The Status of Historical Bibliography in the United States

The history of historical bibliography in the United States is outside the scope of this paper, but some consideration of its general trends is necessary for an understanding of the present situation. On the whole these trends have been similar to those of many other varieties of intellectual activity in the United States—from individual initiative and effort, through cooperative activities sponsored and financed by associations, institutions and foundations, to vast projects conducted by agencies of the Federal Government. This development has been due in part, of course, to the tremendous expansion of the amount of material to be controlled, which in turn has been due not only to a greatly accelerated rate of production of historical material but also to an expansion of the conception of what constitutes history and historical material. In 1868, when Sabin began the publication of his great Bibliotheca Americana, and even as late as 1903, when Evans issued the first volume of his American Bibliography, it was thought to be possible for a single individual to plan and carry out a comprehensive project in the field; but it is significant that Sabin's work, after standing still for many years, was completed under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies and that Evans's project, suspended with his death, will probably never be continued.

An important step in the development of cooperative activities was the setting up in 1929 by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council of a Joint Committee on Materials for Research, which has served and still serves as a planning and coordinating agency and assists, through its parent councils in obtaining funds for desirable projects. The undertaking by the Federal Government of comprehensive projects in the field of historical bibliography was primarily a result of the desire to provide suitable and

1 Reprinted from the Transactions of the XIVth Conference of the International Federation for Documentation (the Hague, 1938).
worth-while work for unemployed people of the so-called "white collar" class, but it was also a result of the realization by a few people that there is need for projects too vast to be financed except by the Government and that it is possible to carry on such projects with "relief labor" under competent direction. Numerous state and local projects supported by Federal relief funds having demonstrated this possibility, the Historical Records Survey was established in January, 1936 as a part of the Works Progress Administration; and it quickly developed into the major agency in the United States for the production of comprehensive historical bibliographies on a nation-wide scale. Governmental participation in bibliographical work has not operated, however, to diminish the activities of institutions and associations; and a high degree of cooperation exists between the two types of agencies. Many of the state and local projects supported by the Works Progress Administration are sponsored and directed by historical societies, libraries, and similar institutions; and the Joint Committee on Materials for Research serves in effect as an advisory committee for the Historical Records Survey. Moreover, individual initiative and energy now find an outlet not only in the smaller projects but also in planning and directing projects too large to be carried out by a single person.

Any discussion of bibliographies now available or in preparation in the field of American history, should begin with a reference to Henry Putney Beers's Bibliographies in American History, published a few months ago by the H. W. Wilson Company of New York, which lists 7,692 works, including guides, lists, inventories, and indexes as well as bibliographies in the narrow sense, that help to make available the sources and literature, printed and in manuscript, of American history. This work has been invaluable in the preparation of the present paper, and free use has been made also of information in an unpublished paper by Dr. Beers on "Bibliographical Activities in the United States."

The completion in 1937 of Sabin's Bibliotheca Americana (29 vols.) makes available a comprehensive list of over a hundred thousand books and pamphlets relating to America. The arrangement is alphabetical by authors, and the publication of the successive parts over a period of seventy years has resulted in a wide variation of chronological coverage. All known editions have been listed, and
library locations are given for many rare works. The most comprehensive classified bibliography of American history at the present time is Josephus N. Larned's *Literature of American History*, published for the American Library Association in 1902. It lists some four thousand works published before 1900, with critical annotations by competent scholars; and supplements were published for the years 1900 to 1904 inclusive. The section on the United States in the *Guide to Historical Literature* compiled by a committee of the American Historical Association (1931) is a more up-to-date but much briefer critical bibliography of American history. The need for doing over and bringing up-to-date the work that Larned did so well at the turn of the century was pointed out some years ago by the Joint Committee on Materials for Research, and it is gratifying to know that the Historical Records Survey has the task about two-thirds completed. The new work, which will probably be published in three volumes, will include about eighteen thousand titles, and the annotations will consist in the main of excerpts from reviews.

The bibliographical essays in Justin Winsor’s *Narrative and Critical History* (1884–89, 8 vols.) are still valuable for the colonial and Revolutionary periods; and the critical essays on authorities at the end of each volume of the *American Nation: a History* (1904–07), taken together, constitute a select bibliography of American history, as will also the somewhat similar essays in each volume of the *History of American Life* (1927–) when that series is completed. The well-known *Guide to the Study and Reading of American History*, by Channing, Hart, and Turner (1912) consists in the main of an elaborate topical outline with voluminous references to original and secondary material on each topic, but the outline is preceded by a number of general and special bibliographies. It is understood that a new edition of this work is in process of preparation by members of the department of history of Harvard University. The fact that so large a proportion of American historical publication has been the work of societies makes Appleton P. C. Griffin’s meticulously detailed *Bibliography of American Historical Societies*, published as volume 2 of the *Annual Report* of the American Historical Association for 1905, an invaluable tool, especially as it is supplied with exhaustive indexes. The annual volumes of *Writings in American History*, pub-
lished for 1902 and 1903 and continuously beginning with 1906, list articles as well as books in a classified arrangement with an index and thus supplement the retrospective bibliographies. A consolidated index is in process of preparation. From 1906 on the Writings have been compiled by Grace Gardner Griffin and financed by funds collected by the late J. Franklin Jameson. The volumes for 1918 to date and several earlier ones have been published as parts of the Annual Reports of the American Historical Association, and that association has recently undertaken to build up a Jameson Memorial Fund to finance the work of compilation in the future.

Not all books published in a country belong in a bibliography of its history, except perhaps from the standpoint of the history of printing; nevertheless catalogues of imprints are often useful tools to historical workers, especially when other comprehensive bibliographies are unavailable. In his American Bibliography, Charles Evans attempted to compile and publish "a chronological dictionary of all books, pamphlets and periodical publications printed in the United States of America from the genesis of printing in 1639 down to and including the year 1820, with bibliographical and biographical notes." The last volume (12) published in 1934 carried the work through the year 1799, and the death of the compiler makes it unlikely that any more volumes will appear. Books published in the United States from 1821 to 1870 inclusive are listed much less fully in Orville A. Roorbach's Bibliotheca Americana (1852–61, 4 vols.) and in James Kelley's American Catalogue (1871, 2 vols.). Since 1876 a fairly complete record of books published and books in print has been maintained by the American Catalogue and its successor, the United States Catalogue. The late H. H. B. Meyer of the Library of Congress is said to have collected many titles for a comprehensive catalogue of American imprints from 1820 to 1876, but the task was incomplete when he died in 1936 and no arrangements have been made as yet for completing it. Numerous catalogues of early imprints of states or cities have appeared in the past, many of them compiled by Douglas C. McMurtrie, and Mr. McMurtrie is now in charge of a nation-wide project of the Historical Records Survey for discovering, describing, and listing locations of copies of imprints on a geographical basis.
Much progress has been made in recent years in providing bibliographies and location or union lists of special types of material of value to the historian. Indexes to general and special periodicals have long been available in such publications as Poole's Index, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, and the Index to Legal Periodicals; and in 1927 the H. W. Wilson Company brought out an invaluable Union List of Serials in Libraries of the United States and Canada, compiled by Winifred Gregory, sponsored by the American Library Association, and financed by subscriptions from libraries and a grant from a foundation. Supplements were issued in 1931 and 1933, and Miss Gregory is now at work on a complete revision. A "Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690–1820," compiled by Clarence S. Brigham, has been published in issues of the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society extending from 1913 to 1937 and is now being revised with a view to separate publication. It includes historical data about the papers and locations of all known files. For newspapers after 1820, students had to rely on a few state and local bibliographies and library catalogues until the publication in 1937 of Miss Gregory's American Newspapers, 1821–1936, a Union List of Files Available in the United States and Canada, which was sponsored and financed in the same manner as was the Union List of Serials. Much information about files not listed in this work is being collected by the Historical Records Survey, and a number of projects for indexing or abstracting newspaper files with relief labor have been or are being supported by the Works Progress Administration. A "Guide to the Opinion Forming Press of the United States" is being compiled by Culver H. Smith under the auspices of the American Historical Association and with financial aid from the American Council of Learned Societies as part of a project of the International Committee on Historical Sciences.

The furnishing of keys to unlock the resources in the printed documents of the Federal Government is a duty of the Office of the Superintendent of Documents, which has published its biennial Catalogue of the Public Documents for the period beginning in 1893 and its Monthly Catalogue of United States Public Documents, beginning in 1895. The principal retrospective bibliographies are Benjamin P. Poore's Descriptive Catalogue, for the period from 1774 to 1881,
and John G. Ames's *Comprehensive Index*, for the period from 1881 to 1893, neither of which is satisfactory. More complete for the material covered is the index in the *Tables of and Annotated Index to the Congressional Series* (1902), which is confined to the publications of the Congress from 1817 to 1893. A most useful classified list is the third edition of the *Checklist of United States Public Documents*, which covers the period from 1789 to 1909. Unfortunately the index, which was to have been published separately, has never appeared. The numerous special bibliographies, catalogues, lists, and indexes of Federal publications are listed in Beers's *Bibliographies*, and there are a number of useful general guides, of which Laurence F. Schmeckebier's *Government Publications and their Uses* (1936) is the latest and the best.

The published documents of the states are listed currently in the Library of Congress's *Monthly Checklist of State Publications*, which has appeared since 1910 but is far from complete. The only attempt at a general retrospective bibliography in this field is Richard R. Bowker's *State Publications* (1899–1909, 4 vols.), which is very inadequate, but more complete lists of certain types of state publications are being compiled and published by the Public Documents Clearing House Committee of the National Association of State Libraries. Note should also be made of Adelaide R. Hasse's *Index of Economic Material in Documents of the States*, of which one or more volumes for each of 13 states were published by the Carnegie Institution of Washington from 1907 to 1922, when the project was abandoned. Three or four of the states issue monthly checklists of their publications, and a number of bibliographies of such material for individual states are listed by Beers. The best guide in this field is James B. Childs, *An Account of Government Document Bibliography in the United States and Elsewhere* (1927).

Voluminous as are the printed materials for American history, they are exceeded in bulk by those that remain unpublished, and it is in the field of archival and manuscript materials that bibliographical work is making the most notable progress at the present time. A *Guide to the Archives of the Government of the United States in Washington*, by Claude H. Van Tyne and Waldo G. Leland, was published by the Carnegie Institution of Washington in 1904 and re-
issued with revisions in 1907. Soon after the establishment of The National Archives in 1934, the Archivist appointed a corps of well-trained deputy examiners, who have recently completed a survey of the nearly three million cubic feet of records of the Federal Government in the District of Columbia; and a similar, but somewhat more detailed, survey of the records of the Federal Government to be found in depositories scattered through the forty-eight states has been conducted as a Works Progress Administration project with The National Archives as a cooperating sponsor. The returns of both of these surveys are available for consultation at The National Archives, and a beginning has been made of the publication in mimeograph form of inventories of the Federal records outside Washington. Plans have been made by The National Archives for the compilation, on the basis of the data collected by these two surveys and of further investigation, of a series of guides to the archives of all the agencies of the Federal Government, but it will be a number of years before this work can be completed.

In the meantime, many of the older and historically more important records of the Federal Government are being concentrated in the National Archives Building, and a guide to those received by June 30, 1937, has been published as an appendix to the Third Annual Report of the Archivist. This guide is now being revised and brought up-to-date and will be reissued as a separate publication in the near future. Numerous lists, inventories, and indexes of sections of the material transferred to the custody of the Archivist have been compiled and are available in typescript at The National Archives; and it is expected that such tools and also calendars of important groups of documents will be published by the agency from time to time.

In the field of state and local archives, the principal bibliographical work, until recently, has been done under the auspices of the Public Archives Commission set up by the American Historical Association in 1899. By means of small grants-in-aid provided by the association and the appointment of adjunct members in the states, the commission procured the compilation of reports, many of which amounted to comprehensive inventories, on the records of most of the states of the Union and on those of a few counties and cities. These reports
were published in the Annual Reports of the American Historical Association for 1900 to 1917 inclusive and still constitute the most comprehensive body of available information on state archives. For a few states more detailed guides or inventories of their archives have been published by state agencies, and inventories of the county archives of Illinois (1915) and of California (1919) have been made and published by the Illinois State Historical Library and the California Historical Survey Commission.

The main task of the Historical Records Survey during the two and a half years of its existence has been "the preparation of inventories and other bibliographical guides, which will render more accessible a great mass of unpublished official documents of the States, counties, cities, and other units of local government throughout the country." By June 1, 1938, the compilation of inventories of county records had been completed, or was under way, in all but about 400 of the 3,066 counties in the United States; the work of editing the completed inventories was well along; and about sixty-five of them had been published, usually by the mimeograph process. Copies of these inventories are being deposited in research libraries throughout the country, and when the set is completed students of American history and also of political science will have an invaluable guide to a tremendous mass of local records. Many inventories of town records have also been compiled by the Historical Records Survey, especially for the New England states, where the towns are more important than the counties; and a beginning has been made in compiling comprehensive inventories of the records of the states.

Of nonpublic archival material, the only group with which any considerable amount of bibliographical work has been done is the records of ecclesiastical organizations. An Inventory of Unpublished Material for American Religious History in Protestant Church Archives and Other Repositories, compiled by William H. Allison, was published by the Carnegie Institution of Washington in 1910. The Historical Records Survey has entered this field also, and is attempting to compile inventories of the records of the more than two hundred thousand churches in the country. Considerable progress has been made on this project and a few of the inventories have been published. The Survey has also experimented with the inventorying
of the archives of discontinued business organizations in one state; and the most important collection of material of this sort in the country is catalogued in a _List of Business Manuscripts in Baker Library_, compiled by Margaret R. Cusick and published by the Graduate School of Business Administration of Harvard University in 1932.

A guide to or inventory of the mass of nonarchival historical manuscripts accumulated in the custody of historical societies, libraries, and other repositories has long been recognized as a desideratum; and some years ago the Joint Committee on Materials for Research formulated a plan for the compilation of such a work. Funds could not be obtained for the project at that time, but the Historical Records Survey has taken it over and is engaged in compiling first a "Guide to Manuscript Depositories in the United States," which will present a general description of holdings and information as to quantity, arrangement, cataloguing, and accessibility; and second, a "Guide to Manuscript Collections in the United States," which will present similar and more detailed information concerning the individual collections in each depository. Pending the publication of these guides, the student finds useful a brief list entitled, _Manuscripts in Public and Private Collections in the United States_, compiled by the Library of Congress (1924). A considerable number of catalogues of particular collections of manuscripts are listed by Beers. The most important of them is the _Handbook of Manuscripts in the Library of Congress_ (1918), which is supplemented by the "List of Manuscript Collections in the Library of Congress to July 1, 1931," compiled by Curtis W. Garrison and published in the _Annual Report_ of the American Historical Association for 1930.

Much manuscript material of fundamental importance for American history is to be found, of course, in the archives and libraries of other countries, particularly those of western Europe. Soon after its establishment in 1903, the Carnegie Institution of Washington began the compilation of guides to this material and, in the course of time, it published a series of volumes describing in considerable detail the material of American significance in the archives of the principal European countries and also a _List of Manuscripts Concerning American History Preserved in European Libraries and Noted in Their Published Catalogues_, compiled by David M. Matteson
These guides and others of a similar nature compiled by other agencies are all listed by Beers. Since transcripts or reproductions of vast quantities of European archival material are now available in the Library of Congress, the usefulness of these guides is no longer confined to those scholars who can cross the Atlantic.

The number of bibliographies of special periods, fields, or subjects in American history is so great that only a few of the more important of them can be touched upon in this paper. Of outstanding importance are the comprehensive Guide to the Diplomatic History of the United States, 1775—1921, compiled by Samuel F. Bemis and Grace G. Griffin and published by the Library of Congress in 1935, and Laverne Burchfield’s excellent Student’s Guide to Materials in Political Science (1935), compiled under the direction of a committee of the American Political Science Association. A bibliography of books of travel and description was undertaken more than thirty years ago by the American Historical Association and made considerable progress from 1930 to 1935 with the aid of funds from the American Council of Learned Societies. A committee of the association is now seeking funds for the completion of the project. The only attempt at a general bibliography of local history is Thomas L. Bradford’s Bibliographer’s Manual of American History, Containing an Account of all State, Territory, Town and County Histories Relating to the United States (1907—10, 5 vols.), a very inadequate work. There are, of course, numerous regional, state, and local bibliographies, among which may be mentioned Charles Wesley Smith’s Pacific Northwest Americana (rev. ed., 1921); Henry R. Wagner’s The Spanish Southwest, 1542—1794, an Annotated Bibliography (rev. ed., 1937); Lester J. Cappon’s Bibliography of Virginia History Since 1865 (1930); and Robert E. and Robert G. Cowan’s Bibliography of the History of California, 1510—1930 (1933, 3 vols.). A unique tool in the field of local history is Earl G. Swem’s Virginia Historical Index (1934—36, 2 vols.), a detailed analytical index by persons, places and subjects of the material in a number of serial and other historical publications relating to Virginia.

Another type of bibliographical activity that greatly facilitates the location of historical materials is the compilation of union card catalogues of the resources of libraries in a given community or region.
The prototype of all these tools is the great union catalogue at the Library of Congress, which was built up largely by means of a grant of $250,000 from John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and which now contains author entries for more than seven million different works with notes of locations in some six hundred American libraries. The possibility of making regional union catalogues in a short space of time and at moderate expense was first demonstrated by the project for the libraries of the Philadelphia metropolitan area, in which was developed the technique of making microfilm reproductions of card catalogues and using relief labor to type cards from projections of the film. Though started only in 1936, this union catalogue, which is housed by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, contains over three million titles of works in about one hundred and fifty libraries. Numerous other regional union catalogues are now being compiled in the same or a similar manner in various sections of the country. Guides to the resources of a given region in a special field are also being compiled, and sometimes these are published. One such work of great utility is the Guide to the Principal Sources for Early American History (1600–1800) in the City of New York, by Evarts B. Greene and Richard B. Morris (1929).

It is evident that the bibliographical apparatus for making known the existence and the location of the sources and literature of American history is being rapidly expanded. The scholar is confronted, therefore, with the problem of keeping informed concerning the bibliographies that are appearing. This problem is being solved, however, for the H. W. Wilson Company has recently brought out the first number of the Bibliographical Index: a Cumulative Bibliography of Bibliographies, which is to be published quarterly with annual cumulations. Moreover, the utility of bibliographies has been enlarged by the development of the cheap microfilm process of reproducing printed and manuscript material and the production of satisfactory inexpensive reading machines; it is now possible for the scholar who, by means of bibliographies, has located in distant centers material pertinent to his research to use facsimiles of that material in his own library or study.

The National Archives

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