

The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections

and Research in Business History

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N.U.C.M.C., usually written without periods between the initials and pronounced nuckmuck, is short for National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections and that is short for a program designed to bring under bibliographic control all the manuscript collections held in American Repositories.

The NUCMC program was the result of the expressed need of scholars to locate source materials. The Library of Congress with the support of members of several committees of the historical associations, asked the Council on Library Resources, Inc., in 1958, to finance the program, which it did with a grant of \$200,000, later supplemented with additional grants totaling \$170,565. Organized and conducted by the Library of Congress the program, after Council support for six years, became, in mid-1964, one of the many services to the scholarly world provided through regularly appropriated funds.

The plan is a cooperative one. Public or quasi-public repositories, i.e., libraries, historical societies, museums, and the like, whose manuscript holdings are regularly available to qualified researchers, are invited, indeed urged, to report their holdings to the NUCMC office in the Library of Congress. The reports consist of detailed descriptions and resumes of each discrete collection. Use of the word "discrete" was dropped from the data sheet used by repositories to report each manuscript collection, however, after we began getting replies such as, "This collection has no indiscreet manuscripts in it." The data sheet, by the way, was designed with great care to bring out essential details that researchers like to know about a collection. The revised form has eleven questions, not all of which are applicable to every collection, but each description must include: (1) the name of the collection, (2) the inclusive dates in which the papers were written, (3) the size or extent of the collection, preferably by the number of linear feet of shelf space covered, or the number of items in the collection, and (4) a listing of the kinds of manuscripts, that is, letters, memoranda, diaries, accounts, logbooks, drafts, etc., and a one paragraph description of their subject content.

These reports are cataloged, in the NUCMC office, following prescribed rules. The prepared entries are thoroughly indexed, and are published in a catalog that forms one part of the li-

brary's National Union Catalog series. The volumes are not numbered but carry the years in which the catalog entries were prepared. The first volume begins with entries prepared in 1959 and it was published in 1962. The 1966 volume, the fifth, was published in November, 1967.

The indexing has twice been cumulative, that is, the index to the first two volumes was cumulated in the second volume; the index to the next three volumes kept cumulating in each volume so that the index in the fifth volume provides the second cumulation. We are beginning a new, or third, cumulation with the 1967 catalog now in preparation for publication in the fall of 1968.

I stress this matter of the index because it provides the only key to the descriptions of the collections, since the entries are arranged by a sequential number assigned when the entries are printed on cards at the Library of Congress. The number consists of the symbol MS, the last two digits of the year in which the card was printed, and a serial number. The cards, by the way, are not for general sale but 20 complimentary copies are furnished to the repository for each of the collections cataloged from its reports.

In addition to the general index to the collections, which I shall describe later, there are several other devices to assist the researcher. Each volume carries what is labeled a "repository index," although it is more properly an arranged list. The Repository Index lists the collections alphabetically, by short title, under the name of the holding repository. This list also cumulates and is placed at the end of the volume. It is followed by two lists concerned with reproductions of manuscripts. The first is "Holders of duplicates reported by other repositories." For example, if the University of Illinois Archives has a microfilm copy of a collection of manuscripts in the Chicago Historical Society, this list will have an entry for the University of Illinois Archives and the number under which the Chicago Historical Society's collection is described. The second is: "Holders of original materials reported by repositories holding reproductions." In general the repositories listed here are located in foreign countries, or they are repositories, such as churches, which are not equipped to service the originals.

In the front of each volume, except the first, there is a list, by State, of the names of all the repositories participating in the program. With the publication of the fifth and most recent volume, a total of 616 repositories had contributed and 18,417 collections had been described. All 50 states plus the District of Columbia, and the Canal Zone are represented by participating repositories. The 1967 volume is going to add a repository in Puerto Rico.

The repositories range from tiny historical societies, through small, middle-size, and large public libraries, colleges and universities, to the very large research repositories. The repositories must be American, i.e., the United States and its possessions, but their holdings may cover any geographic area. The subjects of the manuscript collections reported in the NUCMC

range from persons and topics of purely local interest to those of national and international importance; from miniscule home industry to national and world-wide business networks; from bird-watching to the most sophisticated modern sciences, and from the Renaissance to the present. One collection of very early materials consists of correspondence and business records of the House of the Medici, ca. 1400-1600. (MS 60-1736)

Those persons describing collections are, naturally, selective and subjective. I have been told that when, usually accidentally, two people have described the subject matter of the same collection, the results are quite different. Most manuscript curators, unhappily from your point of view perhaps, have a political history background and they will emphasize the political aspects of collections, whereas, economic historians, would see, and make special note of, economic aspects. We accept the reports presented to us, if they meet minimum standards; although we may question repositories in order to clarify information. Usually, however, we merely edit for uniformity of style, but I believe that, on the whole, you will find the descriptions fair and adequate.

The general index is the key by which scholars can unlock a wealth of long-hidden primary sources for study and research. We are hopeful that use of the NUCMC will present fresh and exciting topics for Ph.D. dissertations, leaving behind in the dust the topics that are worn-out and over-worked in all the disciplines. One of my colleagues suggests that if we call the catalog NUCMC we could call users of the catalog NUCMCrakers (nuck-muckrakers).

The index, in one alphabet, lists all personal names, all corporate names, all local and state names, all named historical periods, and all of the subjects, topics, occupations, businesses, and the like, that are mentioned in the descriptions of the collections. A pattern of multiple index entries provides an approach to material in a variety of ways. For example, suppose you want to study blacksmithing. You will find the heading "Blacksmithing" in the index and it will be subdivided by states. If you want to limit the study to blacksmithing in South Carolina, you can also find references under "South Carolina--Blacksmithing." If you want to find out about blacksmithing in Columbia, S.C., you can look under "Columbia;" and if you are only interested in the blacksmithing firm of Ferguson and Miller of Columbia, S.C., you can look in the index under the firm name. In the following example four index entries refer to the same catalog number: MS 66-529.

This entry, a fairly simple one, reads:

Ferguson and Miller, Columbia, S.C.

Records, 1814-73. 260 items.

In the University of South Carolina,
South Caroliniana Library.

Bills, invoices, and other business papers
of a blacksmith shop.

The catalog entries follow the pattern illustrated by the above example. The first line states the name of the person,

family, or body around which the collection is formed. The majority of main entries are under personal names and family names, with a smaller number under names of associations, institutions, business firms, government agencies, and the like.

The second line gives the title or name of the collection, usually a one-word description of the kind of papers, followed by the inclusive dates when the papers were written. The last segment of the second line displays the size of the collection.

The third line provides the clue to the location of the collection. Users of the NUCMC who want further information about the collection, or want to examine the collection, must approach the repository named in this line. The NUCMC is only the middleman.

A fourth line is reserved for statements about reproduction if the collection contains copies of manuscripts. Some samples of this note are: "In part, transcripts (typewritten), photocopies, and microfilms from various sources;" "In part, microfilm copies made in 1961 from originals in the possession of E. I. Deasey, Mobile, Ala.;" and, "In part, photocopies of documents in London Public Record Office, British Museum, Guildhall Library, Bodleian Library, and other sources "

I should like at this point to mention another of the Library of Congress' special services to scholars--a program established to identify photocopying projects completed, under way, or planned; to record the location of copies of foreign manuscripts or documentary collections in this country; and to assist American institutions in learning which collections can be photocopied in foreign libraries and archives. Inquiries and reports should be directed to the Head of the Center for the Coordination of Foreign Manuscript Copying, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., 20540.

Bibliographic, access, and provenance notes are given as the last items of the entry, when applicable and when supplied by the reporters. There are usually self-explanatory and need no further explanation.

The paragraph that we call the "scope and contents note" contains the meat of the entry. When a collection is formed around a particular person this note usually begins with a statement of his occupation or field of activity and his place of residence or business. It is followed by a list of the types of papers, e.g., correspondence, diaries, accounts, ledgers, and the like, and the subjects, with dates, of the larger groups of materials in the collection, selections of specific events, topics, and historical periods covered, and the names of persons, families, and corporate bodies represented significantly in the collection.

It is this paragraph that furnishes the reader with the resume of the contents of the collection. It is, of course, very short, and as I said before, selective and subjective. The experienced researcher knows that, in addition to searching for a specific name or topic, he must use his imagination and ingenuity and read between the lines. He knows he must look in the catalog's index for related topics, and he must particularly

look for the names of persons associated with the one person he is interested in, because their papers may have material by or about his man, even if the reporter did not name him.

The sample entry above was of a very homely and a very dated business, but you will find in the catalog references to all kinds of businesses and the people engaged in them. Most collections, it is true, are centered around persons and families, but we find fallacious the prevalent idea that manuscript collections chiefly concern politics, the Civil War, and social and family life. A casual survey of the collections of three repositories included in the 1966 catalog shows that of 175 collections 66 describe a variety of business activities as part, if not all, of the content of the collections. The three were the New-York Historical Society, the South Caroliniana Library of the University of South Carolina, and the Library of Congress. It is not surprising that the Library of Congress' collections contain the smallest proportion of reports of business affairs. Nevertheless an article by John McDonough, of the Library's Manuscript Division, prepared for a banking journal, about "Manuscript Materials on the History of Finance and Banking in the Library of Congress" concludes with a statement that applies equally well to business materials and to collections in other repositories: "Nearly every collection has its financial file, or at least a folder or two, of papers illustrating involvements in business which may be large or petty, national or local."*

You will understand now that my job is to conduct the NUCMC program and not to work with the manuscripts of the Library of Congress. The Manuscripts Section in the Descriptive Cataloging Division is responsible for soliciting and receiving reports of manuscript collections held in American repositories, and for editing, indexing, and publishing the reports for the use of scholars everywhere. We have been urged to make the coverage as comprehensive as possible. To date we have cataloged some 20,660 collections in 660 repositories. Ten years ago it was estimated that there were 25,000 to 30,000 collections in some 1,500 repositories. We have no information today that is more accurate. We still receive more than 2,000 reports each year, repositories continue to report, and repositories new to the program begin to participate each month.

Reporting of large holdings is time-consuming for repositories; some have finished reporting the bulk of their collections; some, such as the Library of Congress, report, at intervals, as many collections as they can; some like the Houghton Library at Harvard have not been able to start reporting holdings acquired before our program began.

You may be interested to know that the Manuscript division in the Library of Congress has reported 850 of its estimated 3,500 collections, which contain more than 30 million separate

*A portion of this paper was published in the Washington, D. C., October 6-9, pre-convention issue of Banking; Journal of the American Bankers Association, October 1963, v. 56, no. 4, pp. 199-200.

manuscripts. You will be more particularly interested to know that Harvard's Graduate School of Business Administration was one of the first to report all of its holdings, and to continue reporting new accessions. The collections in Stanford University's Jackson Library of its Graduate School of Business will be reported in the 1967 catalog, now in preparation. Holdings of The Archives of Industrial Society of the University of Pittsburgh have been reported. Syracuse University has reported, along with other business records, its 2,000 feet of records (1828-1960) of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad Company (MS 66-209).

My final words are: consult the NUCMC, and urge your favorite repositories to contribute reports.