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# Rare and Valuable Documents: Identification, Preservation, and Security Issues

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The documents librarian has moved into a new era of responsibility. Factors such as the value to collectors who prize maps, plates, and content; acid/brittle paper; scarcity of complete collections or even individual documents; general abuse; and cost of replacement have combined to force documents librarians into a new role, that of conservators of their collections. There are three aspects to that role: becoming knowledgeable about "rare and valuable documents," learning preservation planning and skills, and seeing to the security of the collection.

The big question becomes: where do you start? With the limited resources of most libraries, the identification of rare and valuable documents in the collection becomes imperative in determining how to allocate resources for preservation and security. Generally speaking, these are documents that have "intrinsic value." That is, they have qualities or characteristics that make the original record have permanent value. These can be age, aesthetic or artistic quality (having maps, plates, photographs, etc.); value for use in exhibits (in some way the original has greater impact than a copy); general and substantial public interest because of direct association with significant people, places, things, issues or events; and significance as documentation for the legal basis of institutions or formulation of policy at the highest executive levels. Those most familiar with valuable and rare documents are reluctant to prepare so-called "hit lists;" and librarians are usually the last to know of such value, finding out only after their materials have been stolen or mutilated. Nonetheless, there are places to start.

The Library of Congress designates anything published prior to 1801 as material to be cataloged as rare books. If you own anything from prior to that date, you should consider placing it in your rare books or special collections. The

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Rare Books and Manuscripts (RBMS) Ad Hoc Committee for Developing Transfer Guidelines published its recommendations in "Guidelines on the Selection of General Collection Materials for Transfer to Special Collections."<sup>1</sup> These will be helpful in determining what should be removed from the regular collection.

For anything published after 1801 and up to 1909, the most practical approach is to take the "1909 Checklist"<sup>2</sup> and assume that any publication in a library's collection that is also in the *Checklist* is worthy of further consideration. This recommendation is made for several reasons. First, the National Archives does not own those publications marked in the *Checklist* with an asterisk (\* = not in the Public Documents Library). A library owning one of these should protect it. Second, the Congressional Information Service (CIS, Inc.) during the past year searched for copies of non-Serial Set materials in the 1909 *Checklist* for a microfiche project. With just two departments surveyed, Commerce and Treasury, CIS has a long list of publications it has been unable to locate. Many of these are leaflets, regulations, and circulars. They may not sound like much, but they are integral parts of our governmental history. Third, the material in the latter half of the *Checklist*, from the 1860s on, is from a period when the paper manufacturing process left residual acids, causing the paper to become brittle and disintegrate. Finally, the cost of replacement with microform products is very high, and the reproduction may not always be as legible as the original.

Several Superintendent of Documents (SuDoc) classification numbers in the *Checklist* can be immediately targeted for special consideration either as transfer items or conservation projects that might place them in special boxes. Anything in the Z section covering the first fourteen Congresses should be considered rare and valuable. Other sections are: N 1.8: Explorations and surveys; S 6: International exhibitions and expo-

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sitions; W 7.5: Explorations and surveys; and W 7.14: Explorations and surveys for the railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. Many of these reports also appear in the Serial Set. A bibliography compiled by Adelaide R. Hasse includes additional exploration publications.<sup>3</sup> She includes *Geological Survey, Smithsonian, Coast & Geodetic Survey, and Ethnology Bureau*, among others. Another Hasse bibliography, *Index to United States Documents Relating to Foreign Affairs, 1828-1861*<sup>4</sup> includes more publications for your review. Both have been reprinted.

Obviously, not all the materials in the *Checklist* may be scarce or valuable enough to merit special treatment. They are all worthy, however, of placement in a more secure area than open stacks. If they have been in open stacks, yours may be one of the unlucky libraries that has lost some of its most valuable materials.

The Serial Set and American State Papers are examples of sets you will want to secure and keep in the best condition possible. The maps in the Serial Set have been prized by thieves for years. Donna Knoepf of the University of Kansas is assembling a duplicate Serial Set collection for the purpose of removing and encapsulating all the maps. She has more than 12,000 maps, and the set is not complete. The final part of her project will be the preparation of an index to be published by Oryx Press.

Plates and lithographs also make a publication valuable. As David Heisser of Tufts University noted at a 1988 ALA GODORT/MAGERT/RBMS workshop,<sup>5</sup> the U.S. Coast Survey annual report of 1854 includes one of the earliest known engravings by Whistler.

Many famous scientists began their significant work with reports they wrote for early exploring expeditions. Clarence King's *Systematic Geology* is a classic, and the observations of James Dwight Dana during the Wilkes Expedition laid the groundwork for the modern plate-tectonics theory of the movement of the earth's crust. Using categories is another way of searching for important and valuable documents. We can take the category of scientific and technical discoveries right into the twentieth century. The patent papers of Thomas Edison, the Manhattan Project, and nuclear energy publications in the 1950s will require preservation for future generations. Also, include U.S. Geological Survey publications describing the discovery of natural resources or phenomena such as major earthquakes within the mainland United States. Political events such as the U.S. Senate's McCarthy hearings and Vice President Spiro T. Agnew's resignation, and controversial reports

such as that of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy will also be valuable.

Another approach to evaluate your collection for preservation and security purposes is to examine the categories of publications whose enduring value is such that libraries are now requesting that they be printed on permanent/alkaline paper. Under the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standard, government-sponsored research studies, almanacs, census data, and survey maps qualify. Because of their legal importance, additional categories were recommended in an article, "Why GPO Should Use Alkaline Paper,"<sup>6</sup> publications mandated by law; annual reports; legislative history sources (House and Senate hearings, reports and documents); permanent cumulations of judicial, legislative or administrative decisions; orders and opinions; rules and regulations; year-books and annual statistical reports; treaty series; advisory committee reports; proceedings of conferences, institutes and advisory boards; and reports, decisions, and conferences concerning domestic and international arbitration.

Finally, give special consideration to materials pertaining to your own state or locale. If you can encapsulate only a few maps, select those of your state. Select reports and other volumes on the same basis, and do not forget the small circulars. When the Michigan State Archives was asked to update a pamphlet to be issued with a reprint of an early Great Lakes shipwrecks map, the Detroit Public Library had the only copy of the original they could locate.

Searching for valuable items in the collection can best be done with standard tools, such as *American Book Prices Current*, *Bookman's Price Index*, and Mandeville's *Used Book Price Guide*. These will give you a range of prices and some idea of those items which are highly collectable. Search both under U.S. agency names and the personal names involved since there is no consistency in the way in which publications are listed. Ask for assistance from your library's rare books specialist or a reputable rare books dealer. If your library does not own any of the pricing guides, the dealer is sure to have at least one of them, and probably receives sale catalogs from other dealers.

Conservation considerations are your next concern. These should be geared to preventing deterioration of your library's collection. Provide the proper storage environment for your materials. Year-round temperature and humidity control with proper air circulation and limited exposure to ultraviolet light help protect materials. High temperature and humidity encourage pests and mildew, while too little humidity causes paper

to dry out. According to Robert Milevski, Head of Preservation at the Milton Eisenhower Library, the recommended temperature is in the 65-75° range, and humidity for paper should be 40-55 percent or lower. Microforms need even lower humidity, 35 percent with a 5 percent plus or minus leeway. Dust and dirt damage materials, so good housekeeping practices are important: cleanliness, no food and drink, and no smoking. Be sure to clean books and shelves on a regular schedule and inspect for mold. Shelving can also cause damage, particularly when books are jammed or fall open. On ribbed shelving, create a flat surface by lining with acid-free board. Develop and implement policies for the proper use and handling of materials for both staff and patrons. These can be as simple as how to remove books from the shelves and replace properly or how to photocopy without damaging the material. Badly deteriorated items can be considered for microfilm or preservation photocopying. Learn good repair techniques. There are many books, videos, and workshops to assist you. These are practices that you can apply to your entire collection.

For the care and repair of your valuable and rare items, you need expertise. If you do not have a preservationist on your staff, consult one of the regional centers such as SOLINET or the Northeast Preservation Center. The best training is hands on, and you do not want to make mistakes on your most valuable items.

Financial resources, space, and staffing arrangements influence the security of your collection. An area with controlled access will help protect your collection, but having staff with their eyes open and aware is also vital. Thieves have included well-known faculty and researchers. Know how many maps or volumes a patron has and be sure all are returned. If the maps in a rare document are counted before you give them to a patron, doing a quick check at return can protect against losses.

This is only a brief overview of problems and solutions pertaining to rare and valuable documents. One of the areas I have omitted is disaster planning, which should be a concern for all librarians and not just documents people. You will find titles that may be helpful in the Resource Bibliography at the end of the article. As part of the current efforts to address these issues, the Government Documents Round Table (GODORT) of the American Library Association, ALA's Map and Geography Round Table (MAGERT), the Government Publication Librarians of New England (GPLNE), GODORT of MICHIGAN and the documents librarians of Ohio are donating funds to

prepare an in-depth packet of information for every depository library this year.

## References

1. RBMS Ad Hoc Committee for Developing Transfer Guidelines, Chair, Samuel E. Streit. "Guidelines on the Selection of General Collection Materials for Transfer to Special Collections." *College and Research Libraries News* 46 (July/August 1985): 349-352.
2. *Checklist of United States Public Documents, 1789-1909*. Washington: GPO, 1911.
3. Adelaide R. Hasse. *Reports of Explorations Printed in the Documents of the United States Government: a Contribution Toward a Bibliography*. Washington: GPO, 1899.
4. Adelaide R. Hasse. *Index to United States Documents Relating to Foreign Affairs, 1828-1861* (Publication 185, pts. 1-3), Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1:914-21.
5. David Heisser. "Federal Documents as Rare Books." *Documents to the People (DTTP)*, 16, 4: December 1988.
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## Resource Bibliography

### Additional historical sources.

Benjamin Perley Poore. *Descriptive Catalogue of the Government Publications of the United States, Sept. 5, 1774-March 4, 1881*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885. (48th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Miscellaneous Document 67) (Serial Set Volume 2268). Also reprinted editions.

Adelaide Rosalie Hasse. *Bibliography of United States Public Documents Relating to Inter-oceanic Communications Nicaragua, Isthmus of Panama, Isthmus of Tehuantepec, etc.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899.

United States. Department of the Interior. Division of Documents. *Comprehensive Index to the Publications of the United States Government, 1881-1893*, by John G. Ames. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905.

### General Bibliographic Search Tools.

*A Checklist of American Imprints:*  
 1820-1829, Shoemaker, Richard H.  
 1820-1829, Cooper, M. Frances (title index)  
 1830, Cooper, Gayle  
 1831, Bruntjen, Scott and Carol Bruntjen  
 1830-1839, Rinderknecht, Carol (also title index)  
 Ralph R. Shaw. *American Bibliography, a Preliminary Checklist for 1801-1819*. NY: Scarecrow, 1958-66.

### Specialized Bibliographic Search Tools.

Daniel Carl Haskell. *The United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842, and Its Publications, 1844-1874; a Bibliography*. NY: New York



Public Library, 1942.

Katherine Karpenstein. *Illustrations of the West in Congressional Documents, 1843-1863*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1953. (ACRL Microcard Series #6) (not an extensive list, but provides some useful background).

Harold R. Pestana. *Bibliography of Congressional Geology*. NY: Hafner, 1972.

Charles A. Seavey. "Bibliographic Addendum to Carl Wheat's Mapping the Transmississippi West," *Special Libraries Assoc. Geography and Map Division Bulletin* 105 (September 1976): 12-19.

Charles A. Seavey. "Maps of the American State Papers," *Special Libraries Assoc. Geography and Map Division Bulletin* 107 (March 1977): and 110 (December 1977): 3-11.

Charles A. Seavey. "Wheat to Serial Set Conversion," *Special Libraries Assoc. Geography and Map Division Bulletin* 108 (June 1977): 37-40.

Henry Raup Wagner. *The Plains & the Rockies: a Critical Bibliography of Exploration, Adventure, and Travel in the American West, 1800-1865*. Various editions.

#### Preservation.

Pamela W. Darling with Duane E. Webster. *Preservation Planning Program: An Assisted Self-Study Manual for Libraries*. Washington: ARL, 1987.

Pamela W. Darling and Wesley Boomgaarden, compilers. *Preservation Planning Program: Resource Notebook*. Washington: ARL, 1987. (For use with Darling's Manual)

Lisa L. Fox. *A Core Collection in Preservation*. Chicago: Resources and Technical Services Div., American Library Assoc., 1988. (This comprehensive bibliography includes preservation planning, emergency preparedness, conservation techniques, and general works and bibliographies, and includes materials for small libraries.)

Jane Greenfield. *Books: Their Care and Repair*. NY: H.W. Wilson, 1983.

Robert J. Milevski. *Book Repair Manual*. Carbondale, IL: Illinois Cooperative Conservation Program, 1984.

Carolyn Clark Morrow and Carole Dyal. *Conservation Treatment Procedures: a Manual of Step-by-Step Procedures for the Maintenance and Repair of Library Materials*. 2nd ed. Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1986. (Southeastern Library Network, Inc. [SOLINET] recommends this for institutions that can afford only one repair manual.)

#### Security Issues.

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John Morris. "Book Theft: Guidelines for Library Staff." *The Library Disaster Preparedness Handbook*. Chicago: ALA, 1986.

Harold Otness. "Going Plating: Stealing Maps from Libraries." *Western Assn. of Map Libraries Information Bull.* 19, 4, August 1988.

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