

The Record Copying Program of the Utah Genealogical Society¹

By ARCHIBALD F. BENNETT

*Genealogical Society of the Church
of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day
Saints*

THE Genealogical Society of Utah was organized in 1894, with one of its avowed objectives that of "collecting, compiling, establishing and maintaining a genealogical library for the use and benefit of its members and others." For 58 years that has continued to be its constant purpose, and some notable achievements have resulted.

All Latter Day Saints, now over a million in number, are taught to appreciate and revere their parents and their forefathers and to be grateful to those who won for us and our homeland of America the great blessings of civic and religious freedom. To venerate our fathers and mothers of the past we must come to know them intimately, even as we do our immediate fathers and mothers in life. This means that we must search out their records, reconstruct accurately their life stories, and relive with them as far as possible the trials and heartaches and triumphs of their pioneering experiences.

This process of "turning the hearts of the children to the fathers" begins with the individual and his family. Each is encouraged to write the story of his own life, amply illustrated with portraits, pictures of places, and documents. The next step is to write the life story of father and of mother, with pictures of the family group; then the biographies of grandparents containing records of their families. One effective device used is that of the portrait pedigree.

Not only do we seek to secure the name of a foreparent and his portrait, but also every possible biographical fact that will enable us to love him for what he earned for us.

It is our belief that such endearing family relationships, formed on this earth by birth, are destined, for those who live righteously, to endure eternally. Consequently our constant endeavor is to seek

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out and make available every genealogical and historical record that can help us reconstruct their life histories.

As a people, our forefathers have been gathered from all sections of America and virtually every nation in Europe. In the archives or dispersed in scattered communities in all these countries are the records we seek. So in a very real sense ours becomes a world-wide record-gathering program.

For years we have purchased printed and manuscript family histories, place histories, and biographies and genealogical magazines for our library as they became available. We spend about \$12,000 a year for this purpose. About 50,000 such records are now upon our shelves.

In November 1938, our society entered the new field of micro-filming, with its almost limitless possibilities. Today I believe we can in truth and modesty say that we have on microfilm unquestionably the most extensive purely genealogical collection in America or in the world.

I have at hand a report of our microfilm editor, dated October 1, 1952. In a single day such a report as this becomes out of date, for about 100,000 new pages of record materials are copied daily by our 24 to 26 microfilm operators — at least 2,000,000 pages per month. But by October 1, 1952, we had made 77,861 rolls of microfilm, each 100 feet in length. By calculated estimate this represents 112,000,000 pages, mostly of unpublished original records usually inaccessible to searchers in America. At an average of 300 pages per volume this would be the equivalent of 372,139 volumes.

Since at least three film copies are made of every record — the negative, one positive print for use in our library, and another positive given to the owner of the original record — we must have used in our project to date 4,422 miles of 35 mm. film. This is enough film to stretch from Vancouver, B. C., to Miami, Fla., and back to Nashville, Tenn.; or from Los Angeles to Saint John's, Newfoundland, and back to New York City. Of these more than 77,000 film rolls, 56,354 were copied in 12 countries in Europe and 21,507 in 16 States in America and the Territory of Hawaii. In addition to all this, we have also made 2,245 rolls of 16 mm. film, usually of card indexes, averaging 5,000 cards to the roll.

Too often, in historical and genealogical research, the Atlantic Ocean has been as much of an insuperable barrier as it is to railroad trains, and we are stopped in our investigations at the seashore. But now, with this constant flow of European records to America, a

new day for researchers is dawning. There will be increasingly less need to cross the ocean to discover our overseas origins.

For instance, we are currently copying with five or six cameras, all the wills in England before 1858, probably 3,000,000 pages, not alone those in the Principal Probate Registry at Somerset House, London, but also those on deposit in the many district probate registries throughout England. Think what a boon that alone will be to American researchers! I have often paid from \$1.00 to \$3.00 for photostats of English wills relating to my forefathers and their families. I have also had the experience of copying wills by hand in the probate registries there, always under the pressure of time. Now I shall be able to sit at a reading machine in my own office or in our genealogical library and consult any will I desire from any section of England or Wales, using film copies of the carefully prepared indexes to locate the will readily.

Wills and probate records we copy in every country of Europe and in counties in the United States. They comprise but one of the many sources we seek. Any record that can furnish dependable facts of personal history and genealogy is our objective. Deeds and land records are helpful; also court records; marriage bonds and licenses; cemetery, census, and vital records; church christenings, marriages, and burials; tax and military records; Bible records; and compiled family genealogies. All these come before the versatile eye of our camera, which, fortunately, can reproduce with equal facility any foreign language or any style of archaic handwriting.

I am happy to tell you that archivists and record guardians such as yourselves, who have a true appreciation of the value of records, have been most friendly and have aided most in our record-copying and record-preserving program. I could name many of you who have made it possible for us to film the records of your States, sensing as you have the advantage of having security copies of otherwise irreplaceable records in a safe place or in widely separated repositories.

Occasionally there have been doubts as to the feasibility of the undertaking. I recall distinctly that at the Connecticut State Library James Brewster, the State librarian, and Mr. Burt, the State examiner of records, questioned the possibility of our being able to film the desired records in private homes and private offices and in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. We, in turn, stressed the hazards of destruction to which such dispersed records were daily subject. It was a happy day when we secured official approval of our proj-

ect. After several years the Connecticut project was completed, and Mr. Brewster wrote as follows:

This seems an appropriate time to express our thanks to you for presenting this positive set of films to the Connecticut State Library. As you can understand, when the proposal was first talked about, there was a slight doubt in our minds as to just how it would work out. As it turned out, our fears were groundless, due almost 100% to Mr. Hughes, your operator. As you, of course, know, not a single Town Clerk or Judge of Probate refused to let him microfilm their records, and before he finished the work in any office, the officials were most friendly to him.

Also, we have greatly enjoyed having him and Mrs. Hughes work in the library, and he has been most cooperative in all his work. We shall be sorry when the Connecticut project is finished and he has to leave.

This is just to let you know that it has been a great pleasure to work with such cooperative people.

In Edinburgh, Scotland, are gathered in one record building all the parish registers of Scotland, and the census records are in the same city. Our first request to film met with a curt refusal. A second time the authorities denied us the privilege of copying. Our third appeal in 1947 was promised consideration, but we were told that if anything the opposition had hardened since our first approach. Our appeal went eventually before the Secretary of State for Scotland; then in due course to the highest record officials in London, who had no objections if those in Scotland had not; then once again to the Secretary of State for Scotland, and so on. After another 5 years spent in this manner, one Sunday morning came a cablegram from our representative: "Rejoice with me. We have received official permission to microfilm all the church registers and early census records of Scotland." Promptly we placed five cameras in the archives and that project was completed in a few months. We also have permission to film all the wills and deeds, kept in another record house in Edinburgh.

One occasion for the hesitation in Scotland was the feeling that if copies of the records were in America there would be a falling off in the fees received for searching the records. We, of course, make no charge to anyone consulting our films. They are free and open to all.

Sometimes we have encountered a well-developed sense of proprietorship, the pride of exclusive possession of precious records, and an unwillingness to share them with others. Usually, however, the desire to ensure the preservation of these records outweighs the proprietary sense.

In several countries objections arose on religious grounds or prejudices. Most of this feeling has been overcome, except in England. On the other hand, excellent assistance has been given us by such religious groups as Catholics, Lutherans, and Quakers. When approached for permission to copy the Friends' immense collection of records at Swarthmore, Pa., Frederick B. Tolles, the librarian, arranged to obtain permission from several hundred individual meetings, and added, "Frankly, we have been amazed at the magnitude of the project upon which you have embarked. I hope that we shall be able to take advantage of your generous offer." Moreover, he put us in touch with other large Quaker repositories in Philadelphia, New York, and Providence, R. I.

Physical barriers have presented problems. In Finland especially constructed fireproof vans brought the church books from scattered parishes to central archives for filming and then returned them. Last winter in Vermont our operator had to battle inclement weather and sometimes snowdrifts 8 feet deep. Now we plan to photograph in the North in summer, and in the South in winter. In the steep Alpine valleys and rugged mountains of Italy I once had to carry 78 volumes of church books from the pastor's home perched on a steep mountainside a considerable distance to where our car waited on the highway below. Once, such books were slung in packs over the back of a donkey and taken down a narrow trail to the waiting auto. At times the records had to be transported down to the valley below where electricity was available. During the whole period of the airlift in Germany our films of records in the Russian zone were flown out by plane.

As to equipment, our first attempts in 1938 and 1939 were with a Photo Record Camera and Steinman developing reels. We early designed and built our first printing machines, which were not entirely successful. Our mistakes taught us helpful lessons. Now we use Recordak cameras — the portable model E with a tripod, the more stationary model D, and the still larger model C. We purchase and use great quantities of film, most of it from Du Pont. For negative we prefer Du Pont safety, unperforated, fine grain, panchromatic, type 312-B; for positive, safety, unperforated, fine grain, type 606-B.

Our procedure in the European countries is to develop the negatives promptly in the country where they are exposed, and then to have them carefully inspected in a standard reading machine by trained film editors. If they are satisfactory, a positive print is made for the record repository permitting us to film their records. If the

inspector discovers pages missed or images blurred or out of focus, he requests retakes of the operator. Then the negatives are shipped to us in Utah. On their arrival in Utah the negatives are reexamined by our local film inspectors. When approved, the negatives are sent to the printing machine, a De Pue printer, and a positive print is exposed and developed to be used by the public in our library. Films are cataloged on the same plan as our books, save that for films we put before the call number the capital letter "F," which indicates a film.

Twenty reading machines, mostly Kodagraphs, are provided in our library for the general public. We could use many more to advantage if we had space for them. In the plans for a new archives building we have provided for 150 such machines.² Those we have are in constant use every hour the library is open. Frequently we have to restrict each patron to an hour at the reading machine. One may stroll past these machines and see searchers examining records from the various States and from a dozen different European countries, in as many languages. Attendance at the library in the period October 1 to 10, 1952, varied from 109 to 250 patrons a day, and these called for up to 222 film rolls and 888 books daily. The society has 256 employees.

Recently we have added a fireproof, air-conditioned vault to our building, for the storage of our films. In it are 185 steel film-storage cabinets. We strive to keep the storage rooms at a temperature of from 68° to 70° F. and a relative humidity of 50%. Regular mercuric chloride tests of the films are made to ensure against too much residual hypo, which might cause deterioration in storage.

Our plans for the future include the continuation of our present projects on a yearly budget. This will provide for copying in other States of America, especially those of earlier origin. Currently we are filming in Mexico and Iceland. We plan further copying in other European countries such as Switzerland, France, and Belgium. We are in urgent need of a new archives building, as fireproof and bombproof as designers can make it. For we feel that our program is really just at its beginning and that it must continue for years.

Our hope is that other agencies in America and other countries will join in the filming of records on an increasing scale, so that a program of universal benefit may be prosecuted by all who value the records of the past.

² The author informs us that the Utah Genealogical Society now has 80 reading machines and plans to have 400 in its new building.—The Editor.