

## THE MANUSCRIPT DEPARTMENT OF DUKE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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There is less uniformity in the particular holdings (but not in the types of holdings) of manuscript depositories than is usually true of book collections. When one walks into a library, be it a research library of a large university, a college library, or a public library, he is able to anticipate many of the books he will find on the shelves. If he knows anything at all about manuscript collections, he knows that they often consist of the private papers of individuals—their correspondence, legal documents, bills and receipts, miscellany, possibly a diary or journal, and often manuscripts of authors' writings; account books; letter books; scrapbooks; ships' logs; military records; records of governmental units, educational institutions, churches, societies, courts, banks, and business concerns. One of the main problems in using such a collection is determining the holdings. One should not depend solely upon printed guides and checklists, for even the best of these are likely out of date by the time they are printed. For instance, the *Guide to the Manuscript Collections in the Duke University Library*, prepared by Nannie M. Tilley and Noma Lee Goodwin, went to press in 1943, but due to delay during the war did not come out until 1947.

Many collections of the manuscripts records of an individual have been scattered to the four winds, and stamp collectors and autograph dealers are not the only ones to blame. Descendants who put the interest of mammon above that of scholarship have been known to break up collections and sell pieces to the highest bidder. Personal and family pride are often responsible for papers being saved but, at times, also accounts for their being dispersed. People sometimes give away individual items from their collections, or their children divide the papers among themselves. The more famous the man, the more likely his papers are to be scattered. If he is a Napoleon or a Washington, they will probably end up on several continents and in depositories and private libraries all over this country. Furthermore, the outgoing correspondence of a prominent man is naturally to be found among the papers of many of his contemporaries.

The beginnings of the Duke Manuscript Department date back to 1894 when the Trinity College Historical Society, under the leadership of John Spencer Bassett, started a collection of manuscripts. This work was continued after Dr. Bassett left Trinity College by Professor William Kenneth Boyd, then the guiding spirit of the Society. Thanks to his foresight and industry and the generosity of William W. Flowers, a sizeable group of manuscripts had been collected by 1931. In that year the department was formally organized with Dr. Ruth Ketring Nuernberger as curator. Without previous experience in handling manuscripts, with an inadequate staff, and without any expert advice, Dr. Nuernberger took this mass of unaccessioned and uncataloged material, along with a constant flow of new acquisitions, and devised a sound system of arranging and cataloging it.

The holdings of the Manuscript Department now number well over two million unbound items and approximately eight thousand manuscript volumes. By far the larger portion of these are part of the George Washington Memorial Collection of Southern

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Americana. These materials have either been purchased with money from the Flowers Fund or secured as gifts through the efforts of the directors of the Flowers Collection.

The majority of the papers start about 1820 and come down to the present day, but there are several significant collections and many single items of the Colonial and Revolutionary periods. The states most prominently represented are North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia, and many of the most famous names in American history appear among the autographs. The subjects covered are numberless, but those about which there is the greatest amount of information are politics and government, on both the state and national level; agriculture, plantation life, and slavery; merchandising, shipping, banking, and lumbering; internal improvements; conservation; labor; religious denominations, especially the Methodist Church in post-bellum North Carolina; southern literature; the various wars in which the United States has been involved; and Reconstruction. The records of the Civil War are very extensive. They consist of thousands of manuscripts of civil and military leaders, principally Confederate (Jefferson Davis, Alexander H. Stephens, Robert E. Lee, and "Stonewall" Jackson, to name a few), and hundreds of letters and diaries by Confederate and Union soldiers. The southern writers who are most prolifically represented are Paul Hamilton Hayne, Thomas Nelson Page, Thomas Holley Chivers, John Esten Cooke, William Gilmore Simms, Augustin Louis Taveau, and Margaret Junkin Preston.

Most of the larger southern collections fall mainly in the twentieth century. They include the papers of several United States Senators and Congressmen, prominent newspaper editors and churchmen, a well known general, a leading conservationist, and labor organizations in the Southeast.

Among the non-Flowers materials are quite a few collections of British literary, political, and ecclesiastical figures and some collections in foreign languages, principally Spanish, French, and Greek. The more notable non-Flowers collections include the papers of the Socialist Party of America, Walt Whitman, William Michael and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Joseph Conrad, Alfred Tennyson, and William Wilberforce; medieval manuscripts, the most important of which are fifteen Greek New Testament manuscripts; and Peruvian collection (1580-1872). The medieval manuscripts and Walt Whitman's papers are housed as special collections in the Rare Book Room. Duke Library is now regarded as the official depository for the inactive files of the Socialist Party of America, and the collection here comprises approximately 125,000 manuscripts and hundreds of pamphlets and broadsides.

The aims of the Manuscript Department have continued to be the preservation, processing, and servicing of papers in such a way that they will be of maximum use to researchers. There are no restrictions on the use of manuscripts except those imposed by the donors of several collections.

The collections vary in size from one item to approximately 670,000, but with manuscripts, as with everything else, it is quality that counts. A few highly informative letters can have more research value than hundreds of other papers. Today this department is so widely known that it is visited by scholars from all over the United States and occasionally from abroad.