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The Collecting of War Agency Material at Harvard

THE innumerable publications issued by the temporary agencies of the Federal Government during and just prior to the Second World War illustrate a problem which arises for the Harvard University Library in nearly every field of research: that of fixing upon some one unit of the library group the primary collecting responsibility.

This responsibility involves an obligation to explore the field, to discover out-of-the-way items, to develop useful contacts with individuals and groups. It presupposes the ability to organize the material and to provide any necessary reference assistance. It can be assumed only after many factors have been considered: the financial demands it imposes and the individual library's capacity to meet them; the existence in one or another library of a prior collection and of cognate materials; the research interests centering in each library; the existence of advantageous contacts to aid in exploiting the collecting possibilities.

During the past year this problem arose with regard to a number of offices in which several libraries were interested — the College Library (Widener), the Business School Library (Baker), the Library of the Graduate School of Public Administration (Littauer), and the Law School Library. The agencies concerned were the Office of Price Administration, the Office of Defense Transportation, the War Shipping Administration, the War Production Board, and the National War Labor Board.

For these groups, as for most federal agencies, the annual, monthly, and quarterly reports, the periodicals, regulations, and similar items of interest and importance to the public were included in the 'depository' material which the College Library receives regularly from the Superintendent of Documents. It was recognized that most of these publications would have to be retained in Widener, which has the central collection for undergraduates, as well as much research material in economics, government, and the other social sciences, to which the items in question form a valuable addition. The discussion involved more particularly the 'non-depository' and ephemeral material: press releases, policy statements, statistics, instructions, often issued for internal use and valuable chiefly for research purposes.

Until mailing lists were sharply curtailed in 1942 and 1943, all the libraries had collected extensively from war agencies. When publications became harder to obtain, the building of a single adequate set for each agency seemed desirable, with duplication in other libraries limited to indispensable items. After several conferences, the following arrangements were made:

The Baker Library accepted primary responsibility for material emanating from the War Shipping Administration and the War Production Board. These two agencies fall well within Baker's economic and business interests, and for the former a considerable file already existed there. Some duplication was expected in the Lit-

tauer Library because of the economic information contained in publications of these two units.

The Littauer Library assumed the responsibility for the National War Labor Board and the Office of Price Administration. The publications of the first logically go into the Industrial Relations Library in the Littauer Center, and the efforts of Professor S. H. Slichter, Dr John T. Dunlop, and Mr James Healey, all of whom are associated with the Trade Union Fellowship programme in the Littauer Center, have immensely strengthened this collection.

The Office of Price Administration has a twofold aspect: as one of the largest and most powerful regulatory and administrative agencies ever created; and as a source of extremely valuable economic information. It was decided that the needs of the Baker Library could be satisfied, especially on the latter score, by duplication of certain publications, provided that a more exhaustive collection were available elsewhere in the University. Both the administrative activities and the economic researches of the agency were considered highly pertinent to the Littauer Library, and it therefore has had the primary collecting responsibility. Negotiations to arrange a transfer of certain files from the Boston regional office of OPA have been

initiated, and much valuable research material should result.

A large quantity of important research material from the Office of Defense Transportation was received by the Littauer Library from Mr Henry McCarthy, '27, in 1945. Upon this foundation, it was agreed that the Littauer Library could appropriately endeavor to form as complete a collection as possible of the literature of this agency, for the use of the entire University.

For all these offices the Law Library indicated its interest in legal and administrative documents, and it is receiving many of these by transfer and through its own efforts. There is nothing in the agreement to prevent any library from duplicating what is collected elsewhere, should necessity arise, and some such duplication is inevitable and desirable.

The great value of arrangements of this kind lies in the assurance that somewhere a research collection is being built for each agency, available to the whole University. Every librarian has a criterion for acquisition when specific items come before him. Such agreements are constantly being evolved to guide the Harvard libraries toward the most effective use of their resources.

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