

# Disposition of Nonmanuscript Items Found Among Manuscripts

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**C**OLLECTIONS of manuscripts<sup>1</sup> often include a wide variety of materials such as pamphlets, books, serials and government documents (both annotated and unannotated), maps, photographs, mimeographed items, and many other related items. To learn the "general" practice of institutions in the disposition of these items a survey was taken by sending questionnaires to institutions housing manuscript collections; 53 replies were received. On this basis current practices were determined. From this, it was possible to suggest some practical guidelines for the disposition of these nonmanuscript materials.

Many replies to the questionnaire stated "it all depends on the nature of the collection and the materials." Yet in the final analysis of the returns, many answers were heavily weighted on one side or the other. It appears that some operational principle is being observed in most institutions, and it is indeed assumed here that such principles lurk behind the decisions concerning nonmanuscript materials that accompany manuscript accessions.

As can be seen from the tabulation on the questionnaire/tally sheet, it would appear that some coherent model based on sound theoretical premises might prove helpful.

A brief review of the archival concepts of provenance and *respect des fonds* will establish the theoretical context from which an operational model may be extrapolated that may serve as a guide to practice. The essence of these two concepts is that recognition is given to the fact that records are generated from activity and consequently they will reflect that activity in a documentary sense. This activity itself may be personal or corporate or a combination of both (in the sense that corporate activity is conducted by people and also that these people will often conduct both corporate and personal work concurrently). Record items will be received and sent out in connection with that activity. These

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<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this paper a modern definition of "manuscripts" has been used, which describes them as a "group of papers (manuscript or typescript, originals or copies, of letters, memoranda, diaries, accounts, log books, drafts, etc. including associated printed or near-print materials), usually having a common source and formed by or around an individual, a family, a corporate entity, or devoted to a single theme"; (National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, Information Circular No. 2, revised; Aug. 1966).

TALLY SHEET

Many non-manuscript items and categories of material often accompany a manuscript accession. It is the purpose of this questionnaire to learn what is the general practice mainly with regard to the disposition of such materials within the library or historical society.

Part I

	Kept with manuscript accession	Sent elsewhere in library/society
1. Pamphlets	22	27
2. Leaflets, broadsides	27	21
3. Books	8 (+ 2 sometimes)	38
4. Government documents	11	34
5. Serials	11 (+ 1 sometimes)	33
6. Annotated books	30	16
7. Annotated government documents	32	14
8. Annotated serials	32	14
9. Photographs (personal, family)	37	11
10. Photographs (views, buildings, institutional)	29	15
11. Maps (printed, not annotated)	11	37
12. Maps (printed, annotated)	28	15
13. Maps in manuscript form	32	13
14. Mimeographed and other machine duplicated items	37 (+ 3 sometimes)	6
15. Scrapbooks without manuscript items	36	11
16. Scrapbooks with manuscript items	45	3
17. Is a record made in the manuscript department of those materials that are transferred? 40 yes 1 sometimes 3 no		
18. General or specific documents about disposition policy. (Please send with reply)		
19. Do you require the return of items sent out but not wanted by other departments? 15 yes 26 no		

Part II

1. For annotated books, government documents and serials that are retained with the manuscript accession, is there an entry made in the main catalog of the library if those items are the only copies in the library or society? 18 yes 22 no
2. Microcopies of manuscripts from manuscript collections of other repositories:
  - a. Are these retained in your manuscript collection? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. If transferred from the manuscript collection, to what department is the transfer made? \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. If acquired for another department is a record made in the manuscript department? \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Are there exceptions to the above answers? Please describe.

record items normally will be any document published or unpublished that is generated in connection with that activity.<sup>2</sup>

It follows that anything generated thereby will be relevant as documentation. Thus, if a pamphlet, leaflet, or other nonmanuscript item is received by a person or corporate body whose papers are at hand, it probably pertains to their actions and would be relevant as documentation.<sup>3</sup>

What is important to stress here is that because human action occurs within a given social context it is therefore crucial that the documentation of that activity be preserved to reflect the context in which it occurs. To do so permits one to reconstruct the way in which an event, development, or series of actions took place.

If the operation of manuscript collections is to be guided by the two archival concepts regarding provenance and respect for the source that generated the record item (i.e., respect for the integrity of the records), then potentially all the types of nonmanuscript materials listed in the questionnaire should be kept with the manuscript group or record group. However, most manuscript collections are parts of a larger institutional complex such as a library or historical society and often have other special departments or units in which many of these record types will be normally acquired or wanted. Often in these institutions there will be rules stating to which units such materials are to be sent. The question thereby arises as to how sound archival practice can be made to conform to broader institutional interests and, in turn, how these interests can conform better to archival considerations.

A commentary on the answers to the questionnaire follows:

#### *Pamphlets, leaflets, and broadsides*

Of the institutions reporting, the current practice of disposition appears almost evenly divided between retention of pamphlets, leaflets, and broadsides within the manuscript collection and dispersal to other library/society units. Inasmuch as this kind of material, whether it is sent out or received, is often quite vital in influencing action, it would seem that the best policy would be to keep it with the manuscript group so that the items can be properly viewed in their documentary context.

If there are special collections for this kind of material in the institution and if they must be routed accordingly, then two considerations should guide their disposition.

1. They should be kept together as a unit in that special collection in the same way as they would be handled if kept in the manuscript collection.

2. If unwanted elsewhere then they should be returned for reincorporation with their parent manuscript group.

<sup>2</sup> "Document" here is used in its broadest sense as being "documentation."

<sup>3</sup> The problem of weeding collections of "unimportant items" can be excluded here inasmuch as it poses a different kind of question of "relevancy."

*Books, government documents, serials (annotated and unannotated)*

These items pose additional considerations. Normally libraries and historical societies will have a regular policy for acquiring these unannotated publications. Clean copies without annotations offer no special problem of disposition if these items are wanted elsewhere in the system. Ideally, however, all such items that are transferred should be listed in the provenance record as having been with a particular manuscript group. If this job is too burdensome, then at least a synoptic statement that is also incorporated in the provenance record is essential. In addition, the return of unwanted items that are (or would be) unique to the system should be required inasmuch as their relevancy and quality as source material to the manuscript group can best be determined in the manuscript division. If kept in the manuscript division then they should be placed in the manuscript group with which they were originally associated.

The more troublesome items of this nature are those that are annotated. As with clean copies the general practice is clearly weighted, but this time on the side of retention with the manuscript accession. This general practice would seem to be based on the sound archival principles respecting provenance and integrity of the records. The theory behind the practice should be made explicit, however, for these annotated items are much like a record series of notes or field books, or sketches and the like. Indeed they are keyed so specifically to the annotated items that they should be considered inseparable from the manuscript group. For example, the poet Theodore Roethke heavily annotated books written by Auden and Dylan Thomas; to handle them elsewhere in the system would be to destroy their relation to Roethke's creative development because the integrity of the records would be violated and the documentary connection obscured. If, however, such items are nevertheless transferred, then they should at least be placed in a special collection that is noncirculating, and proper reference should be made illustrating their interrelationships within the system. *And* they should be kept together as a single unit just like the manuscript group itself. It should go without saying that all such items if transferred should be returned if not wanted elsewhere in the system. If annotated items are kept with the manuscript accession and if the items are unique to the system, then they should probably be referred to in the general public catalog.

*Photographs*

Neither personal and family photographs nor those of a scenic or institutional nature seem to pose practical problems as practice is heavily weighted in favor of retention within the manuscript group. Where this is not done, it is probably true that a photographic collection exists. If photographs are transferred, then every attempt should be made to have them kept together according to the source from which they came—to do

so would be an optimum compromise that recognizes their documentary integrity and their relationship to a parent manuscript group.

*Maps (annotated, unannotated, manuscript)*

The general practice regarding the disposition of maps also seems clear. Those that are printed, like the unannotated books, government documents and serials mentioned above, offer no special problem. Practice respecting manuscripts maps, however, requires some special comment. Since maps in manuscript form are usually so clearly a product of the activity reflected by the other documentation in any given manuscript group, it would seem equally clear that they should be kept with the manuscript group with which they are so intimately linked. It is about as difficult to reconcile their transfer as for other more typical record series such as correspondence or a diary.

*Mimeographed and other machine duplicated items*

The results of the survey show that practice is overwhelmingly in favor of retention with the manuscript accession. This clearly is in recognition of the fact that modern "manuscripts" are no longer limited to either handwritten or typewritten materials. Practice would indeed seem to be inspired by recognition of the archival concept about records being *generated*. If not, then practice should be explicitly founded upon this fact.

*Scrapbooks (with and without manuscript items)*

Once again, the answers show a heavy tendency toward retention. This would appear to be in recognition of the generational aspect of scrapbooks; but also probably because scrapbooks are usually precisely keyed to the career (personal or corporate) of the subject of the manuscript accession. It is somewhat surprising that even three institutions transfer scrapbooks with manuscript items. Such a practice would be difficult to justify on any theoretical basis, as far as archival management is concerned.

It might be well to make additional remarks concerning the return of items sent out from the manuscript collection but unwanted by other library/society units. The fact that 40 institutions make a record of nonmanuscript materials that are transferred is well and good and needs no comment. However, the fact that only 15 require the return of such items if unwanted elsewhere does cause concern.

If such items would be a unique addition to the system and are unwanted elsewhere, it would seem that sound practice would require the return to the manuscript division for final evaluation. To do so would recognize the original integrity of the records and provide a second (and last) opportunity to restore the original relationship. Since it is normally difficult or impossible for those in other branches of the institution to appreciate these record relationships it is imperative that

final judgment about retention be made in the manuscript division. Furthermore, there should be a resignation upon the part of the manuscript curators and archivists that their collection in part will have to be "residue collections" incorporating items unwanted elsewhere. Their documentary value can be fully appreciated best (if only) by those who know what their documentary characteristics and relationships are—that is, manuscript curators and archivists who have examined the materials and know their true relationship to the entire manuscript group and collection as a whole. They are in the best position to know.

Finally, the survey indicated that the practice of making an entry in the institution's main catalog for annotated books, government documents and serials that are the institution's only copies is about evenly divided. As indicated above it would seem reasonable to have such items as books, serials and government documents represented in the public catalog if they are retained in the manuscript division providing they are unique to the system. They can be guarded from misuse in the same way that manuscripts themselves are protected.

The answers to questions about manuscripts received on microfilm from other repositories were too ambiguous to be analyzed. Some guidelines to practice, however, can be offered.

1. If the microfilm acquisition is initiated by or on behalf of the manuscript division, then it should be treated like any manuscript accession.

2. If the microfilm is acquired for the repository's main collection, then it should be brought to the attention of the manuscript division so that it can have an opportunity to include a description of it in their finding aids or catalog.

3. If there are inflexible institutional rules that require transfer of microfilm, the manuscript division should have the opportunity to include a description in its finding aids or catalog. If this is not done, the reference service of the division will be crippled to that extent.

In conclusion, it would seem that the primary consideration in dealing with nonmanuscript items is their relationship to: (1) the manuscript accession itself, (2) the overall objectives of the manuscript collecting program, and (3) the overall program of the library or historical society itself.

At all three levels, every attempt should be made to preserve the original identity of the nonmanuscript items. If transfer from the manuscript collection is made, then the items should be kept together according to their origins. Thus, if photographs or pamphlets are transferred, the receiving unit should preferably keep them together according to their original source. If these materials, for example, were originally part of the Thomas Burke papers, then they should be kept together as the Thomas Burke collection by the receiving unit. Every attempt should be made to make it easy for the researcher to see clearly the documentary interconnections. To do this, the library or historical

society should also operate on the basis of provenance in these matters. Furthermore, in deciding about retention in general, the most decisive voice should be that of the manuscripts division, because of its special knowledge of the ultimate documentary value of the non-manuscript material.