Manuscript Collections in the Bancroft Library[1]

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FOR many years the Bancroft Library has been known far and wide as one of the greatest collections of historical materials in this country. Its fame rests on the fact that its central core of documents and books consists of highly specialized collections accumulated at a very early period in the history of Western North America. This fact is basic to any understanding of what the Bancroft Library is and why its sources are so unique.

Hubert Howe Bancroft, founder of the Library, came to San Francisco in 1852, while the Gold Rush excitement was still in its ascendant wave. A young man of twenty, reared with a strong Puritan background in a small Ohio town, he kept his head in the swirl of madness that the Gold Fever brought with it; and, in 1856, after trying his hand at a variety of tasks in the gold fields and in Crescent City, he went into the stationery and book business in San Francisco. The choice of his business was largely accidental. It happened that as a youngster he had spent a winter or two in his brother-in-law's stationery store in Buffalo, New York, with indifferent success, but when he went to California he bore a commission from this brother-in-law to dispose of some books and stationery. As a consequence, without any particular training or education in the business that was to make him great, but with a fine sense of integrity, application to duty, and a good personality, he launched his enterprise, which grew, like a real Horatio Alger "success story," to mammoth proportions within a decade.

Bancroft found it easy to make money. At a time when other business ventures were likely to fail, his grew stronger and stronger. Making money, however, gave him little real satisfaction and within a few years he began to cast about for other outlets for his energy and ambition, a search which culminated in the acquisition of a library of Pacific Coast materials and in the writing of the

[1] This paper, in slightly different form, was read at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists held at Glenwood Springs, Colorado, in 1947.

first great history of the Pacific Coast and the West. Here is how this came to pass.

One of the activities of the Bancroft stationery firm was the publication of a handbook, useful in the business life of the day. The editorial work required a reference library of California books which by 1859 had grown to about seventy-five volumes. One day this library caught Bancroft's attention, and with his usual drive, he set about enlarging it. What he collected was local history, pamphlets, and ephemera relating to San Francisco and other areas with which he had contact. Step by step his vision grew. He had never dreamed that there could be so much history in such a new country. As he delved deeper, he learned about California's relations with Mexico and with its earlier dependency upon Spain and Spanish America. These discoveries led Bancroft to study European history from a new point of view and to collect books that would explain this Spanish background. In other words, Bancroft had found a new world of intellectual interest that fascinated him. Collecting books and documents relating to the Pacific West became one of his major interests. Repeated trips to book marts in Europe and to the older areas of the United States brought a rich harvest in books relating to Mexico and to Spanish North America. In twenty-five years, Bancroft had purchased a library of 50,000 items of the finest basic material for Pacific Coast history. It was a worthy achievement in any period and particularly so in that early pioneer era.

Though Bancroft's purchases of printed works were extensive and well selected, he built an even more enduring monument in his collection of manuscript materials relating to the new West. Of books, more than one copy will normally survive, no matter how great the perils of time, but of manuscripts there will probably be only one or two copies and the loss of an important manuscript by fire or flood blots out the record forever.

The high point in Bancroft's collecting of Californiana was the winning of General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo of Sonoma as a friend. Vallejo was a leader among his people, admired and respected, and a participant in many of the activities of his time. As the military commandant of Northern California, he had exercised great power and prestige; when the missions were secularized, he had supervised the work at Sonoma. Through the years, therefore, as an official who had held many responsible positions, he had accumulated a quantity of records. When the American immigrants poured in, he held on to his estate, Lachryma Montis, at Sonoma,

and preserved his ranch like a feudal oasis in the sea of American invasion. When Bancroft threw out his dragnet for early California records, he found that Vallejo had a mass of them, but he found also that Vallejo, like the rest of the Spanish Californians, aggrieved at wounds they had suffered in the avalanche of American immigration, held distinctly aloof. Moreover, Vallejo himself was writing a history of early California to give his people just recognition for their achievements, for no Californian believed that a "gringo" would deal justly with his people.

This is not the place to tell the story of how Bancroft stormed the Vallejo citadel and made Vallejo a lifelong friend. Bancroft's earnestness, sincerity of purpose, and aggressiveness had something to do with it, but it was Enrique Cerruti, one of his employees, who should have chief credit for winning Vallejo's confidence and friendship. As a result, when Vallejo saw how much better equipped Bancroft was for writing a history of California, and how great a campaign he was putting into the collection of all possible sources of information, he gave him his entire collection of manuscripts, which might, in a sense, be called the official archive of the Mexican government in northern California. This magnificent collection Bancroft had bound up in thirty-six great folio volumes, each several inches thick. These documents may be said to constitute the foundation of Bancroft's collection of early California manuscripts.

But if the Vallejo documents constitute the foundation, many other collections make up the superstructure. And these collections are numerous indeed. Once reconciled to Mr. Bancroft, once convinced of his fairness and his competency, Vallejo devoted the next years of his life to helping Bancroft collect materials, chiefly by "running interference" for him among the old California families. Thus former Governor Juan B. Alvarado, deeply suspicious of the American newcomers, finally wrote a five volume historical narrative of early California and gave it to Bancroft, primarily because of the intervention of Vallejo. From many other families, Bancroft and Vallejo, now a great team, received more and more documents. Often they were too late — the letters and old papers had already been lost or destroyed — but the harvest was significant.

At this point it is not out of place to sound a note of caution to the collector who may be conjuring up visions of the wealth that Bancroft enticed away from these people. The fact is that these records were of little or no monetary value at the time; there were no rich collectors in the field, and there were to be none for many decades thereafter. Finally, if Bancroft had not labored so prodi-

giously to gather these manuscripts, many of them undoubtedly would have vanished with the passage of time.

Permit me to name a few more of these manuscript collections gathered by Bancroft. There are the Thomas O. Larkin papers and official correspondence. Larkin, who had come to California in 1832, had prospered as a merchant and as American consul at Monterey, the provincial capital. From his heirs Bancroft received the Larkin letters and official reports. Today these are bound in nine great folio volumes which have been used almost daily by a generation of scholars.

There are the Benjamin Hayes papers and clippings. Hayes, like Vallejo, planned to write a history of that part of California where he lived, in this case the south, and had gathered material on the subject for years. His history never materialized, however, and when Bancroft called on him in 1874, Hayes tearfully gave him his entire collection, for he realized that Bancroft had the resources and the ability to carry through the program that so many others had dreamed about. Three years later Hayes died, but his manuscripts helped Bancroft write a better history of California. Today these materials are still called for constantly by a new generation of California historians and writers.

In the mission archives and other collections of a public character, Bancroft found rich materials for Western history which had to be treated differently. Copying records in full or abstracting important sections of them was the only practicable course available in those days, and Bancroft spent large sums in making such copies. In many cases the originals have been well cared for, as for example the mission records at Santa Barbara, but Bancroft's copies of them are still very useful. In other cases the originals have not fared so well. The public records in the custody of the Surveyor General in San Francisco are a case in point, for these burned in the great San Francisco fire of 1906.[2] Thirty years earlier, however, Bancroft had spent a small fortune in listing, abstracting, or copying in full these precious manuscripts. His copies, comprising sixty-three fat volumes, constitute a precious heritage which Bancroft's foresight and business acumen preserved for future generations. These unique records, so carefully selected, are a basic part of the Bancroft Library and are an example of its marvelous resources.

Numerous smaller private collections flowed into the Hubert

[2] A few records pertaining to land matters survived and are now in the National Archives.

Howe Bancroft Library, with the aid of veterans like General Vallejo in the north, Hayes in the south, and many others. With real vision and with great persuasiveness, Bancroft convinced the leaders of his generation that he had the resources and the ability to carry through the program of writing a great history of California. He felt that he was performing a significant public service. The documents came to him, therefore, sometimes cheerfully, sometimes grudgingly, and sometimes not at all. But the final bulk was large; and its importance for the future of California and the West was incalculable.

There is little purpose in this paper to list more of these early collections. To read their names is almost like calling the roll of the great California families of the time — Alvarado, Alviso, Avila, Bandini, Castro, Coronel, De la Guerra, Estudillo, Hartnell, Osio, Vallejo. Sometime in the future we hope to prepare a general guide to these manuscript collections in the Bancroft Library; suffice it, therefore, to mention only these few here.

Bancroft's collecting zeal virtually ended with the burning of his great business establishment in 1886. Thereafter his primary concern seems to have been the sale of his histories and the recouping of his fortune. From the middle 1880's, therefore, until 1905, when his library was purchased by the University of California, there were few additions to it. The same was apparently the case in the early years after it came to the University, but when we remember that the price paid for the Library by the University of California was not included in its regular budget and that an expenditure of $50,000 per year for three years was a bold venture for those lean years, we must hail the courage and vision of President Benjamin Ide Wheeler and the Regents for their action. Dr. John W. Caughey, in his biography of Hubert Howe Bancroft, discusses the growth of the Library in some detail and I recommend his splendid book for further information.[3]

While there were relatively few acquisitions by purchase in the early days, the Bancroft Library was the recipient of innumerable gifts. During the past half century, in fact, its resources have grown tremendously. These later acquisitions are of a different character from the highly selective materials acquired by Bancroft in his day, and the primary purpose of this paper is to describe a few of these newer collections, to obtain a cross-section view of their composition, and to evaluate our present program of expansion.

[3] *Hubert Howe Bancroft, Historian of the West* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1946).

As a method of procedure, let us examine the larger collections that have come to the Library during the past several years. These often consist of masses of unselected papers, some valuable and some not, often more useful in their general than in their specific value. These include, for example, the Glenn Ranch papers. Through the intercession of friends, a large quantity of the records of this famous old ranch in northern California was given to us. Dr. Hugh J. Glenn migrated to California in 1849 from Missouri. After many adventures, including several trips across the plains to his old home, he began buying land in what is now Glenn County and acquired thousands of acres of good grain land. He became one of the largest landholders in California and one of its greatest wheat farmers. Some idea of Dr. Glenn's operations may be gained from the fact that he nearly succeeded in his ambition to grow one million bushels of wheat in a single year.

The records of the Glenn Ranch are largely accounts such as would be kept in the management of the business, chiefly daybooks, journals, and similar records. An analysis of records such as these may give information on many problems of California agriculture in the seventies and eighties relating to costs of production, yield of crops, white vs. Chinese labor, introduction of labor saving machinery, or the herding of wild geese. Such records, often kept in crude fashion, form a strange contrast to the neat documents of the Spanish occupancy of America, both in form and content, but they are characteristic of the records that were kept in this new era. They are awkward for the librarian to handle and difficult for the researcher to use. The question inevitably arises: "How important are they for posterity?"

A few weeks later there came to the Library a valuable collection of 64 volumes containing original records relating to the San Francisco graft prosecution that figured so largely in California's history between 1906 and 1910, an event commonly associated with the name of Abe Ruef. These records, together with another 37 volumes from the same collection that had previously been given to the University, constitute a vital source of information for affairs in San Francisco in the early 1900's, a time when the city was experiencing a phenomenal growth of about 10 per cent per year. These records are probably the most complete collection concerning this episode in existence. They are of the conventional sort and lend themselves quite readily to use and interpretation. They are vital to anyone studying California's political and social history in the early part of this century.

Still another type of material came to the Library with the gift of the Marcel E. Cerf collection. Cerf, a Californian, was educated in the law and practiced his profession in San Francisco from about 1900 till his death in 1935. His family gave his entire library to the University. His manuscript files and California books were placed in the Bancroft Library. Cerf was a man of wide intellectual interests, orderly and business-like in the management of his affairs. The books yielded nearly 150 new titles to our collection, in addition to some much-wanted duplicates. The manuscripts consist of a portion of Cerf's office files and are of special interest because of their relation to San Francisco during the years when the city was bursting with growing pains, spiritually as well as physically. Of necessity, the material in this collection is specialized, but herein lies its strength, for Mr. Cerf, who was a judge for a number of years, moved in prominent circles and was a man of considerable importance. With the passage of time, we may find that a collection of this nature takes on increased value.

A smaller collection but one of some interest was bequeathed the Bancroft Library by Mrs. Alice Hare, a versatile person, photographer, writer for popular magazines, persistent investigator. Her most active work fell in the decade after 1897, when she traveled among the missions and carried a busy camera. She accumulated a large number of photographs of the missions and of persons and scenes of importance. These pictures, with her notes and clippings, may be of value to many another investigator.

Somewhat farther afield from the usual type of historical record was a collection presented to the library through the influence of August A. Vollmer, former Chief of the Berkeley Police Department, consisting of materials on the application of psychiatry in industrial problems in California, compiled by Dr. Jau Don Ball in the period from 1915 to about 1930. Here are case histories and finished studies that may be of importance. Who can say?

These half dozen collections represent a part of our recent major manuscript accessions. We have also received a good many smaller collections, usually of family papers, from donors whose predecessors came to California decades ago.

This is an outline of the record for the past year.[4] Now let me draw a picture, in broad outlines, of a few of our manuscript collections acquired in previous years.

Advertising of California and her wonders has gone on for generations, and our libraries are bound to reflect the various devices

[4] 1947.

for telling the world about ourselves. Expositions are one of these. They have been a common means of attracting people to the West, as, for example, did the Panama-California Exposition at San Diego in 1915 and the Panama Pacific International Exposition at San Francisco in the same year. The latter was to celebrate not only San Francisco's rebirth and rebuilding following the fire of 1906 but to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal, full of promise for the port by the Golden Gate. This San Francisco Exposition accumulated tons of records, most of which came to the Bancroft Library a few years ago. In volume they are prodigious, constituting more than 700 linear feet, not to mention the vast quantity of blueprints of the buildings of the Fair, all of which apparently were saved and came with the collection.

A sort of index to these records was prepared under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration in its day. On the basis of it, it is possible briefly to analyse the collection here, though in the most cursory fashion. We find that correspondence of the Executive Office occupies 108 linear feet; Special Events and Celebrations, 18 feet; Comptroller's Files, 28 feet; Jury of Awards, 16 feet; Exploitation (both at home and abroad), 56 feet; Division of Exhibits, 54 feet; Concessions and Admissions, 30 feet; Division of Works, 102 feet; Legal Department, 80 feet; Live Stock (including conventions, exhibits, etc.), 28 feet; Musical Director's File, 8 feet; Hotel Bureau File, 8 feet; Customs and Deliveries, 54 feet; Liberal Arts Department, 16 feet; Historical Records, 16 feet; Educational and Social Economy, 12 feet; Horticulture, 6 feet; Manufactures, 2 feet; Photographic Permits, 4 feet; Concessions, 14 feet; Purchasing, 8 feet; Yachting, 2 feet; Reception Committee, 4 feet; Miscellaneous, 16 feet; plus several other smaller groups.

These records are stored in four-drawer files and in their total quantity constitute a forbidding mass. A number of graduate students have used them and feel that the material should be winnowed, the grain preserved, and the chaff destroyed. The custodian, however, has no machinery for winnowing such a mass, and finds little agreement among his co-workers as to what should be done. Any consideration of the problem does suggest, however, the necessity of a selective policy if the Library is to collect and preserve records that are evaluated by the quality of the individual document rather than by tons and yards of material. There is danger, I believe, in placing emphasis on mere quantity, though that is often done.

When talking about records that must be weighed by the ton, we must mention the Miller and Lux Company papers. Henry Miller, a native of Germany baptized Heinrich A. Kreiser, came to San Francisco in 1850 and went into the wholesale butcher business. He did extremely well. Within a few years he entered into a partnership with Charles Lux, a relationship that lasted until Lux's death a generation later, after which time Miller continued the business single-handed. He died in 1916. These two men bought land in the great interior valleys of California and nearby states until the so-called "Kingdom of Miller and Lux" encompassed about a million acres. The more land they purchased, the more cattle and sheep they had to have; and the more sheep and cattle they raised, the more land they needed. To weather the droughts that came periodically, they undertook irrigation projects and successfully operated one of the great canal companies of their time.

Some years ago, the Company presented to the Library a part of the records of their business from about 1900 to 1920. These consist of cash voucher ledgers, journals, merchandise ledgers, sales books, payrolls, and miscellaneous letter files, totaling altogether a very large quantity. The earlier records of the company's operations, if in existence, are apparently still in private hands.

As will be evident to anyone familiar with the history of the Miller and Lux estate, these business records constitute only a part of the history of the firm and its operations. For a score of years after the death of Lux in 1887 there was a great deal of litigation instigated by Lux's numerous heirs in Germany. The resulting court records are not represented in our collection. They would, of course, shed a vast amount of light on the Miller and Lux "empire" and the part it played in the development of the West.

Outstanding among our collections are the Pardee papers, the gift of Dr. George C. Pardee, Governor of California in 1903-1907. These are the documents bearing upon his campaigns for governor, and the correspondence of his administration, together with various maps, correspondence concerning the East Bay Water District, scrapbooks, and other materials. Neatly arranged and indexed for use, these materials are a most valuable source of information for the history of California in the period before the rise of Hiram Johnson and the men of his generation. Here is a rich vein for the future historical prospector.

Although this is only a bird's-eye view of our manuscript resources, it may give some idea of our problems and resources. Therefore, without attempting the impossible task of listing all of

our collections, let us pass on to our Foreign Archives Materials.

About forty or fifty years ago scholars began to use documents from foreign archives in increasing volume. This was because our predecessors had not realized before then how much there was in these places that might be of value in writing the history of our own country. After the turn of the present century, it became the vogue to consult foreign archives, and all of you know how much this has meant to American historiography. Collections of archival materials of interest to American students were soon copied in quantity; such institutions as the Library of Congress, and the Universities of Texas, California, and others cooperated in this project. These copies were made by typewriter and were subject to pitfalls that are reflected in all typed copies. Nonetheless, they were of great value.

After a few years, scholars demanded more accurate copies than those made by hand. This became feasible first of all with the development of the photostat machine, and even more so with the perfection of the microfilming process. This not only gave the research worker an image of the original which was much superior to the hand-typed copy but enabled him to accumulate larger quantities of records at lower cost. These scientific resources stimulated historical investigation, and today larger numbers of students than ever before are going from country to country to investigate archival resources.

From the first, the Bancroft Library joined in these activities, accumulating thousands of pages of typed transcripts from foreign archives. Many of you have used some of these documents and can testify to their value in your own research. As photostating and microfilming developed, we acquired thousands of pages of documents in those forms. Outstanding in our microfilm library are special collections that have been made in various archives of Mexico, Spain, Holland, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Venezuela, as well as in our own country. For the most part these collections are blocks of material gathered by various scholars in connection with their own research. Thus there are the collections of Bolton and Thickens on Sonora and the West Coast Corridor, Borah on the silk industry, King on negro slavery in Colombia and Venezuela, Powell on the Chichimecas, Simpson on the Encomienda System, Sluiter on Dutch expansion, and many others. In cooperation with other centers such as the Library of Congress, Newberry Library, and many university libraries, we have acquired microfilm copies of some of their treasures, a courtesy which we reciprocate.

Recently when the records of the early coastwise trade in San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Coast were sent to Washington from the Customs House in San Francisco, where they had been stored for nearly a century in excellent and accessible condition, we were able to microfilm a few of the records of ship movements in and out of San Francisco in the period between 1849 and 1870. Included in this collection are data on such topics as Foreign and Domestic Ship Arrivals, 1849-1870, Clearances, 1852-1870; Bills of Sale for Ships; and Registers for Coastwise Licenses. This material supplements our collection of Ship Manifests of the San Francisco trade in this period. These maritime records are of interest and importance to the people of the Pacific Coast, and it was with regret that we observed their removal to a distant and overcrowded depository. Few graduate students can afford to go as far as Washington to pursue their investigations.

This observation leads me to propose the establishment of a Federal center for the storage and use of governmental records on the Pacific Coast. No place in the country is more ideally situated with regard to the climatic conditions required for records preservation or for the comfort of students who wish to use records. With the National Archives building long since overcrowded and the population of the West Coast expanding at an unprecedented rate, it seems logical that the Government should establish depositories or archival centers in the West.

Microfilming is thus a vast new field that is rapidly assuming first-rate importance. Well-selected source materials are not exhausted by one scholar, but are of use to generations of investigators. This fact makes it important for the Bancroft Library to continue its policy of gathering from foreign and other depositories those documents that relate to California and the West in particular, as well as to those old provinces of Spain that later became a part of the United States or have close contact with our nation.

The Bancroft Library, as these brief notes may indicate, is a repository of extremely divergent sources. It has innumerable facets of information. Today its problem is to determine the direction of its development; to shape a policy that has meaning for our generation and which may be significant for the future. Shall we collect everything relating to California, whether it be snapshots of missions or documents relating to migrant labor, development of railroads, highways, petroleum, maritime history, the cattle industry, or case histories in the use of psychiatry in industrial relations? After a half century of heterogeneous growth, it may

be necessary and inevitable that an arbitrary decision be made. It seems to me that here, in a policy of selection, lies the real future of the University of California's Bancroft Collection, for if we are not able to devise means of selecting and keeping what is relatively more important, we shall find ourselves so burdened with pulp that our system of record keeping will break down altogether.