ARRANGING AND CATALOGUING MANUSCRIPTS IN THE WILLIAM L. CLEMENTS LIBRARY

Introduction

THE method of arranging and cataloguing manuscripts[1] in the William L. Clements Library has been determined by certain conditions peculiar to rare-book libraries as a class and to this library in particular. These conditions must be understood before that method can be discussed without tangent explanations.

The first determining factor, naturally, is the type of material housed in the Manuscript Division of the Clements Library. The collection is relatively small, numbering about 120,000 letters and documents. The great bulk of the material consists of the papers, public and private, of political and military figures of the century between 1740 and 1840 in America and England. Whether they constitute archives or historical manuscripts will not be argued here.

Secondly, as suggested at the outset, the Clements Library may be classed as a semipublic institution belonging to the state. Its contents, therefore, are state property, and the first duty of the curator of manuscripts is towards his material: to preserve it from Blades' "enemies of books"—fire, water, heat, dust, vermin, and careless readers—and to keep it in its original or some other logical order. His second duty is to help readers by cataloguing the material and publicizing it. He has other duties as well, but these two rank in the order just stated.

A third factor is the type of reader which the Clements Library was founded to serve. The ideas of its donor were definite in this respect. Users of the books, manuscripts, and maps were to be scholars, not the lay public; further, these scholars were to be engaged upon some research project of sufficient importance to justify the wear on the source material used. Thus, for instance, a person seeking genealogical data is not encouraged, since he must handle valuable and fragile records in obtaining information which is of little importance or interest outside of his own family. Likewise, many graduate stu-

[1] American usage is followed in the meaning of this word. That is, "manuscripts" refers to all kinds of written (not printed or engraved) material regardless of date. "Documents," the European generic term, here means a particular type of manuscript, as distinguished from a letter, such as a contract, deed, will, commission, warrant, resolution, law, etc.

dents in the University are not permitted to use the Clements Library in preparation of their theses, because they usually cover historical ground which has been gone over before and therefore can use material already published. At times this is a difficult idea to present tactfully to inquirers, due in the main to their familiarity with but one kind of library—the public library. Reasons for this sanctity have been set forth by the director of the Clements Library in an essay on book collecting.[2]

Qualified readers are not expected to begin their research at the Clements Library. They must have exhausted secondary sources in their particular field before asking for admission to this library. It follows that they will know the *dramatis personae* of their subject. This entirely reasonable assumption has a most important bearing on the cataloguing, as almost all entries are under names of persons.

A fourth determinant is the conditions under which the manuscripts are used. The curator's desk, the card catalogues, the study tables, and the manuscripts are all in adjoining rooms, which means that the readers are free to inspect the collections through the glass-doored cases; and, when working, they are under the surveillance of the curator, who is there to answer questions as well as to watch the handling of the papers.

The size and duties of the staff in charge of manuscripts cannot help but influence their arranging and cataloguing. At the Clements Library the staff consists of one person, the curator, who recently has had help from the National Youth Administration for part of the year. His other duties take up part of his time. It should be kept in mind also that the Clements Library is not a static institution, but is buying and receiving gifts steadily. With one person in charge of manuscripts, it is a real problem for him to keep up with the inflow of material. Clearly, he cannot devote himself to cataloguing in detail a particular or favorite collection while later acquisitions are left for ten or twenty years in the basement. The system used must allow for steady accomplishment in preparing the manuscripts for use.

Lastly, thirteen years' experience with other methods of arranging and cataloguing manuscripts have pointed toward the system now in use. It is an evolutionary development. Whether it is an ideal method is irrelevant to this paper. It is satisfactory for the Clements Library, that is all. In brief, it works.

[2] Randolph G. Adams, *The Whys and Wherefores of the William L. Clements Library* (Ann Arbor, 1925).

Arranging

The classification system employed in the Manuscript Division hardly deserves that phrase. The quantity of material is still so small that no call numbers are needed; all that is done is to arrange the collections on the shelves in simple order. A collection, it might be explained, may consist of letters written to or written by one man and members of his immediate family and is known by the family name; or it may consist of letters and documents relative to some event or person and is known by the name of the event or of the collector.

Briefly, the arrangement of the collections on the shelves is first geographical, then alphabetical, and then chronological.

First of all the collections are divided into two groups, according to whether the writers lived in the Eastern or Western Hemisphere. The terms we use are American (in its broadest sense, to include both continents) and European. Collections of papers of American origin are placed in locked cases in one room, and those of European origin in similar cases in an adjoining room. An archway between the two actually makes of them a single long room. If a collection of personal papers belongs to a man active in both hemispheres, such as the papers of an English politician who became a colonial governor, it is not divided, but put wholly into one division or the other. Similarly, the letters of an American minister to Spain would be kept in the American room with his other correspondence. In general the nationality of the writer determines in which room his papers shall be placed. Borderline cases are decided by asking: with which country or continent is this person usually associated?

Collections formed around an event are placed, of course, according to the location of the happening.

Within the two geographic divisions, the collections are arranged alphabetically by their names, which are always evident on the backbone of the volumes or boxes. A chronological arrangement of them has some value for the reader, but it is awkward to carry out. Ordinarily a collection covers a period of years, and it is perplexing to decide whether it should be placed according to its earliest date, its latest date, or by the years in which the material bulks largest. A subject grouping is, of course, impossible. The alphabetical arrangement is the simplest and most convenient way of serving the reader, maintaining order, and avoiding call numbers.

Perhaps this is the proper place to mention a third group of manuscripts kept separate from the American and European divisions. This is a broad, heterogeneous collection conveniently called "Miscellaneous Manuscripts." In addition to acquiring collections in which research may be done, the library acquires separate letters and documents, single items, for one of three reasons: because of the importance of the text, because the man's autograph is an appropriate one to have, or because a sample of the man's handwriting is wanted for the handwriting file, used in identifying anonymous letters. These single items are arranged chronologically and placed in folders in boxes, each one of which is labeled "Miscellaneous Manuscripts" and bears the inclusive dates of the pack within it.

The next consideration in arrangement is the disposition of the papers within each collection. The rule is that all papers are to be arranged chronologically unless (1) they came to the library handsomely bound in different order, (2) they were kept in a different order and are supplied with an index, or (3) they fall naturally into two or three geographic or topical groups. In any of these instances the old arrangement is respected and maintained. Otherwise, the chronological rule is observed, with the exception that inclosures are placed immediately after their covering letters. Envelopes precede their letters. Receipted bills, like plain bills, are placed under the date they were rendered to the debtor, if it can be found; otherwise under the date of the receipt. Undated papers are placed at the end of the month or of the year in which they are believed to have been written, if such a time can be determined, or at the end of the collection.

While the chronological arrangement often brings unrelated documents together, it has the virtue of offering the papers to the reader in the order in which they "happened," or were written. In the sense that things happening at the same time bear some relationship to one another, it is a subject grouping. Any further selection by subject matter must be and should be done by the research student, for attempts to group letters by subject or by correspondents will only produce chaos. From the curator's point of view the strict chronological arrangement is the most convenient for finding specific papers and for putting them back again in the collection with minimum risk of misplacement.

Now for the care given the loose documents after they have been arranged by date. In the past each one has been laid in a rag-paper

folder, the upper right-hand corner of which was labeled with the names of the writer and recipient and the date:

Washington, Geo.
ALS to Nath. Greene
Phila. Oct. 6, 1782

This inscription is not intended to duplicate the catalogue entry, but is an identification only. A pack of sixty to seventy of these folders was then put into a letter-box file, the back of which was covered with leather and labeled, and stood up on the shelf. A spring on the inside cover keeps the folders pressed together so that the manuscripts will not rest on their edges. On the shelves the boxes can hardly be distinguished from bound books. The Miscellaneous Manuscripts are still handled in this fashion because interpolations, which are frequent, can be made easily; while the date labels on each volume are of a temporary nature and allow of periodic change. Incomplete collections, which there is reasonable expectation of augmenting or completing some time, are also preserved in folders within boxes.

Recently the library has favored binding some of its manuscripts, as the Library of Congress has done in some instances. In this process the manuscripts are hinged, by a strip of transparent linen pasted down the left-hand margin, to sheets of white mounting paper of an all-rag content. The left side of the mounting paper, which is larger all over than the manuscript it supports, is folded over about three-quarters of an inch for saddle stitching by the binder. Notes regarding inclosures may be added on the margin of the mounting sheets. A pack of about 110 or 115, almost three inches thick, is bound into one volume and labeled on the backbone.

There are advantages and disadvantages to both methods. A three-inch volume contains about twice as many manuscripts as a three-inch box, owing to the added thickness of the folders in the latter. A breakdown of the costs of each method in our case revealed that mounting cost only half as much as boxing. Moreover the manuscripts

are protected from becoming ragged and are difficult to steal when they are bound. Photostating is not more difficult in the one instance than in the other. However, individual documents cannot be removed easily if two from the same volume are wanted for exhibition purposes. The private collector justly may object to attaching manuscripts with paste to anything, but he is not serving readers as is a library.

It would require a separate paper to enter into a full discussion of the proper method of preserving manuscripts on library shelves. The initial question whether manuscripts should be stood on edge at all or laid flat I have not mentioned because it was answered before I came to the Clements Library. The first collection purchased by Mr. Clements—the Shelburne Papers—was bound when he obtained it, and he placed the volumes on edge. For later collections of loose papers he had special boxes constructed with a spring in the cover, as mentioned above. Certainly it may be said that if manuscripts are to be placed on edge, mounting and binding is the best way of preserving them. Whether the dual policy of the Clements Library shall be continued or a new technique adopted depends chiefly on the manufacturers of library equipment. So far they have not offered equipment that is free from adverse criticism.

Backbone labels have been emphasized on purpose. Every volume on the shelf has a legible label on its backbone giving the name of the collection, the inclusive dates of the material in that particular volume, and the volume number if it is one in a series. Separately bound single items, such as a diary, a commission, or a rare letter, are appropriately labeled on the backbone also. Not only are such labels a great convenience to the curator in locating a desired volume; but in a library where the reader works surrounded by glass-doored cases, labels are of especial aid to him. A short tour of the room or rooms shows him everything the Manuscript Division possesses and permits him to find collections relating to his subject without, perhaps, ever consulting the card catalogue.

Accessioning

After a manuscript or a collection of manuscripts is paid for or accepted as a gift—that is, as soon as its title has passed to the library, it is accessioned in the curator's accessions book. This is a loose-leaf notebook of large size, its pages bearing a printed form of several columns. In the first column is space for numbers, which run consecutively through the book, each one preceded by the letter "M" to indi-

cate Manuscript Division. Every new accession receives the next available number for reference. This number is written in pencil in the corner on the back of a manuscript, if a single item comprises the accession; otherwise it is written on the inside back cover of each volume or box.

Succeeding columns in the book of accessions are headed: date of accession, description, source (person or dealer who gave or sold us the article), cost, order number (a detail of university bookkeeping), and remarks. Containing as it does information of a confidential nature, this book is kept in the curator's desk and is not for use by the reader, although the curator may consult it for him to trace the provenance of a manuscript. The book is also used by the curator in preparing his part of the director's annual report to the president.

Cataloguing

After a collection has been accessioned it is examined to see if there is to be any arrangement other than chronological. If not, the manuscripts are sorted first of all alphabetically by writer: putting all the letters by one person in a bundle or folder by themselves, keeping inclosures with their covering letters. Then notes are taken in rough cataloguing form for each bundle.

For example, in a collection that will be known as the Taylor Papers it is found that one George Jones wrote a number of the letters. The Jones letters having been gathered into one pile, they are examined and the following information culled from them: there are twenty-six letters from Jones to Taylor, dating from May 16, 1820 to October 10, 1822 and written from various places; there are five letters from Jones to John Smith within the dates April 21, 1830 and February 8, 1831, all from Philadelphia; and one letter from Jones to James Williams dated July 4, 1835 from Detroit. Three slips are made out as follows:

Jones, George
to Josiah Taylor
1820 May 16—1822 Oct. 10
26 ALsS and LsS

Jones, George
to John Smith
1830 Apr. 21—1831 Feb. 8
5 ALsS. Phila.

Jones, George
to James Williams
1835 July 4
ALS. Detroit

If the letters to a given recipient were scattered over a decade or more, the slip would contain an added notation:

1820 July 1—1833 Sept. 9
11 ALsS. None 1826-30.

The same kind of note is taken for every writer-bundle. Thus all the letters from one person to one other are indicated on a single slip.

If in one of the Jones-to-Taylor letters, Jones had inclosed a letter from a mutual friend, Mr. Blank, a slip is made out for that letter like those above, with the following note added:

Inclosed in Jones' letter of Dec. 4, 1820.

If the inclosure is a copy instead of the actual letter, "Copy," or "Cy," is written instead of "ALS."

These notes may finish the curator's work with the Jones bundle. However, the examination of the letters should be more than the cursory glance necessary to identify the signature, recipient, date, and place. Now is the time for the subject entries, if any, to be jotted down, usually on the back of the slip. To obtain this information it is necessary to scan the letter, but as a general rule it may be said that the curator's task is to read no more of the manuscript than he has to for his cataloguing purposes.

So far only personal letters have been discussed. There may be in the collection manuscripts of a legal or official nature, issuing from an office rather than a person. The same kind of slip is made out for such documents as for letters, although in many instances there will be no recipient. This is not the moment for verifying the correct form of entry for the office or officer, provided that name is missing from the document. The name of the signer or clerk should be written down, with his title if given, and a note added to indicate what the document is, whether commission, proclamation, court decree, legislative act, etc. If the document is a printed form filled in by hand, that fact is noted by a phrase.

When notes have been taken on all the writer-bundles, mounting or insertion in folders is then in order. Although the curator may not

be actively engaged in it, he must supervise the work closely. Folders can be labeled on a typewriter with an extra-wide carriage. If he does not do the labeling himself, the curator must write out the form for each manuscript to be inserted as a model for the typist. If the manuscripts are to be mounted, he must separate inclosures from their covering letters and indicate on the former in a penciled note the date of the covering letter. This note enables him to put back together the two related pages of mounted manuscripts, when the notation is erased from the inclosure and lettered by hand on the margin of the mounting sheet.

After being assembled in chronological order, the mounted manuscripts are divided into packs for binding. It is preferable, of course, to make the divisions between years or at least between months, but that is not always possible when scores of letters have been written in a few weeks. The name of the collection, the volume number, and the inclusive dates of each pack are noted on a sheet of paper which is tied up with each pack for the information of the binder. An example of a backbone label is shown below:

TAYLOR PAPERS

3

JULY 1820

JUNE 1821

In some collections it may give a better balance to the volumes to place the dates in a lower panel.

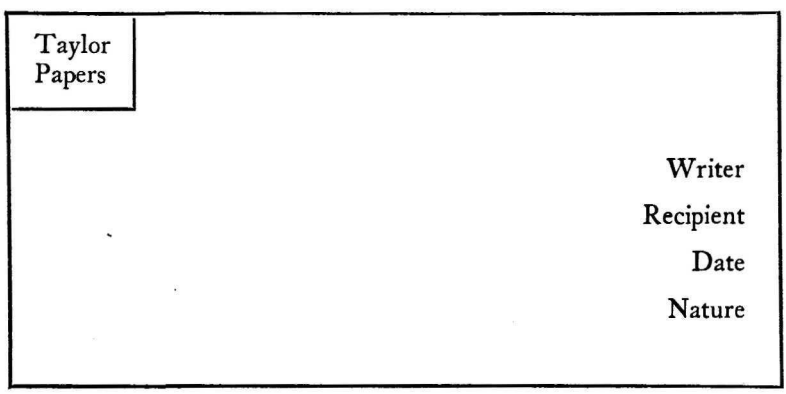
The business of mounting or labeling folders produces an interval of time between the two steps in cataloguing. The second step is to transfer the information from the rough catalogue slips to the regulation catalogue cards. First of all it is necessary to search for the full names and dates of birth and death of writers and recipients. As in book cataloguing, the name must be established, and cross-references made to it from other spellings, titles, or pseudonyms. Where there are variations in the spelling of a name, we take the version of the writer himself. It is not necessary or prudent to make an exhaustive search for dates, since the time at which the person lived

is indicated by the date of the letter he wrote or received. If he is so little known as to make biographical information difficult to find, then that information becomes a problem in research for the reader, not for the curator.

Correct office or corporation entries should be established at this time also. Government entries for Clements Library manuscripts follow those used by the Library of Congress for printed documents of a political or judicial nature. For the British Army of the eighteenth century and the Continental Army, the Manuscript Division has evolved a special classification system, much less elaborate than those used by the Library of Congress and the British Museum. It follows, in simplified form, the organization of the two armies and is used mainly in the cataloguing of military returns. Letters and orders issued by the officers are catalogued under their names, with "see" cards from their military rank and position. It may be necessary in some instances to do the requisite historical research and, following established forms, produce a new entry.

Perhaps it will not be amiss to remark here that it is preferable for a curator of manuscripts to have a background of history rather than a background of library science. The technique of cataloguing can be learned much more quickly than a fund of historical knowledge can be accumulated. Accurate cataloguing is extremely difficult without a detailed knowledge of the events and persons with which a particular collection is concerned. Moreover, this knowledge is used extensively in helping readers.

Equipped with full and correct information, the curator is now ready to type his catalogue cards. These have been printed in anticipation of his needs in the following form:



The name in the box in the upper left-hand corner is the name of the collection as it is known in the library. This card filled in for the Jones-to-Taylor letters from the slip shown on page 221 will read as follows:

Taylor Papers		
	Jones, George, 1770-1845	Writer
	Taylor, Josiah	*Recipient*
1820	May 16-	Date
1822	Oct. 10.	
	26 ALsS and LsS.	Nature

The boxed name and the dates in the left-hand margin constitute the reference for this group of letters. They may be all contained in one volume, or, if the collection is extensive, in several volumes. The volumes wanted are found by consulting the dates on their backbones.

In the library's system of multiple cataloguing at least three cards are required for every group of letters: one to be filed under the writer's name (the above card), one under the recipient's name, one under the date or dates covered by the letters, and perhaps one or more under particular subject entries. As many date cards as there are years covered by the correspondence are made. The remaining cards for the Jones-to-Taylor letters follow:

Taylor Papers	Taylor, Josiah, 1778-1847	
	Jones, George, 1770-1845	Writer
	Taylor, Josiah	Recipient
1820	May 16-	Date
1822	Oct. 10.	
	26 ALsS and LsS.	Nature

Taylor Papers	1820 May 16	
	Jones, George, 1770-1845	Writer
	Taylor, Josiah	Recipient
1820 May 16-		Date
1822 Oct. 10.		
	26 ALsS and LsS.	Nature

The next two cards are like the one above, except that on one the date "1821" is typed in at the top, and on the other the final date of "1822 Oct. 10" is similarly placed. Where there are five letters or less in a group and the dates are scattered, generally all of the dates are written out on each card in the two-line space reserved for them. Consequently a date card for each one of the letters is made.

Assuming that in one of the letters in the foregoing example, Jones related an incident in the Whiskey Rebellion which he had witnessed, a subject card would be made. The phrase "Whiskey Rebellion" would be typed in at the top of the card, and the date of the particular letter, not the dates of the group as used formerly, would be indicated on the date line. The entry for "Nature" also would be altered accordingly.

As the final step in cataloguing, these cards are placed in the card catalogue. This catalogue has two sections: an alphabetical file and a chronological file. Personal, official, and subject entries are found in the first; date cards go into the second.

Multiple cataloguing, as in the foregoing example, cannot be practiced in a collection wherein the manuscripts are arranged in a non-chronological order. In such cases, it is necessary to type three, and perhaps four, cards for each letter. Then under the box in the left-hand corner, the volume number and page number are typed for reference. The Miscellaneous Manuscripts also are catalogued individually, since there are no runs of letters from Mr. A to Mr. B in the lot. As they are arranged chronologically, no reference to volume number is required.

The saving of time under the multiple system of cataloguing is

obvious. For the group of twenty-six letters catalogued in the example above, six cards were used; if each letter had been catalogued separately at least three times twenty-six or seventy-eight cards would have been required. However, it may be questioned whether the library is doing its full duty toward the reader in making him turn page after page of a volume in search of half a dozen letters which he only knows are somewhere between the covers.

Our reply is that the reader is doing the research; the staff need not do it for him. The curator's duty ends with steering the reader to the right or relevant collection, wherein the reader's subject is, or is likely to be, mentioned. Then it is for the reader to discover what he can, and he should be prepared to dig through a peck of chaff to reach his grain of wheat. That is what constitutes research.

Secondly, more than one of our readers has benefited from being obliged to thumb through a volume of correspondence in search of two or three letters of a particular person. Facts not sought have thereby been discovered. Thorough scholars wish and expect to do that amount of work; they are unwilling to trust the curator to hand out to them specific manuscripts which, according to the curator's judgment, bear on their research topic.

Subject Entries and Calendars

The card catalogue of the Manuscript Division offers very little in the way of a subject index. Events, of course, mean action, and outside of certain natural phenomena, events are produced by men or involve men who afterwards relate what happened. The catalogue is filled with personal entries and with dates. A reader investigating an event, therefore, must look for manuscripts dated contemporaneously with the event or, written by the persons who witnessed or had some part in the event.

Our rule in regard to subject entries is this: where the writer is an obscure person and his letter touches upon an important event or person, a card bringing out that subject should be made. Here again the curator's historical knowledge forms the basis of his decisions. Thus, for instance, letters by George Croghan need not be catalogued under "Indian Affairs," for anyone admitted to the Clements Library to study Indian affairs of the eighteenth century would know that the correspondence of Croghan should be examined. If he did not know that, he was not ready to use this library. That is not arrogance, but a plain statement of policy.

However, a letter from, let us say, Pete Smith, a Boston Minute Man, dated 1788, in which the writer recalls how he and his comrades defended the bridge at Concord the morning of April 19, 1775, is regarded differently. It is not reasonable to assume that readers would know the names of the common soldiers in that first engagement of the Revolution. Therefore a card for this letter would be made under the entry, "Concord, Battle of," and perhaps another under the date of the skirmish.

Extra entries are regularly made for persons mentioned in depositions, trials, court martials, and similar documents. Likewise, letters written by one person to another about a third are often catalogued under the name of that third person. The chief difficulty in the way of making a subject card for every letter is, of course, the fact that a dozen subjects are often mentioned in one letter.

Calendars have not been attempted. The making of a calendar requires the full time services of an almost phenomenally brilliant historian. Even such a talented one as Worthington C. Ford asserted that he could not make more than eight thousand calendar cards a year.[3] Thus it would take more than twelve years to calendar a hundred thousand manuscripts. Then the calendar must be printed to be widely useful. Finally, Mr. Ford also declares that a fully satisfactory calendar has never been made. The insurmountable difficulty is that what may seem unimportant to the person making the calendar may be of significance to a particular research worker. Knowing this, a careful reader puts little reliance on a calendar. The only way to overcome this defect is to print the complete letters in the calendar, and the result is not a calendar but an edition of the correspondence.

The Manuscript Division does, however, propose to offer inquirers and readers a guide to the collections in its possession. This book, now being compiled, contains a brief description of each collection, followed by a list of all the writers of letters and authors of documents found in that collection. It also has a general index to all the writers and authors which cuts across the division lines of the collections and allows the reader to learn in how many collections a given writer is represented.

Such a guide is designed to answer three purposes: to make known to scholars—indeed to put them on their guard concerning—the loca-

[3] Worthington C. Ford, "On Calendaring Manuscripts," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, IV, 45-56.

tion and existence of papers of persons in whom they may be interested; to provide enough information about the collections to help prospective readers decide whether a trip to Ann Arbor would be worth their while; and to answer that most frequent of all inquiries, "Have you any letters by so-and-so?" A letter addressed to the director of the library will bring further information about the letters of a particular person relative to quantity, dates covered, photostating, microfilming, etc.

HOWARD H. PECKHAM