

Return to
Mrs. Colton

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LIBRARY

HISTORICAL RECORDS OF THE
AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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The original invitation to speak at this seminar asked for a report of data banks in the Chicago area that might provide source materials for the study of the history of librarianship during the past century. Further refinement of the topic reduced it to the archives of the American Library Association. Subsequent study of the topic indicates, without casting aspersions on anyone, that perhaps the vaguer term of data bank is more appropriate to it.

In one very important sense, the ALA has an archives. It depends on the definition. In 1948, the ALA Committee on ALA Archival and Library Materials, appointed first in 1946 to consider goals and means of handling the records of the Association, met in Detroit at the Annual Conference to discuss the problems. It defined archives as "those pieces of material that reflect the policies and activities of organized bodies and are intended to be kept for record purposes." [1]

It decided that ALA was an organized body with such materials to keep. As will appear later, an abundance of these materials exist and have been kept. They are not complete, and the volume has been inflated by duplication. However, the Committee of 1948 deserves credit for the preservation of papers that otherwise might have been lost.

The Committee, of course, did not stop with the definition of archival materials in its discussion of 1948 nor in its final report of September 2, 1949. [2]

It made eleven additional recommendations for acquiring, storing, organizing, and servicing the archives, embracing the activities of the Divisions, Boards, Round Tables, and Committees as well as the Association at large. The Executive Board gratefully accepted the report and discharged the committee. In succeeding years, however, the Association little heeded the recommendations for systematic acquisition, organization, and service of the records it undertook to keep; and it was forced to strive against the mounting needs for space generated by expanding programs to provide minimal storage facilities.

That was the situation when AIA engaged Kenneth Munden as a consultant to survey the archives in 1968. He examined the collection and procedures and wrote a report with recommendations.

"The preliminary planning for the archives," he wrote, "is found to be generally excellent." [3, p. 1]

The committee of 1948 had done its work well. Only the execution of the plan was faulty. "The picture presented by the whole is . . . that of a staging area for an Archives proper." [3, p. 2]

That is, he found records of impressive quantity and appreciable quality, but the provisions for caring for and serving the collection were so inadequate that it did not justify the name of archives. Among other things he recommended the employment of two full-time archivists assisted by two full-time clerks to bring the archives into usefulness. Fewer people were employed at the

time to conduct both the headquarters library and the archives. The recommendation could not be followed.

The committee report of 1949 and the engaging of an archival consultant in 1963 demonstrate the nagging feeling of concern that the ALA has about its historical records. The conscientious efforts of the headquarters library staff to provide some archival service today are also an expression of interest. Some consideration of the historical background will contribute to an understanding of the present collection of records and its handling.

The origins of the archival idea at ALA are obscure. Related to it is the sense of history and the practice of history by the librarians active in ALA. The librarians who founded the association in 1876 and conducted its affairs during the first quarter of a century undeniably felt they were making history, but they showed little interest in collecting archival materials of their activities. They felt their published proceedings preserved the significant records of ideas and events. As will be shown in the summary inventory of the collection to be presented later in this paper, some records of the early years have been preserved at ALA headquarters. The circumstances through which they were preserved are not entirely clear. The papers of George Watson Cole, treasurer from 1893 to 1895 and the papers of Henry J. Carr, President in 1900-1901, were preserved by other persons and added to the ALA collection at a later date.

Also related to the development of a centralized collection of records is the development of a permanent headquarters and headquarters staff. When officers of the Association conducted their

affairs at their own places of employment, the records tended to be scattered in those places. Even after the establishment of a paid secretariat, the dispersion of records of the elected officers of the Association continued.

Although Edward C. Hovey was a paid executive officer of the American Library Association from 1905 to 1907 with headquarters at 34 Newbury Street, Boston, the continuous secretariat of the Association dates from 1909. Chalmers Hadley became executive secretary in 1909 and the headquarters were established in rent free space in the Chicago Public Library. Headquarters have remained in Chicago since that time, always under some pressure of space. Moves followed to the fifth floor of the Crerar Library, to 520 North Michigan Avenue in 1929, to the McCormick mansion at 50 East Huron Street in 1946. The present headquarters building was erected in two stages (during the second of which the old mansion was razed) and dedicated in 1963. During these changes and expansion in space, the archives were in a continuous position of temporary storage.

Shortly after the move to the Chicago headquarters, Arthur Hastings Grant in 1910 offered the papers of his father, Seth Hastings Grant who had been secretary of the Librarians' Conference of 1853 to the Association. [4, pp 679-80] The Executive Board not only accepted the gift but made a strong presentation of the argument that AIA headquarters would be a much more appropriate repository for the papers than the libraries Arthur Hastings had suggested as alternatives. [4, p. 680] This may represent the genesis of the archival idea at AIA.

In 1921, Carl Milam had become executive secretary and he showed special concern for the War Service files. In his report for that year he wrote, "Some of the War Service files and much other War Service material which has been in storage for several months have been moved to the basement of the Newberry Library through the courtesy of the librarian and trustees of that library." [5, p. 30] G. B. Utley, the Newberry librarian, had preceded Milam at ALA. This is the first reference to special storage required for older historical records. It may be noted that in neither the case of the Grant papers nor the war files was the routine and continuing business of ALA involved. The Grant papers concerned history made by someone else. The war service records concerned the efforts to supply books to American service men at home and abroad during the Great War so recently completed.

From 1924 to 1946, Milam returned to the subject of archives from time to time. He was mainly interested in a headquarters library that would serve as an information center in keeping with "the purposes and present activities of the Association." [6, p. 357] However, by 1927 the librarian was responsible for the correspondence files, and Miss Gladys English, holding that position, made references to her work "with the files in the Newberry basement." [7] In 1940, Miss Harriette Greene, librarian wrote in her annual report, "Materials of historical value regarding the development of libraries, especially in the United States and Canada, and relating to the activities of the Association must be preserved." [8, p. 543] To that end, a WPA worker was assigned to the files from May 1939 to May 1940. Collections of records from the outside were added to the files from time to time, and in 1943

Miss Greene reported that "Preservation of the ALA archives and historical material is a part of the work of the library." [?]

The move to the McCormick mansion in 1946 prompted the Executive Board to a formal consideration of the archives problem. Carl Milan advised the board that it was not possible to store archival material in the headquarters library and suggested that copies of stenographic reports be offered to the library schools at either the University of Chicago or Columbia University. Neither school, however, was interested. "It was then VOTED that the President of the ALA be empowered to appoint a committee to study the whole question of the conservation and preservation of ALA archives as suggested by the Executive Secretary. The question of conservation and preservation of the archives of the Divisions should also be included in the study of the divisions so desire."

The Committee took its duties seriously. It sent out letters requesting opinions, met in serious deliberation, and rendered a comprehensive report in 1949. Its definition of archival materials has been mentioned. Other recommendations of the Committee can be summarized as follows: (1) The ALA house the archives of the Association, Divisions, Boards, Round Tables, and Committees; (2) the ALA headquarters library serve as the depository; (3) the archives be open to serious students, with the reservation that confidential records require the approval of the chief officer of the relevant body; (4) that limited service be offered; (5) that each group supplying records be responsible for its own weeding; (6) that each such group appoint a committee on archives or designate a special member to assume the responsibility; (7) that an archival consultant be employed to survey

the records; (8) that ALA furnish the necessary equipment; (9) that the headquarters librarian send out instruction sheets each year requesting the forwarding of records; (10) that the Executive Director formulate policies; and (11) that the executive staff assist in formulating policies. [2]

By accepting the report of 1949, ALA recognized the responsibility for keeping its archives, designated the headquarters library as the place of deposit, and made the headquarters librarian responsible for maintenance and limited service. Since 1949, the responsibility for archives has subjected the headquarters librarians to the nagging voice of an unreasonable conscience. In September 1955, a report to the Executive Board on an enlarged program for the Headquarters Library discussed the Archives.

The Archives of ALA are also in deplorable condition. The American Library Association has a rich history, but it will not have any way of locating the material if something is not done soon about its archival collection, much of which is at present rotting away from dust, dirt, and heat in the basement storage room in which it is housed mostly in cartons. With the present staff the library cannot take on this organization problem, in spite of the pressure evidenced from the various Divisions and Committees who wish to deposit their archives at ALA Headquarters. [9]

Under such circumstances, it was probably too much to expect the librarian to solicit chairmen, presidents, and other responsible persons to forward papers each year as recommended in the 1949 report. But this is not to say the librarians forgot the responsibility. In 1956, Miss Helen Geer reported on the physical deterioration of the materials. [10] In 1966, Miss Ruth White

drafted a proposal for organizing the archives. [1a] She called attention to the neglect of the 1949 recommendations. In view of the coming centennial of ALA, she proposed a two-to-three year project to get the records in order. This proposal probably led to the survey by an archival consultant in 1968--a step that had been recommended in the 1949 report.

In 1969, the present librarian, Mrs. Flora D. Colton, first followed the recommendation made twenty years earlier to send out letters to responsible individuals requesting the forwarding of papers. The letters were accompanied by the list of instructions that the committee formulated. These designated fifteen types of material to be preserved, six types to discard, and presented nine well ordered steps of procedure in sorting, weeding, and preparing records, concluding with the instruction to "Send express collect to Headquarters Library. . . ." This list of instructions serves well as a guide to policy and procedure, although two interested bodies, The Public Library Division in 1953 and the American Association of School Librarians in 1966, formulated their own guidelines.

The historical records of ALA today are located in different sections of ALA Headquarters. Some of the oldest material is kept in a safe at Headquarters. Minutes of the Executive Board and the transcripts of Council meetings are kept in the Board Room. Papers remain in various secretaries' offices for an indeterminate length of time. They may go from there to central files; but the practice varies from office to office. The official ALA files in the Headquarters Library contain committee reports of the past ten or fifteen years. The bulk of the records are stored in the North Pier Terminal

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Warehouse at 431 East Illinois Street. They were moved there from headquarters building in December 1965 when the need for a staff lounge pre-empted the storage space allotted to archives.

The Headquarters Librarian is the key to the location of various materials. She has a general understanding of the kinds of things that are stored in different locations. From requests she receives for information, as she finds the time she has been building up a card file of archives locations. By the nature of things, a large share of the requests require a search for new answers. This increases the time required for response. Any extended inquiries will require the investigator to visit ALA archives. The following summary inventory will give some idea of the kinds of material available and the methods of search required.

A SUMMARY INVENTORY

It would be very desirable to be able to make a cogent statement of what the ALA Archives contain. It is not possible to do so, however, in any more than the broadest outlines because of the disorganization of the whole. In some particular instances persons interested in one aspect or another of the collections have done some organizing of them (e.g., the AALS files and the S. Hastings Grant papers). But the remainder, especially those in the North Pier Terminal warehouse, are in a massive disarray. The background of this has been discussed in the historical account.

The bulk of materials are located at the North Pier Terminal Warehouse. In gross measurements the materials can be analyzed in various ways. They are contained in approximately 96 standard three

foot shelves, more than 300 filing cabinet drawers (including some that are made of cardboard) and more than 100 other boxes of various sizes in an area of approximately 1200 square feet (ca. 90'x14'). They include correspondence in both file folders and bound in book form, mimeographed and otherwise duplicated reports, minutes, etc., statistical collections, printed publications of various sorts, financial materials that include ledger books and voucher records, library conference memorabilia, scrap-books, account ledgers, and other miscellaneous items. They cover the whole history of the ALA but with a great deal of variation. There are comparatively few materials before 1909, a great deal for the period of the American involvement in World War I, fewer for the 1920's and early 1930's, and then an ever increasing bulk from the late 1930's to about 1965. Materials more recent tend to be kept at the various offices in the headquarters building.

In giving even a general inventory it should be noted that it is possible neither to pinpoint in the ALA organizational structure where all of the materials belong nor to locate easily all materials for any one aspect of ALA organizational history. Besides the problem of determining the correct antecedents of any particular division, there are simply too many drawers and boxes with wrong labels and sometimes badly mixed groups of folders. Until the Archives are finally organized, any inventory must of necessity be only a general survey. A person desiring to use the Archives may be able to find a single very specific item if he has the good fortune that the librarian has already happened on the correct location. If, however, one is looking for a whole series of materials, the only alternative is to personally go through all of the materials

folder by folder. There is no other sure way.

Having pointed out these discouraging realities, there is still, of course, a value in describing the materials in a general way, not for an exact accounting and guide, but in order to relate a sense of the kinds of materials that are available. It is hoped that the tentative nature of the list will be therefore understood.

I. Materials of the Longest Range

1. ALA Executive Board Minutes. June 20, December, 1906; May 15, 1907; September, 1909. (Bound) (1919-1942 also on microfilm)
2. ALA Council Minutes and Transcripts. 1909-1946, 1948-1953. (Bound) Other years, since 1950, scattered throughout.
3. Financial records
 - a. Treasurer ledgers, 1876-1949 (various types).
 - b. Report on Audit of Accounts, 1918-1961. 8v. (Bound)
 - c. Treasurer's reports and budgets, 1921-1962. 29v. (Bound)
 - d. Budget working papers, ca. 1955-65.
 - e. Vouchers, cancelled checks, etc. (Ca. 40 cartons, and perhaps 8-10 filing cabinets.)
4. Membership records
 - a. Ledgers of membership dues, 1882-1898.
 - b. Attendance register, 1890-1919. 3v. (Bound)
 - c. Membership Division materials. 11v. (Bound)
5. Conference materials
 - a. 1876 Scrap-book. (See Edw. G. Holley, Making the Historic Coals: The A.L.A. Scrapbook of 1871. Urbana: Beta Phi Mu, 1967.)
 - b. Programs, memorabilia, 1876-1960 (incl. arrangements correspondence, 1952-1957) and photographs, etc., 1886 +
 - c. 50th Anniversary Conference materials, incl. corres. 3v. (Bound)
 - d. 75th Anniversary materials, incl. corres. (2 file drawers)
6. ALA Publications. Many shelves and drawers. Includes Bulletin, Handbook, Booklist, Proceedings, etc.
7. ALA Circular Letters, 1923-1954. (30+ feet of bound vols.)

II. 1876-1909

1. Henry J. Carr. Correspondence, 1898-1901. President of - ALA, 1900-01. Given to ALA by Mrs. H. J. Carr at an undetermined date, along with a great deal of ALA conference materials and other items on the American Library Institute. Also contains correspondence pertaining to the appointment of the Librarian of Congress, 1899. (4 archival boxes)

2. George W. Cole. Correspondence, 1885-1906. Treasurer of ALA, September 1893 - August 1895. Given to ALA by Clarence S. Brigham in 1943. (203 items in 1 archival box)

III. 1909-1920

1. Some presidential papers given by James I. Wyer in 1943.
2. War Service records. (ca. 95 bound volumes of correspondence etc., 1916-1919; 3 boxes of materials relating to ship and other military base libraries, 1917-1920.)

IV. 1920-1965.

For the period before 1920 ALA records are found mainly in the minutes of the Executive Board and Council and in the summaries of committee and section work printed in the ALA Bulletin and in the Library Journal. The only other major groups of correspondence are the scattered presidential papers and the War Service records. After 1920 the ALA headquarters staff began to grow in size. As the work of the ALA grew more complex an increasing number of committees and newly created boards gained a liaison connection between their volunteer efforts and the permanent headquarters staff with its record keeping capabilities. An early example of this is the Board of Education for Librarianship whose records exist from the early 1920's. It can be hardly coincidental that this Board was also one of the earliest with an office and paid secretary established at headquarters.

Another kind of record to be found preserved in the Archives are those materials assembled by headquarters staff personnel, often perhaps by the library staff, for the use of some particular committee or committees or for staff members. Included in this category are groups of statistical materials and library science course offerings.

The best way to assess the coverage for this period would be first to determine the evolving organizational structure of the ALA

and then to arrange the various materials conveniently. ALA structures, however, present a kaleidoscopic picture of complexity, and to do such a study falls outside the realm of possibilities for this report. However, it has been possible to attempt some tracing of committees, boards and sections that form a continuous history for some of the ALA presently named divisions and to indicate what well defined materials are available. It is hoped that these plus a notation of other prominent committee records will give some sense of the possibilities of finding continuous records in the midst of all of the confusion.

A. Some present Divisions of ALA.

1. ACRL; Evolution

College and Reference Libraries Section, 1889-1938

Bylaws established in 1923

Reorganized as ACRL in 1938

"Reference" changed to "Research" in 1951

Records available (10 boxes)

CRL (periodical) correspondence with ACRL materials included,
1938-1945

ACRL correspondence files, 1956-1962

ACRL Grants Program correspondence, 1956-1962

ACRL Burma Project

ACRL Engineering School Libraries Section. Various materials including minutes, correspondence, etc., 1941-49.

ACRL IBM coding sheets (one box)

2. RTSD; Evolution

Cataloging Section, 1900-1940

Committee on Cataloging and Classification, 1928-40

(A merger of previous committees on cataloging and on decimal classification)

Division of Cataloging and Classification, 1940-56

RTSD, 1957-

(Supersedes also Board on Acquisition of Library materials, 1951-56 and Serials Round Table, 1929-56)

Records available

Committee on Cataloging and Classification; Division of Cataloging and Classification: Four separate groups of correspondence, etc. that range from 1926-1956.

RTSD: Two separate groups of correspondence that cover 1950-60.

3. LAD; Evolution

1. Committees on Salaries, and on Schemes of Library Service; combined to form,
2. Board of Salaries, Staff & Tenure, 1937-44; became,
3. Board of Personnel Administration, 1944-56.
4. LAD, 1957-
5. Merger of BPA and Committees on Buildings, Equipment, Federal relations, Friends of libraries, Insurance for libraries, Library legislation, Public relations, and statistics, as well as some of the functions of Board of Education for Librarianship.

Records available:

- (2-3). Five boxes, unsorted, late 1930's to ca. 1950.
- (3-4). Fourteen filing cabinets, drawers, weeded, sorted and indexed; continuous correspondence 1949-1964.
- (5) Separate files of Friends of Libraries Committee, (3v. bound) and of Federal Relations Committee.

4. LED; Evolution

Board of Education for Librarianship, 1924-1956
 Professional Training Section (also at one time, Round Table),
 1909-1945.
 LED, 1946-

Records available:

B.E.L., continuous correspondence, 1924-1955.

5. ALTA

Trustees Section, 1890-1941 (Reorganized, 1935/6)
 Trustees Division, 1941-50
 (Merged with Library Extension Division and Division of
 Public Libraries in 1950 to form Public Libraries Division)
 Re-emerged as ALTA, 1961-

Records available:

Correspondence, etc., 1940-1965 (various)

6. ASL (American Association of State Libraries)

Records available: 1940-1965 (various)

7. AALS

Records available: Fully organized, 1915-1965.

8. AASL

Records available: Various correspondence, records included.
 Knapp School Libraries Project.

B. Specifically Identifiable Committee materials.

Audio-visual, Editorial, Federal-Regulation, Intellectual Freedom,
 Library Extension, Library Radio-broadcasting, Post-War Planning,
 Public Relations, and Scholarships and Fellowships.

C. Headquarters Materials

Specific materials on Credit Union, General Files retired from active use, Mail Records, Personnel Office Records, Public Relations Office correspondence, and Time Study materials.

D. Other Specific Categories

1. International Relations Board--International Relations Office. Continuous correspondence, 1937-1967 (37 file drawers). Also more than 10 file drawers of correspondence from special projects, including Library Cooperation with Latin America, Books for Latin America, International Library in Paris (1920-45), Books for China, and Libraries in War Areas.
2. Statistical materials
 - a. On Public Libraries, 1920-1944 (15 file drawers)
 - b. On college and university libraries, 1919-45 (8 file drawers)
3. Library Science Courses, 1924-1940. (17 file drawers)
4. Appointment of the Librarian of Congress, 1937-39. Correspondence; 3v. (bound).
5. National Defense Files, W.W.II. (11 file drawers)
6. American Library Institute materials. Accounts ledger is in the Carr correspondence. Scrapbooks. Other materials in 1 file drawer.
7. Carnegie Corporation Grants. Correspondence, 1915-1941 (3 file drawers)
8. Seth Hastings Grant and C. B. Norton. Correspondence. Grant was secretary of the Librarians Conference in NYC in 1853. Scrapbook, 56 items. (Archival boxes, 598 items)
9. Library Community Project, 1950-60. (6 file drawers)

This summary inventory is not of course to be considered at all complete. Likewise the dates are not to be taken as the final word. It simply presents the largest and most well defined groups of materials. There remain, however many other materials with only the vaguest indication of their contents. More than 34 filing drawers that can only be described as miscellaneous, cover committee correspondence, minutes, and other types of materials.

VALUES FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH

As the summary inventory suggests, the value of the ALA archives (to give them a name to which they can legitimately aspire) are most useful for an investigation of the organization and development of the American Library Association and its various divisions, committees, and round tables. These records are most voluminous for the past thirty years, but the lack of organization makes it difficult to judge their completeness. In addition, because most of the great figures in librarianship have also been active in the affairs of ALA, the archives include a valuable store of personal information about such people. Finally, inasmuch as the Association has been involved in the development of ideas in the setting of libraries, these records are valuable sources for intellectual and social history.

The values of the records would be enhanced by greater care and organization. One possibility would be to develop a full blown archives along with the requisite staff and physical facilities as suggested by Munden in 1968. The ALA, like many other important organizations, focuses attention on current projects and programs. These strain its resources to the utmost. It is probably not reasonable to expect the Association to devote as large a share of its resources to the study of its history as a fully developed archives would require.

Another possibility would be to place the archives, if possible, in a university or historical society. Carl Milam made some tentative moves toward that thirty years ago. In 1970 a major university made a bid for the archives, but the Association was not satisfied that the transfer would leave headquarters with adequate access to or

control of the records. Universities are short of funds, too, and some at least would require a subsidy to maintain AIA archives in such a state of completeness and ready access as would be desirable.

A third alternative has been suggested by Peggy Sullivan who has made extensive searches in the archives to support her study of Carl Milam. She has written the president of AIA proposing the employment of a "thoughtful, literate, but ruthless . . . librarian who would weed the collection so that its true status may be determined." It is her opinion, based on inspection, that weeding would greatly reduce the bulk of the collection and render sensible organization easier. Such evidence of increased organization and care might lure more papers, now scattered among former officers, into the collection. Better care and organization and better quality of records might induce appropriate historical institutions to show more interest in the collection. This is perhaps the most feasible proposal at this time, and I think it deserves our support, especially if we use the word "literate" to signify a sense of balance and style.

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