The collecting of war agency material at Harvard

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The Collecting of War Agency Material at Harvard

For these groups, as for most federal agencies, the annual, monthly, and quarterly reports, the periodicals, regulations, and similar items of interest and importance to the public were included in the "depository" material which the College Library receives regularly from the Superintendent of Documents. It was recognized that most of these publications would have to be retained in Widener, which has the central collection for undergraduates, as well as much research material in economics, government, and the other social sciences, to which the items in question form a valuable addition. The discussion involved more particularly the "non-depository" and ephemeral material: press releases, policy statements, statistics, instructions, often issued for internal use and valuable chiefly for research purposes.

Until mailing lists were sharply curtailed in 1942 and 1943, all the libraries had collected extensively from war agencies. When publications became harder to obtain, the building of a single adequate set for each agency seemed desirable, with duplication in other libraries limited to indispensable items. After several conferences, the following arrangements were made:

The Baker Library accepted primary responsibility for material emanating from the War Shipping Administration and the War Production Board. These two agencies fell well within Baker's economic and business interests, and for the former a considerable file already existed there. Some duplication was expected in the Lit-
tauer Library because of the economic information contained in publications of these two units.

The Littauer Library assumed the responsibility for the National War Labor Board and the Office of Price Administration. The publications of the first logically go into the Industrial Relations Library in the Littauer Center, and the efforts of Professor S. H. Slichter, Dr. John T. Dunlop, and Mr. James Heasley, all of whom are associated with the Trade Union Fellowship programme in the Littauer Center, have immensely strengthened this collection.

The Office of Price Administration has a twofold aspect: as one of the largest and most powerful regulatory and administrative agencies ever created, and as a source of extremely valuable economic information. It was decided that the needs of the Baker Library could be satisfied, especially on the latter score, by duplication of certain publications, provided that a more exhaustive collection were available elsewhere in the University. Both the administrative activities and the economic researches of the agency were considered highly pertinent to the Littauer Library, and it therefore has had the primary collecting responsibility. Negotiations to arrange a transfer of certain files from the Boston regional office of OPA have been initiated, and much valuable research material should result.

A large quantity of important research material from the Office of Defense Transportation was received by the Littauer Library from Mr. Henry Healey, '27, in 1943. Upon this foundation, it was agreed that the Littauer Library could appropriately endeavor to form as complete a collection as possible of the literature of this agency, for the use of the entire University.

For all these offices the Law Library indicated its interest in legal and administrative documents, and it is receiving many of these by transfer and through its own efforts. There is nothing in the agreement to prevent any library from duplicating what is collected elsewhere, should necessity arise, and some such duplication is inevitable and desirable.

The great value of arrangements of this kind lies in the assurance that somewhere a research collection is being built for each agency, available to the whole University. Every librarian has a criterion for acquisition when specific items come before him. Such agreements are constantly being evolved to guide the Harvard libraries toward the most effective use of their resources.

Elmer M. Grieder
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