

Illinois History and Lincoln Collections

Unit Annual Report, July 1, 2011 - June 30, 2012

Manuscript Collections

During the 2011-2012 year, Ryan Ross and I spent our time in a range of activities which, compared with similar collections here and elsewhere, are handled by a much larger staff. We focused in particular on the unit's manuscript collections, and this emphasis is reflected in this report.

Ryan and I have so far entered into Archon, the Library's database for special collections, a summary description of nearly 1,000 manuscript collections, many of which also include an inventory which vary in length from one to 350 pages. In the past three years, we have written or revised the summary and inventory for the majority of these collections, but a substantial number are not yet prepared or edited sufficiently to be opened for viewing on the Internet. In addition, a few collections, acquired both recently and in the past, have not been processed at all.

The development of full and satisfactory records of the unit's manuscript holdings has never received the attention that they merit. Between 1909 and 1939, collections of the Illinois Historical Survey were incidental to the unit's role as the editorial office for the documentary publications of the Illinois State Historical Library (now the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library), in Springfield. In that period, and during the next forty years, the Survey was administered on campus by the Department of History and the Graduate College. The first substantial listing of the unit's holdings was Marguerite Jenison Pease's *Guide to Manuscript Materials of American Origin in the Illinois Historical Survey* (1951), which contained information on a few score collections. That inventory was updated, mainly by Dennis J. Walle, in the Survey part of the *Manuscripts Guide to Collections at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign* (1976).

The Survey, which was relocated from Lincoln Hall to the Library in 1966, became a unit of the Library rather than the Graduate College in 1980. In 2001, the Survey was merged with the Lincoln Room, which began as a separate entity in 1951 when Harlan Hoyt Horner and Henrietta Calhoun Horner donated their Lincoln collection to the University. I initiated this merger

which brought two closely related collections together, with no cost to the Library.

Now identified as one component of the Library's Illinois History and Lincoln Collections, the unit's manuscript holdings have about tripled in size since the *Guide* of 1976. Almost every collection has been donated to the University, not bought by it. Mainly with the assistance of graduate assistants drawn from the History Department, I have endeavored over the years to organize these materials. The work file for the typical collection now contains papers relating to its acquisition and use, typed inventories of its contents, and pages from pre-Archon databases.

It is my intention to continue to push ahead with work on the unit's manuscript collections. I see this as my principal legacy to the Library and as more important than the multiplicity of professional and personal activities which engage others in the Library.

When it became necessary to shift to Archon in 2009, I planned to post information about the collections by title, in a straightforward alphabetical way. It has proven impossible, however, to carry out this plan. To accommodate individual researchers--to put in proper shape materials that they want to use when they want to use them--Ryan Ross and I usually work on particular collections out of alphabetical order. As a consequence, we have posted very few collections for certain letters of alphabet.

Ryan Ross and I divide the work on the unit's manuscript holdings and often he puts in more time on particular collections than I do. I handle the contacts and correspondence that are involved in acquiring the material, in updating the donors on its handling, and in answering questions from researchers about particular collections. I also review and revise information about each collection for the web. In this way, I attempt not only to achieve editorial consistency but also to make the coverage of each collection reflect its relative importance.

Beyond this work together, Ryan has spent additional time with three collections so as to go beyond the entries for them in Archon. His first project led to *The Early Illinois Newspapers and Job Printers: The Terence A. Tanner Collection* (Occasional Paper No. 216, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, 2011). He also has written papers on the Richard

Phillips and the John Mason Peck collections that have been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Illinois History*.

Book Collections

The unit is a library in the ordinary sense of the word as well as a manuscript repository. As a library, it is engaged with the whole spectrum of book-related work that dominates the activities of most traditional units. Such work requires less time than do manuscript collections, although the acquisition and cataloging of specialized publications in the fields of Illinois history and Lincoln studies often involve special attention.

Research Use

It is a truth universally acknowledged that on-site use of most units of the Library has declined in recent years. The Illinois History and Lincoln Collections is no exception. However, this drop has been partly offset by the increase of phone, postal, and e-mail questions. In effect, such questions often shift the research from the remote user to Ryan or me.

I keep a log that documents in detail my time at the Library and my work each day with individual users and collections. It would take several pages of this report to summarize this log, but it is enough to note that it reflects the variety and the unpredictability that sustain my interest in the work. By its nature, such documentation is unlike the statistical reports of larger units which circulate their catalog collections and monitor database usage.

Visibility of the Unit

For more than five years, ever since the unit was removed from Library 346, it has lacked adequate directional signage. Both before September 2009, when it occupied the Lincoln Room on the fourth floor, and since then, when it has been located in the Latin American space on the third floor, the name of the unit has appeared only on a photocopied sign on the door. That sign can hardly be seen from the hallway when the unit, and that door, is open.

In response to many written and verbal requests for more visible signage, the director of facilities has talked about having it installed, both outside the door of Library 322 and at the nearby intersection of the east-west and north-south hallways. However, nothing has happened.

Ever since 2005, I have also asked that one of the several empty and unused glass exhibit cases that are affixed to hallway walls elsewhere in the Library be remounted in the hallway outside Library 322, for the display of unit materials. Again, this request has been ignored.

Closing Remarks

The objectives of the unit are clear. They will provide the guidelines for me and Ryan Ross in 2012-2013, as they did in 2011-2012. During the past year, we have thus moved ahead without taking the time, or becoming a concern, of the division coordinator, the librarians for services and collections, or the University Librarian. My only request at this time is to engage the Administration in making the unit more visible through hallway signs and display cases.

September 4, 2012

John Hoffmann