

The Place of the Register in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress

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ON PAGE 7 of the preliminary "Rules for Descriptive Cataloging in the Library of Congress . . . for Collections of Manuscripts," which has recently been issued, there appears the following direction: "If the repository has on file an unpublished guide to the organization and content of the collection, this should be noted."

Well to the fore among such "unpublished guides" in the Library's Manuscripts Division is the register. This has become the very backbone of the Division's work in organizing collections of manuscripts for use. Its development, as was suggested in an article in the *American Archivist* for April 1953 has been gradual.¹ Registers were prepared, in the first instance, in order to maintain control over the Division's holdings and to aid the researcher in his use of material and the staff in replying to reference inquiries. Their use by readers and staff members has shown where improvements could be made. The labors of the Library's Committee on Manuscripts Cataloging over a 2-year period, and the rules which have emerged therefrom, have suggested other changes. The Division's experience both with the preparation and with the administrative use of registers has also resulted in valuable suggestions for revision. In consequence there have emerged, in fact, not only improvements in the register itself but also a new kind of instrument — the short-register, familiarly known in the Division as the "short form" — which is designed to control and describe material not sufficiently extensive or complex to warrant the preparation of a full-length register.

For each accession received in the Manuscripts Division, whether it be a single manuscript or a group of manuscripts, there is now prepared either a full-length register or a short-register. A col-

¹ Katharine E. Brand, "Developments in the Handling of Recent Manuscripts in the Library of Congress."

lection of personal papers, being as a rule both extensive and complicated, is likely to be described in a full-length register. This is true also of a substantial collection of records of a nongovernmental organization. But a single manuscript, or a small group of manuscripts, or even a considerable group in one simple series is, in most cases, described by a short-register. The sample "John Doe" registers (appendixes I and II, below) will suggest why this is so. The short-register consists of a mimeographed sheet, to be filled in by the processor; while the full-length register, which varies widely according to variations in the papers or records described, is prepared on plain sheets, according to a generally prescribed form and sequence to be sure, but without benefit of mimeographed headings. The same essential information, however, appears in both cases: title, accession number, date received, source, status, and so on. The information is assembled from various sources, one of the most important of which is the Division's case file, which consists, as its name implies, of case histories of manuscript holdings — that is, all the documents which have been created in the acquisition, custody, and reference use of each collection. When the register is completed, two copies go at once into the case file, one to bring the record up to date, the other to be available for interlibrary loan when donor restrictions permit.

In addition to their other uses, registers and short-registers are designed also to make necessary information quickly and easily available to the cataloger when the group cataloging of the vast holdings of the Manuscripts Division, according to the new rules, is begun.² In the full-length register, part I should furnish the cataloger with information necessary for establishing a main entry and title; physical description; location; reference to published descriptions and to indexes or other unpublished guides in the repository (of which the register itself is, of course, one); restrictions on access, if any; proprietorship of literary rights, when not dedicated to the public; and provenance. Parts III, IV, and V, or some combination of these, should furnish the information necessary for preparing added entries, references, and analyticals, for establishing the form of the document (if it is not original), and for writing scope and content notes. The short register should furnish the same information in capsule form.

The two deviate most widely in the description of the material itself. The register includes a carefully drawn description of series,

² See Robert H. Land, "The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections," in *American Archivist*, 17:199 (July 1954).

a container list, and in many cases a partial list of correspondents, but in the short-register a very brief description usually suffices. This may take the form of a list of letters or other papers, with dates and in some cases content notes, or it may be a paragraph description if the material does not lend itself usefully to list treatment. In either case, significant names and subjects are brought out in this section.

The form of registers and short-registers is, we think, extremely important, not at all because it purports to be the only correct method of procedure but because *some* established and standardized form is essential where so many different workers and so many different users are involved. The form that has been developed is proving to be adaptable, reasonably easy to prepare if the necessary information has been assembled, and usable from the point of view of the reader who comes to it in search of information.

We who have worked with manuscripts and have prepared these registers find that they serve as a useful discipline in the task of processing the material. The worker engaged in organizing a difficult and complex collection of papers is often much helped by keeping well marshaled in his mind the various kinds of information he will need for the completion of a register. The biographical note, which is ordinarily prepared in rough at the outset of an extensive processing task, will, if a chaotic group of papers is concerned, help the processor to find his way through the labyrinth by suggesting what he ought to look for and identifying material about which he would otherwise be uncertain. When he comes upon what appear to be series or parts of series he must watch for their structure, remembering that he will need to know this in drafting his description of series. As he records, on rough working cards, the dossier headings in a developing subject file, he will be inclined to execute even these working cards in the prescribed form so that a container list can be typed, in part, directly from the cards. And when, after the organization of the papers is nearly completed, the processor begins the drafting of the register, it happens more often than not that he must return to his volumes and boxes, must recheck his folder headings and his shelf reading here and there, in order to supply all the information upon which the "John Doe" sample insists. Short registers deal, of course, with far less complicated groups of materials, but they, too, often serve as a kind of check that the processor himself applies to his own work.

We are well aware in the Library's Manuscripts Division — as what overburdened repository is not? — that processing depends on

staff, and staff depends on funds. Occasionally, therefore, when interest in a large group of newly received material is unusually keen or when for some reason the papers must be used by readers before the staff has been able to complete their organization, it is necessary to do a partial processing job. In such cases we have experimented with the preparation of a partial register, that is to say, one which presents as much information as possible about the whole collection, in parts I and II, but which, in matters covered by the other parts, concerns only such of the papers as have actually been processed for service. This is a useful *détour* around a difficult situation, but we employ it only when we must, because it is dangerous. Such a partial register may, in spite of the fact that its incomplete character is carefully spelled out at the beginning, give the user a false sense of having sufficiently "covered" a group of papers; and it may tend also to give the Division itself an equally false sense of having completed a job! But if care is taken at both these danger spots, the partial register can at times serve a very useful purpose.

At all points it is necessary to emphasize, and emphasize again, the need for judgment. There are no hard-and-fast rules to cover every situation, much as one may wish there were. The "John Doe" whose papers are described in the sample registers obviously led an oversimplified life. The handling of his diaries, his general correspondence, his speech file, and the packet of papers assembled by his biographer is intended to *suggest* methods of handling similar and also other types of actual material in the papers of his flesh-and-blood counterparts. But this is a suggestion only. Every manuscript collection differs somewhat from every other manuscript collection. Although general principles and precedents that have been proved workable are of real help, nothing can relieve the manuscript worker from the necessity of using his own judgment. And nowhere is that more true than in the last and in some ways the most important step of all — the careful and intelligent recording, in properly prepared registers, of what has been done.

Two sample forms follow, both of which are now in use in the Manuscripts Division: a register; and a short-register. Both record the handling of the literary remains of that well-known and extremely useful figure, John Doe.

APPENDIX I: SAMPLE REGISTER

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
MANUSCRIPTS DIVISION[Form number]
Revised 10/27/54Processed by: AJC
Date: 5-11-54

JOHN DOE PAPERS

Acs. _____; —, —
II-41-F, 4 to L, 3

The papers of John Doe, banker, cabinet member, and author, were deposited in the Library of Congress in 1930 and 1941 by Mrs. John Doe. In 1952 Mrs. Doe converted the deposit to a gift.

Linear feet of shelf space occupied: 110.5
Approximate number of items: 71,450*

For ten years, or during the lifetime of Mrs. John Doe, whichever period is shorter, the papers may be used only by permission of Mrs. Doe.

Literary rights in the unpublished writings of John Doe in these papers, and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress, have been dedicated to the public, except that these literary rights are reserved to Mrs. John Doe during her lifetime.

A press release on the John Doe papers was issued by the Library of Congress on _____; a note appeared in the Library's *Information Bulletin*, _____; and the material was described on p. _____ of the Library of Congress *Quarterly Journal of Current Acquisitions*, _____ (Vol. —, No. —).

II. *Biographical Note*

1870 Born, Boston, Massachusetts
1891 B.A., Amherst College
1892-4 Harvard Law School
1895 Admitted to bar and began law practice, in Massachusetts
1900-12 President, Hamilton Bank, Boston, Massachusetts
1913-17 Secretary of the Treasury
1918-24 Chairman, Federal Reserve Board
1925 Died, Washington, D. C.

Author of: _____ 1914
_____ 1920

* A large group of pictures, mounted and unmounted, was transferred to the Library's Prints and Photographs Division; 16 maps to the Map Division; and 40 records of speeches to the Music Division. All of these are available for use without special permission.

III. *Description of Series**Con-
tainers Series*

- 1-15 Diaries. 1891-Aug. 1925. 15 containers.
In 32 bound volumes, chronologically arranged. The following volumes are missing: 1899; 1920; 1921.
- 16-176 General Correspondence. 1896-1925. 161 containers.
Letters sent and received. Chronologically arranged by months.
- 177-189 "Personal Correspondence." 1898-1925. 13 containers.
Letters sent and received. Alphabetically arranged by names of correspondents.
- 190 "Personal Correspondence" of Mrs. John Doe. 1905-25. 1 container.
Mainly letters received. A few handwritten copies of letters sent are included. Chronologically arranged by days.
- 191-195 Material Relating to the Death of John Doe. 1925. 5 containers.
Mainly letters received. Some newspaper clippings and several biographical articles are included. The clippings and articles have been segregated, but otherwise there is no arrangement.
- 196-225 Subject File. ca. 1880-1925 [mainly 1891-1924]. 30 containers.
Memoranda, reports, financial papers, maps, photographs, memorabilia, clippings, etc. All correspondence has been withdrawn and filed in the General Correspondence Series. The folders are alphabetically arranged by subject. There is little arrangement within folders.
- 226-250 Speech, Article and Book File. 1906-24. 25 containers.
Handwritten, typewritten, near-print, and printed copies or drafts of speeches and articles; also manuscripts and galley proofs of John Doe's two books. Chronologically arranged.
- 251-253 Biographer's Papers. ca. 1925-30. 3 containers.
Correspondence, notes, manuscripts, etc., relating to John Doe, assembled by Joe Doaks (who died in 1930 without having completed the biography of Doe). The correspondence has been separated, but otherwise there is no arrangement.
- 254-274 Scrapbooks. 1906-25. 21 containers.
Clippings from newspapers and magazines, mounted in 26 scrapbooks. The material relates to John Doe and his activities. The volumes are chronologically arranged, and there is general chronological arrangement within each volume.

IV. *Container List*

<i>Nos.</i>	<i>Contents</i>
1	Diaries. 1891-93
2	“ 1894-95
3	“ 1896-97
4	“ 1898, 1900
5	“ 1901-02
6	“ 1903-04
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16	General Correspondence. 1896-97
17	“ “ 1898
18	“ “ Jan.-June 1899
19	“ “ July-Dec. 1899
20	“ “ Jan. 1900
21	“ “ Feb. 1900
22	“ “ Mar.-Apr. 1900
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177	“Personal Correspondence.” A-B
178	“ “ B
179	“ “ C
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190	“Personal Correspondence” of Mrs. John Doe
191-4	Material Relating to the Death of John Doe. Letters Received
195	“ “ “ “ “ “ “ “ Clippings, etc.
196	Subject File. Agriculture, Memoranda re; Amherst College Alumni Matters
197-8	“ “ Budget Notes, 1913
199-200	“ “ “ “ 1914
201	“ “ “ “ 1915-16
202	“ “ “ “ 1917
203	“ “ Calendar Revision
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<i>Nos.</i>	<i>Contents</i>
226	Speech, Article and Book File. 1906-08
227	“ “ “ “ “ 1909
228	“ “ “ “ “ 1910-12
229	“ “ “ “ “ Jan.-June 1913
230	“ “ “ “ “ July-Dec. 1913
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251-2	Biographer's Papers. Correspondence
253	“ “ Notes, Manuscript, etc.
254	Scrapbooks. 1906-07
255	“ 1908
256	“ 1909
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.	
274	“ 1925

V. [Optional Section]*

Among the correspondents of John Doe are the following persons:

Calvin Coolidge	1923-24
Charles S. Hamlin	ca. 1906-20
Henry Cabot Lodge	ca. 1910-15
William G. McAdoo	ca. 1913-24
Elihu Root	1910-11
Woodrow Wilson	ca. 1913-23

Bases for Estimates
(for Staff use only)

Average number of items in letter-size metaledge container:	300
“ “ “ “ “ legal-size “	300
“ “ “ “ “ 3-inch box-portfolio	150
Number of letter-size metaledge containers in 1 full press:	36
“ “ legal-size “ “ “ “ “	30
“ “ 3-inch box-portfolios “ “ “ “	32 [or, if crowded, 36]

Number of linear feet per shelf: 2.42

*If more detailed information can be easily assembled by the processor (such as the approximate number of letters found in each case, or the specific dates of certain significant letters), such information may be added to this optional section of the register.

APPENDIX II: SAMPLE SHORT-REGISTER
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
MANUSCRIPTS DIVISION

0127-4	<i>Processed by:</i> AJC
Revised 10/27/54	<i>Date:</i> 10-30-54
<i>Title:</i> John Doe Diary	<i>Ac. no.:</i> _____
<i>Addition to:</i> John Doe Papers	<i>Material rec'd. on:</i> _____
<i>Source:</i> Mrs. John Doe	<i>Location:</i> II-41-L, 4
<i>Status:</i> Gift	

Linear feet: 1.25 *Approx. no. of items:* 4 *No. of containers:* 4 (vols.)

Restrictions: For ten years, or during the lifetime of Mrs. John Doe, whichever period is shorter, the diary may be used only by permission of Mrs. Doe.

Literary rights: The literary rights in these diaries have been dedicated to the public, except that such literary rights are reserved to Mrs. John Doe during her lifetime.

Description: The diaries of John Doe (Secretary of the Treasury, 1913-17; Chairman, Federal Reserve Board, 1918-24), cover the years 1913-24 and are contained in 3 original autograph volumes and a photostat volume, reproducing a 4th autograph volume, the original of which is in the possession of Mrs. John Doe. The diaries include a number of detailed descriptions of Cabinet meetings; comments on the activities of the Federal Reserve Board during World War I and in the years immediately following; descriptions of social events; and a number of entries of purely personal and family significance.

A note on the John Doe diaries appeared in the *Information Bulletin*, ____.

[Note to staff: In rare cases it may be advisable to attach a separate biographical note, or a container list.]