

Manuscript Cataloging— The Beinecke Method Examined

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THREE years ago the Yale University Press published the first volume of a catalog of the Beinecke Collection of Western Americana.¹ According to its editor it is the first of a series to catalog the entire collection. Future volumes will be devoted to manuscripts, printed books, pamphlets, and broadsides. Since, according to the editor, the collection is "still growing," the successive volumes will serve not only as finding aids but also as progress reports. The final volume in the series, according to present plans, will catalog those manuscripts in the collection not covered by Volume 1.

In 1952 a forerunner of the present volume was published: *A Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Collection of Western Americana Founded by William Robertson Coe, Yale University Library*, compiled by Mary C. Withington. By contrast with the volume to be discussed here, Miss Withington's catalog is more exclusive—it covers Western Americana manuscripts only—and yet more inclusive: with some stated exceptions, it covers all Western Americana manuscripts in the Yale University Library. In spite of this basic difference in coverage there is continuity between the two catalogs, in the person of Archibald Hanna, editor of the Beinecke catalog and one of those whose aid Miss Withington acknowledged in her catalog.

A sentence in the introduction is suggestive of the multiple purposes to be served by the Beinecke catalog: "Mr. Beinecke's desire that the results of his collecting should *further the work of historians* not only at Yale but throughout the scholarly community has led to the publication of this catalogue of his collection." The phrase italicized (by this writer) expresses what seems to be the proximate purpose of the book.

Regarding the total quantity of manuscripts in the Beinecke Collection, the catalog is not very informative. Admittedly, the validity and utility of historical evidence are largely independent of quantity, but on the other hand, the efficacy of descriptive techniques is critically affected by the quantity of material to be described. Totaling the page

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¹ *A Catalogue of the Frederick W. & Carrie S. Beinecke Collection of Western Americana, Volume One: Manuscripts*, compiled by Jeanne M. Goddard and Charles Kritzler and edited with an introduction by Archibald Hanna (New Haven and London, 1965).

counts shown in most of the catalog entries and estimating where they are lacking, this writer arrives at a total of somewhat less than 25,000 pages. Therefore, including containers, transcripts, and other auxiliary material, and assuming fairly compact storage, the Beinecke manuscripts can hardly occupy more than about 50 cubic feet. In discussing finding aids, however, the *document* is perhaps a more meaningful unit than the page or cubic foot. The present catalog does not consistently provide data on the number of documents, no doubt because doing so would in certain cases have required rather arbitrary decisions on what should, and what should not, be counted as a separate document. Having taken these decisions (two multidocument secondary compilations, for instance, are here treated as single documents), and using the available data, this writer has derived an estimate of the number of documents close enough, he hopes, for present purposes: there are some 2,000 documents described in the volume.

From an archival perspective a *fonds* of 2,000 documents, more or less, would present few problems of description. The Beinecke manuscripts, however, do not constitute an archival *fonds* (although, as will appear below, they include dispersed portions of several *fonds*); instead, they make up a *collection*, an aggregate of discrete items selected and assembled from disparate sources. In the present case the collectors, by following what seems to be a preestablished collecting pattern, have superimposed a measure of unity upon the diversity of the documents in the collection. According to the editor, the Beineckes in their collecting were "strongly influenced" by a desire to fill a major gap in Yale manuscript holdings, namely, in the field of the "Spanish Southwest and California . . . down through the Mexican War and the gold rush." For present purposes the Beineckes' collecting field will be interpreted to cover: (a) the area extending eastward from the Pacific to the Rockies and the eastern borders of Texas and Mexico, and southward from the 42d parallel; (b) the time period extending from earliest times to 1860; and (c) two events, "the Mexican War and the [1849] gold rush," whose scope is self-evident. The Beineckes stayed pretty well within these self-imposed collecting constraints; this writer has counted only 25 catalog entries, of a total of 285, describing documents that are substantially outside the Beineckes' chosen collecting field, either spatially, temporally, or both. These irrelative documents pertain to places extending from the confluence of the Mississippi and the Missouri to Vancouver Island and are dated from 1789 to 1899. Although they are not numerous, they include some of the outstanding items in the collection. Two of these are of special interest to archivists: the Clark journals (1803-5) and a dispersed part of the records of the Wheeler Survey (1871-79). Plainly, the Beineckes were willing, when the provocation was great, to step outside their chosen collecting field.

The extraordinary history of the Clark journals has given rise to a

formidable literature, an ornament of which is the published edition of the journals, *The Field Notes of Captain William Clark, 1803-1805* (New Haven, 1964), consisting of the printed text, edited, annotated, and introduced by Ernest Staples Osgood, together with complete facsimile copies of the manuscripts. It would be supererogatory to attempt a Clark journal bibliography here, but it is perhaps in order to cite two recent items: a review by Lester Cappon of the Osgood edition of the journals in *William and Mary Quarterly* (22:674-677; Oct. 1965); and an article in the *New Yorker* (vol. 42, no. 36: 105-148; Oct. 29, 1966), the author of which, Calvin Tomkins, presents data apparently acquired directly from some of the protagonists in what he calls the "Lewis and Clark Case." The Beinecke catalog cites the Osgood edition of the Clark journals and summarizes the information in Osgood's introduction; no additional data are furnished.

Although they are, admittedly, of an order of magnitude less important than the Clark journals, the Beinecke holdings of Wheeler Survey records may be of some archival interest. For one thing, they are strays from the Wheeler Survey *fonds*, the main body of which has been in the National Archives since 1960. The disruption of series caused by dispersal is exemplified by one series of Wheeler Survey general correspondence, the press copies of letters sent, 16 volumes of which are known to have survived, 10 of them now in the Beinecke Collection. It is probable that this series, before it was dispersed, comprised 30 volumes that covered, with no major discontinuity, the period 1872-83. Using "B" to symbolize volumes in the Beinecke Collection, "A" for volumes in the National Archives, and "o" for hypothetical missing volumes, the series might be conjecturally reconstituted thus: BooBooAoooBABBBBBoBAAoooABoooA. Homogeneity of the series, the number of volumes surviving, their chronological order, and the incidence of gaps in the series due to loss are objectively demonstrable; the number of missing volumes that originally occupied those gaps must be guessed, but pertinent clues are not entirely lacking.

The Wheeler Survey records are also noteworthy as a happy exception to the general rule that the dispersal of archives is an irreversible process. Originally having been accumulated as records of a subordinate unit in the Army Engineer Department, and subsequently having been thoroughly dispersed, the Wheeler Survey records have largely been reassembled in the National Archives since 1960, through the bounty of the Stanford University Library and various other temporary custodians. What was known of the history of the Wheeler Survey records in 1964 is discussed in an article in the *American Archivist* (27:219-227; Apr. 1964); the Beinecke catalog provides no new evidence on that subject, which is regrettable. One presumes that the custodians of the Beinecke Collection have attempted to document the chain of custody through which their Wheeler Survey record holdings have passed, with-

out success. Nevertheless, evidence of the latest link in the chain is readily at hand: the Yale Wheeler Survey records were offered for sale in a manuscript catalog issued by Edward Eberstadt & Sons, *Catalogue 159: California Manuscripts* (New York, privately printed, 1962), and they passed directly from the Eberstadt firm into the Beinecke Collection.²

Assuming that the importance and size of a given accumulation of documents justify preparation of a finding aid, the initial step in that process is to divide the documents into what East (in *American Archivist*, 16:291-304; Oct. 1953) calls "describable items." In the present volume the Beinecke catalogers have divided their manuscripts into 285 describable items, each item is the subject for a catalog entry, and the entries are arranged alphabetically according to their name or subject headings.

The ruling principle, if any, used by the compilers of the Beinecke catalog in dividing the manuscript collection into items is not made explicit anywhere in the volume. From the evidence of the actual catalog entries, however, and from tangential remarks in the introduction, it should be possible to infer with some assurance what the compilers intended. This writer hazards a guess that the division of Beinecke manuscripts into items reflects rather faithfully the state of organization or disorganization in which the documents were found when they entered the Beinecke Collection. The item makeup of the catalog bears witness to the fragmentation process—dispersal, damage, and partial loss—usually undergone by manuscripts in their passage from hand to hand over the years, until they reach sanctuary in a *new haven*. Most of the Beinecke manuscripts are evidently the survivors of a more or less natural selection process, in which historical (and commercial) accident have been major determinants.

By separating items that appear to belong together, the catalogers may, in some cases, have compounded the disorganization suffered by the manuscripts before entering the collection. For instance, seven documents apparently originating in the papers of a soldier, E. O. C. Ord, are described in seven separate catalog entries; three "retained drafts" are consecutively entered under ORD; but four documents received by Ord from W. T. Sherman and G. L. Welcker are entered separately under the names of the writers. An analogous instance concerns letters received by a geologist, J. E. Clayton, from two colleagues, Clarence King and J. D. Whitney; these items are entered separately under the names of the writers. (Primary identification of letters with their writers rather than with the recipients into whose *papers* the letters are assimilated is common practice among manuscript custodians. The foregoing criticism is therefore aimed at the Beinecke catalogers only to the extent

² Information about this transaction, for which acknowledgment is gratefully made, was furnished the writer by the vendor and the recipient.

that their work exemplifies a common practice that many archivists deplore.)

Having criticized the catalogers for excessively atomistic descriptive practices, it is only fair to commend them for using corporate entries to reveal that certain documents belong together. For instance, six items entered consecutively under identical corporate entry headings (MEXICO. JUNTA DE FOMENTO DE CALIFORNIAS) cover official reports and related correspondence of the Junta. Having assembled these records, how logical and natural it would have been to describe them under a collective heading, RECORDS OF THE JUNTA . . . ! But the Beinecke catalogers were apparently prevented (by what ideology or policy, one wonders) from taking this decisive integrative step in the descriptive process.

A considerable number of Beinecke catalog entries might have been assembled under more inclusive corporate headings, including U.S. Army, U.S. War Department, and U.S. Navy. An interesting run of records covering the period 1782–1850, cataloged under seven separate, repetitive, consecutive entries, might have been subsumed under the heading, RECORDS OF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS OF CALIFORNIA.

In spite of the sumptuous physical setting provided for their catalog, the Beinecke catalogers have been true to the Puritan heritage of their parent institution in one important respect: they have shunned any temptation to create collective entries for documents that share significant attributes. For instance, a rather impressive entry could have been synthesized under the heading, COMPAÑÍA DE JESÚS. One advantage of the synthetic entry is that the whole may be greater than the sum of the parts. For instance, 31 Beinecke catalog entries of widely varying importance might have been subsumed under a heading in the style ARGONAUTS OF '49, perhaps with subheads for the different routes (Overland, Nicaragua, Panama, Cape Horn, etc.). Judgments about the historical importance of manuscripts are extremely fallible, of course, and this writer therefore offers with considerable diffidence his opinion that some of the material described in the Beinecke catalog should have been granted the decent obscurity of inclusion in collective entries. Seven stray letters received by Presidents of the United States concerning minor patronage matters, for instance, would seem to call for collective treatment.

The Beinecke catalogers, having largely accepted the division of their manuscripts into items by historical accident, concentrated their descriptive effort on the content of the items, and the results are admirably informative and concise; in this regard, comparison is possible with the Eberstadt *Catalogue 159* (cited earlier) since 111 of the 285 Beinecke catalog entries cover material previously described by Eberstadt, through whom they presumably were acquired. Setting aside the hyperbole one expects of a vendor, it seems fair to say that the Eber-

stadt catalog is considerably more detailed and more diffuse. The Beinecke catalogers have, as would naturally be expected, improved upon their commercial forerunner in many ways. Nevertheless, this writer finds the Eberstadt catalog a useful supplement to the Beinecke catalog.

The Beinecke catalogers have been less successful in conveying the essential data on the *form* of the documents in their collection than in describing their content. In a catalog intended, in the words quoted earlier, to *further the work of historians*, it is disconcerting to find that one must depend largely upon conjecture to answer such basic formal questions as the following: Is a given document the *retained* copy, the *recipient's* copy, or some other copy? Of what *series* should the given document be considered a component? In what *fonds* (in whose *papers*) was the given document originally accumulated? What happened to the given document between original filing and final attainment or sanctuary? Where are related records to be found? Clues to the answers to some of these questions are provided in some of the Beinecke catalog entries; in some cases the relevant data are, no doubt, irretrievably lost; and in some cases the reader is left to infer or guess about data that are readily available but not presented in the catalog.

The Beinecke catalogers have, with a few exceptions, omitted from their *apparatus* the standard abbreviations used to indicate the documentary form of manuscripts, *e.g.*, "A.L.S." This omission is to be regretted. On the other hand, the vertical length of most (but not all) documents in the collection is explicitly noted; this practice, bibliographical in origin, is, in the manuscript context, of limited usefulness, especially when the subject matter is a mixed batch of sheets with a widely varying range of shapes and sizes. The Clark "field notes," for instance, have a size range noted as "25½–104½ cm." Much more useful as a rough indication of the amount of reading matter is the number of documents and of pages. As noted earlier, these data are provided for most of the Beinecke manuscripts, but not for all.

Except for a few cross-references to related material in other collections at Yale, the Beinecke catalogers have abstained from guiding the student to related records elsewhere. This policy is understandable; to have done otherwise would have multiplied labor. Fortunately the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections is now in being and, with proper support from manuscript custodians, should provide the synoptic view needed to link widely scattered manuscript holdings into a functioning network. Accordingly, one assumes that a report on the Beinecke manuscripts will appear forthwith in the National Union Catalog. As an instance of a subject for which comprehensive cross-referencing is indicated, there is John White Geary, whose Mexican War service is documented in the Beinecke Collection, with a cross-reference to another Yale collection; related Geary material is to be

found in at least two archival establishments and several manuscripts repositories.

The introduction to the Beinecke catalog states, "Information about provenance . . . is given where known." This statement, if taken literally, is misleading; this writer found only a few catalog entries that include explicit reference to previous custodians. At least one readily available source of data on provenance (Eberstadt *Catalogue 159*, cited earlier) was apparently ignored by the Beinecke catalogers. From the descriptive data in the catalog entries, it is possible to infer with some assurance the provenance of some of the items in the collection and to make plausible guesses about others. The remarks that follow about provenance are, therefore, necessarily speculative. This writer has counted 161 catalog entries (of 285) that cover what appear to be records of essentially private matters. Predictably, personal correspondence, journals, and reminiscences make up most of the private papers, but they also include the records of two San Francisco business firms.

A little less than half the Beinecke manuscripts (124 items) have for their subject matter essentially public affairs. Some of these documents are of official origin; some were privately accumulated to document the public roles of the protagonists; and some must be put in an equivocal status because information is not available in the catalog to determine whether they are of official or private origin. It would be futile under the circumstances to attempt a more refined breakdown of the provenance of the Beinecke manuscripts. Among the official jurisdictions whose activities are documented are the following: the Spanish Government, the Church in Mexico and various missionary orders, the secular Spanish colonial government in Mexico, the Mexican Empire, the Mexican Republic, the Spanish and Mexican provincial governments in California, other successive and concurrent authorities in California during 1845-50, the California State Government, the municipal government of San Francisco, the United States War and Navy Departments, and the British Admiralty.

One of the Beinecke catalog entries exemplifies several points of descriptive technique that are perhaps worthy of note. The primary entry heading consists of the name of the commander of an exploring expedition, Alessandro Malaspina (*floruit* 1754-1809). By inference from the text of the entry, it seems clear that the expedition was not a personal enterprise of Malaspina, but rather an official Spanish Government expedition. Accordingly, it would seem more appropriate that the heading should make clear the corporate nature of the subject matter, perhaps in the style RECORDS CONCERNING THE MALASPINA PACIFIC OCEAN EXPEDITION OF 1788-1792. The subheading for the Malaspina expedition records is "Letters, documents, and papers pertaining to the Northwest Coast of North America . . ." Geographically, this subhead-

ing is definitely misleading; the text of the entry makes clear that, although the expedition visited the Northwest Coast, the northern limit of the region covered by the expedition records in the Beinecke Collection is Acapulco.

Regarding the *provenance* of the Malaspina expedition records in the Beinecke Collection, the person in whose office or registry these documents were originally accumulated, is apparently Antonio Valdés y Bazan, Minister of Marine in the Spanish Government; the documents in question appear to be strays from the records of the Spanish Ministry of Marine. The catalog entry is silent on this point. One wonders if the Beinecke documents bear *legajo* and *expediente* numbers that could be checked against the Ministry of Marine registers, indexes, and other finding aids.

In comparing the Beinecke catalog with other manuscript guides and catalogs, several matters of terminology may be of some archival interest. *Docket* is apparently used in some manuscript circles to denote what archivists would call an *endorsement*. The unexplained use in the Beinecke catalog (*e.g.*, in describing some Zachary Taylor copies of letters sent) of the phrase *signature only* was baffling to this writer (and to several knowledgeable colleagues), until he found an explicit definition of the phrase on page x of Miss Withington's catalog (cited earlier), to wit: a document in a handwriting other than that of the signer. Finally, this writer would like to note an astonishing fact: a rather thorough reading of the volume under discussion has failed to reveal any appearance of the term *record*. Could the Beinecke catalogers have been intimidated by the vague and redundant definitions of *record* that appear in the archival literature?

Considered strictly as a finding aid, the main feature of the catalog is its index. Quantitatively, the index occupies 27 pages (of 128) and includes no less than 2,000 index entries, each one referring to from 1 to 30 or 40 particular catalog entries. Cross-referencing is copious. The index entries are mostly names: personal, corporate, geographical, ship, etc., but they also include some subjects. In the parlance of information storage and retrieval, this is a relatively *deep* index.

The Beinecke catalogers have valiantly tried, in their index, to supply the integration, the lack of which in the text this writer has deplored. For instance, the index provides several entries ("Overland journeys to the Pacific in 1849," "Voyages to the Pacific Coast," "Panama City," etc.) to facilitate access to material that might have been described under an inclusive entry heading such as ARGONAUTS. Incidentally, although the catalog includes material on the Nicaraguan route to eldorado, there is no index entry for Nicaragua.

This writer was struck by a curious hiatus, undoubtedly inadvertent, in the indexing of ecclesiastical affairs: although the Catholic Church is well represented under "Missions," and the Latter-day Saints rate

an entry under "Mormons," the four catalog entries concerning Protestant clerics and missions have no corporate recognition in the index. In another field, mining, the writer found, in following up a catalog entry headed QUICKSILVER PROPERTY IN CALIFORNIA, that the index refers from "Quicksilver" to "Mercury mines," under which heading the sole reference is to the quicksilver property mentioned above. Incidentally, the Eberstadt *Catalogue 159* indicates, as the Beinecke catalogers do not, that the document in question has to do with "New Almaden quicksilver"; New Almaden is a name to conjure with in California mining history.

Two special features of the Beinecke index are explicitly noted in the introduction: the index does not pretend to be exhaustive, and it includes names and other references found in the manuscripts but not mentioned in the catalog entries. It is well to have these points on record; to neither of them could anyone take exception.

In an era when information and document handling techniques are in ferment, the appearance of a manuscript guide such as this may just possibly be an anachronism. All document custodians, however, now and in the years to come, will have need for all the philosophical breadth, technological insight, and judgment that they can muster, to make optimal use of both old and new techniques.

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