is much which we can do to improve the quality and the nature of the work which we have undertaken, and your further interest and cooperation is most earnestly solicited. Requests for any of the thirty volumes issued by the project in Louisiana should be addressed to Dr. Edwin A. Davis, Archivist, Louisiana State University. Thank you.

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