



Microforms as Library Resources

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FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS libraries have had the opportunity to develop resources through microfacsimiles.¹ There are other virtues of microfacsimiles, above all, condensation (e.g., to save space and, incidentally, to eliminate binding costs) and preservation (e.g., to preserve fragile paper such as newsprint). These uses of microfacsimiles will not be considered in this paper.

The problems associated with the use of microfacsimiles in developing library resources may be stated in broad terms: (1) How are we to set up and implement acquisition policies that will satisfy specific needs of individual libraries as well as the broad needs of the national library economy?² (2) What can we properly expect from publishers of microfacsimiles in the way of quality of the product, and what should be the nature of the relationship of the libraries owning the originals and the publishers?

Even the greatest libraries must depend on microfacsimiles. The larger the library, the more voracious its appetite, the more difficult to acquire what it must have, the more necessary the use of microfacsimiles. The Library of Congress has filmed the manuscripts of St. Catherine's Monastery. Brown University has filmed Medina items not in Providence. The University of California at Berkeley has copied the German Foreign Office records from 1867 to 1920.

Today it is possible for virtually any library to have nearly any text for which it is willing to pay the price. The specific acquisition problem of the individual library, therefore, is to separate the world's printed manuscript literature into three categories: What is so important for our purposes that we must have it for immediate reference? What is of secondary importance, so that we may decide to share it in a pool with others, to depend on other libraries for a loan when it is needed, or simply to rest secure in the information that it may be filmed at any time or that a negative exists somewhere? What is so unimportant for us that we may take no responsibility for its future

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availability. This paper can provide no sure-fire formula for making these decisions. At this time it is possible only to identify the problems involved in establishing such a formula and to indicate the lines along which producers and consumers of microfacsimiles should cooperate in broad programs for building library resources. The major problems that must be considered are the cost of microfacsimiles, selection of material to be reproduced and the specific medium or media acceptable for reproduction, the appropriate agency for production and distribution, standards for processing and servicing microfacsimiles in individual libraries, and the composition and scope of any over-all agency for policy in these matters.

Contrary to popular belief and even to a vague superstition among some librarians, good, legible microfacsimiles are not cheap. A 16 or 35 mm. negative is perhaps three or four times as expensive as an ordinary trade book; and if difficult materials (in terms of form or location) are involved, the expense may be ten times the original. Even in edition processes such as those used by the producers of opaques, the expense is two or more times the cost of a small trade edition for the simple reason that microfacsimile editions are necessarily small.

If a sale of as many as 150-200 copies can be assured, an edition legible to the naked eye is nearly always possible and preferable. Let us not fool ourselves: despite all the arguments of some of the promoters of microfacsimiles, the original is nearly always preferred by the reader, even at the cost of a greater expenditure for space. Most libraries will be well advised as a general policy to provide for comprehensive coverage of significant new publications in their field so that the next generation will not have to resort to microfacsimiles.³

The great cost of microfacsimiles gives us pause. The various microfacsimiles (exclusive of local newspapers) announced in 1956, 1957, and 1958, which might have had a real usefulness in the average university library, would have to run to roughly \$75,000, \$80,000, and \$105,000 respectively for the three years. And the cost of the pieces for which libraries will be tempted in the future will probably continue to rise. This situation, by the way, is a healthy sign for the microfacsimile publishing industry. As both a publisher and a consumer, this writer is eager to see the business proliferate in an orderly fashion, for proliferation will compel librarians to be selective in their acquisitions and publishers to be more keenly aware of the need for a quality product in every sense of the word.

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The consideration of cost is a primary one for the librarian in the matter of selection of microfacsimiles for building resources. He should not be concerned with problems of cataloging and the cost thereof, for, as will be indicated later, the production of cataloging information should be the responsibility of the publisher. The librarian may properly be concerned with the physical quality of the product in making his selections, and he should feel free to return to the vendor any illegible or partially legible microfacsimile. A producer who consistently turns out an inferior product or who tries to work with material for which his medium is not well adapted will not stay in business very long if librarians actually look at what they buy from him, and he will represent no serious problem in the total microfacsimile economy.

While individual decisions on microfacsimiles offered for sale must be made by each library, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the selection of materials to be reproduced and the methods of distributing them are more than an individual responsibility. If resources are to be built on a logical, systematic basis that will make sense both for the individual library and the total library economy, librarians and producers of microfacsimiles must plan together in an atmosphere of good will. When the use of microfilm began to become fairly general in the latter part of the thirties, libraries at once seized the opportunity to acquire microfilm of everything that they had long coveted. There is no recognizable pattern whatsoever in the list of material that was available on microfilm in 1937.⁴ The sad part of this story is that J. L. Dewton's *Tentative List of Catalogs of Microforms* and the articles describing various microfacsimile projects (e.g., those by R. B. Downs and L. S. Thompson) will reveal no more system or logic in selection of material reproduced in the following quarter of a century.

Very early in the history of the development of microfacsimiles in the United States it was realized that there ought to be some sort of control for the selection of material to be copied and its distribution. Fremont Rider, in his first enthusiasm for microcards, assumed that the microreproduction of most books and periodicals would be preempted by the microcard, and he proposed a "Library Micro-Card Committee" which would be sure that all fields were covered, yet without duplication, and would formulate sales and marketing policies to govern library distribution.⁵ A year later K. D. Metcalf echoed these problems: "Who will sponsor the microcards? Who will print

them? Who will distribute them? Who will decide what books should be placed on microcards? Are we to have a central organization for the United States or for the whole world, or are we to leave the matter to individual libraries? Here are problems where an international court would be needed to settle things."⁶ He recognized the problem clearly but offered no answer, and there is still none. In the first volume of *American Documentation* L. K. Born made an effort to formulate a definite outline for a national plan for microfilm operations,⁷ but there have as yet been no perceptible effects of his proposal. Neither can this paper offer any solution for these problems other than to emphasize that there is a most serious problem and that it requires earnest consideration from all concerned.

There are many specific problems in the matter of selection of material to be copied, but one all-important aspect deserves special mention here; the matter of duplication. The Lost Cause Press has spent time and money in checking the various items in T. D. Clark's *Travels in the Old South*, now being issued on microcard, against the un-indexed *Bibliography of American Culture, 1493-1875*,⁸ Tremaine's *Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1751-1800*, and E. Millicent Sowerby's *Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson*. While the Lost Cause Press offers the entire group of titles recorded in *Travels in the Old South* on microcards, it also offers at no penalty subscriptions which exclude items in these bibliographies or which are already held by subscribers in the original or in some other form of microfacsimile. Any microfacsimile producer must recognize this very grave responsibility to protect his customers from unnecessary duplication. Duplication of microfacsimile editions in different media is not unethical or even undesirable in itself, but the buyer must be forewarned of possible duplication by the vendor and given an opportunity to make adjustments in the conditions of his purchase.

If the lack of a plan for the selection of material to be copied has plagued the microfacsimile publishing business, the rivalry between the proponents of the various types of microfacsimiles has been equally as serious. Extravagant claims made by the various supporters of one medium or another have contributed to sceptical attitudes among librarians about microfacsimiles in general. Perhaps the only type of microfacsimile that does not have its supporters or detractors in America is the microfiche, and this fact is due only to the unfortunate circumstance that the microfiche has not yet been naturalized in this country. It is natural that the proponents and

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producers of the various media attempt to exploit their product's virtues as much as possible, and they will continue to do so. However, the consumers, the libraries, must insist on clearcut definitions of the fields of publication for which each type is best adapted.

We have, in general, some notion about the utility of certain varieties of microfacsimiles for certain types of publications. We know that translucent film is likely to give the best image of the original simply because it is closest to the original, that the microcard—a second step removed from the original—is likely to be somewhat less sharp, and that microprint—a third step removed from the original—is likely to give a still less faithful image. We know that available reading equipment gives a better image of a translucent film. Still, none of these implied strictures against opaques are necessarily absolute in view of the constant probability of technological improvement.

Experience has told us to a very limited degree what not to do with certain microfacsimile media. We know from the attempt to publish the *Louisville Courier-Journal* on microcards that modern newspapers ought not to be reproduced in this form with present equipment. The unsatisfactory reproductions of many of the early American imprints on microprint suggest that this is not a desirable medium in its present stage of development for anything that does not have sharp contrast or which has continuous tones.

In addition to the problem of the selection of the material to be copied and the form to be used, there is a third major issue in the production of microfacsimiles to increase resources: should the job be done on a commercial, profit-making basis, by a nonprofit corporation, or by the photographic laboratories of individual libraries? If the answer is to choose the third alternative, it would also seem logical to advocate that libraries undertake the publication of research based on the use of their collections, or, even more broadly interpreted, of all scholarly books. If the answer is to choose the second alternative, then we might set up a national equivalent of the Midwest Inter-Library Center to handle not only this but also many other cooperative projects. It is this writer's inclination, as a producer and consumer of microfacsimiles, to leave the production and distribution in the hands of commercial firms for a number of reasons, above and beyond the sentimental one of supporting the American free enterprise system. In general it may be said that the large-scale producers of microfilm have a better degree of quality control than the great majority of research library photographic laboratories. No

library laboratory is equipped to produce opaques in quantity, and it is not likely that any will make the necessary investment to do so. Moreover, libraries are geared to giving away books, not to selling them, and they are likely to be far less effective than commercial firms in making the product known to libraries that need it.

The possible use of a nonprofit corporation of national scope for the production and circulation (not necessarily distribution) of microfacsimiles is suggested by the highly successful Foreign Newspaper Project and the nascent Foreign Official Gazette Project. There are many types of material which are valuable as library resources but whose use is so infrequent in individual libraries that the cost of their acquisition cannot be justified. The Midwest Inter-Library Center's much-too-modest acquisition program has already demonstrated the validity of this idea, and it is likely to be extended.

Perhaps even more suggestive is the notion that every bibliography should be backed up by a reproduction in microfacsimile of the material it records.⁹ The idea of binding in the microtext of works listed in the bibliography as a supplement is an atavism. We have defended the codex book against microforms so long that the notion has become an obsession with us. For some centuries we have been able to give effective service with unbound manuscript collections, and we will be able to do the same with unbound microfacsimiles of any type. The notion of a nickle-in-the-slot machine (rather a quarter-in-the-slot machine a decade and a half after Rider and E. E. Williams spoke of such a device) is a fundamentally sound idea for providing expendable copies of material on microforms, either in the original size or as a microcopy. However, why should every undergraduate college library or public library or even larger research libraries be compelled to buy whole sets of microfacsimile editions so that an occasional reproduction can be made on the spot? It would seem more economical for all libraries to pay relatively small fees, possibly on the now classic "service basis," to one or more major depositories of negatives from which prints would be available by return airmail, either in microcopy or legible to the naked eye, to be given to the reader for his permanent personal file. Better still, some sort of wire-photo or ultrafax transmission is technically possible.

If readers could be quickly provided with personal copies of texts they need, there is no reason why substantial portions of research library funds could not be diverted for this purpose. Most of us would welcome the possibility of clearing our shelves of much of the junk

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with which they are loaded and make space for the "good books"—source materials, reference works, and texts in steady demand.

The microcard publishers and the major microfilm producers (with their continuous electrostatic reproduction equipment and possible future variations thereof) are prepared to develop such a program whenever it is proposed on a large enough scale and with adequate bibliographical planning. It is also likely that producers of micro-offset (microprint) could offer the same service, since their work is ultimately based on the 16 or 35 mm. negative.¹⁰ If a program of this type were ever to be initiated, it would require the closest possible cooperation of libraries (which control the material to be copied), bibliographers (who can work out the most practical and inexpensive methods of describing and disseminating information on books and manuscripts), microfacsimile producers and publishers (who have the best technical devices for production, storage of negatives, and distribution or circulation), and, finally, letterpress publishers and publishers' associations (who control copyright and copying policy for twentieth century publications).

The librarians hold the ultimate key to the development of the microfacsimile as a library resource simply because comparatively few great research libraries own the basic material that needs to be made available.¹¹ But they should not overlook the contributions that the other groups (bibliographers, microfacsimile producers and publishers, and letterpress publishers) can contribute. Any agency set up to work out policies on microfacsimiles as library resources must include adequate representation from each group. To attempt to define further the composition of such an over-all policy group would be futile at this stage. We have already noted abundant reason for the existence of such a group, and responsible librarians will have to work out its activation.

If a policy agency is to advise on the selection of materials to be reproduced and methods of distributing or circulating them, such action should always take place before any microfacsimile project is initiated, and this action should be expeditious. It would be distinctly unfair to a microfacsimile publisher to allow him to go ahead with a plan which will subsequently meet with disapproval; and it would be equally unfair not to give him an opinion within a reasonable period of time, quickly enough for the publisher and yet deliberately enough to protect the interests of the consumers.

Internal policy in handling microfacsimiles is fully as confused to-

day as is the national policy. In part this circumstance is due to the accumulation of large masses of material furnished without cataloging information, in part to failure to understand the proper use of the various types of microfacsimiles, and in part to ignorance. The last element seems to be predominant in more instances than we would like to admit, and it is only too often exposed to the producer. A small university library serving an institution which offers a few masters degrees and a single wobbly doctorate in education once wrote this writer to ask whether it would be legitimate to count as separate physical volumes each item listed in an offering of a microfacsimile business with which he is associated. Forgetting any finesse as a salesman and reverting to the primeval instincts of a librarian, he replied in the politest terms he could muster in the third redaction of a letter that the library should feel free to use any variety of count that served its particular objectives most effectively, but that it would be best advised to depend on X University Library, thirty minutes away by rapid transit for this material. Certainly the total resources of that community would have been increased had the librarian followed this advice. Perhaps the only answer to situations of this type is to educate the consumers to the true functions of microfacsimiles as library resources. More attention to microfacsimiles in library school curricula and more attention to them in all sections of state and regional library association meetings would be helpful. We have too much money tied up in microfacsimiles to fail to make every effort to educate all professional librarians to their proper and effective use.

The day will come when research libraries will have their millions of titles and public library systems their tens of millions of books. Title or volume count will mean little. The best libraries will be those which base their claims to excellence not on quantity but on the completeness of their reference collections, the quality of their special collections to support institutional research programs, and the degree of their integration with national and international schemes for quick access to little-used material, mainly in microfacsimile.

A basic issue is whether or not a library should have its own photographic laboratory, a problem to be analyzed in detail in another essay in this issue but which deserves brief comment from the standpoint of building resources. A few large libraries still do not have such a facility but depend on local commercial firms. A decade of experience with a fairly well equipped laboratory has convinced the writer that any research library which does not own equipment at least com-

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parable to the Recordak Model E (portable) and have an operator available at all times is constantly missing significant opportunities for acquiring material pertinent to its collections.¹² Dozens of instances can be cited in which manuscripts and newspaper files have been offered on loan for filming to the University of Kentucky Library on a now-or-never basis. In several instances these materials have subsequently disappeared, and in many others they are still housed in highly combustible buildings.

In general a large-scale microcopying program which can be planned in advance is likely to be done most economically and most effectively by the larger commercial firms (except in the case of an institution whose photographic operations are on a comparable scale, such as the Library of Congress, the Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the New York Public Library, and perhaps a few others). An exception to this general rule may be a statewide newspaper filming project. In the case of most local papers no library except the one logical regional depository is likely to want prints. A good example is Kentucky, in which only one current newspaper, the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, is wanted beyond the borders of the Commonwealth with any frequency. Occasional needs for others can be and actually are satisfied by interlibrary loan of positive prints.

Assuming that it is the part of wisdom to relegate most large-scale microfacsimile projects to commercial firms, what procedures should the commercial agent follow in order to abide by ethical business standards and ultimately to provide the highest possible quality in his product? In the very beginning we must assume that these people are the servants of scholarship, but, just as the traditional publishers, the binders, the manufacturers of bookstacks, or the library supply houses, they must expect a reasonable profit, certainly enough to pay for their own time, their production expenses, and their overhead. We must also assume that they are technically competent and that their media for reproduction are legible. Shortcomings on this point will be more quickly detected than deficiencies in any other field of their activities.

Probably the most important demand that the librarian, as the consumer, can make on the vendor of microfacsimiles is that he provide adequate bibliographical information, again a problem to be discussed in detail in a subsequent paper in this collection, but one which deserves some attention in a discussion of the role of the

microfacsimile producer in developing library resources. Provision of adequate bibliographical information means simply that the vendor should provide either catalog cards or copy from which cards may be typed by any Grade I typist. In the early days of microfacsimile reproduction, we concentrated largely on serials, newspapers, and long runs of journals, and manuscript collections (generally already calendared, e.g., the Draper Papers of the Wisconsin Historical Society). Today we are becoming increasingly aware of the need for making more generally available the some 20,000,000 to 50,000,000 separate, nonserial books and pamphlets that were printed between 1456 and 1904 (the *terminus ante quem* for anything in the public domain at this publication date—the problem of reproducing copyrighted or possibly copyrighted materials in quantity is one that we cannot consider here). As a general rule, it may be stated that no publisher of microfacsimiles of separates should deliver his product and expect the consumer to do individual cataloging. For one thing, it is simply uneconomical for fifteen to fifty subscribing to a project to do their own individual cataloging. For another, it is simplest and cheapest to do cataloging at source; and here we can enforce this policy far more easily than we can with the thousands of publishers of letterpress material.

As a producer, this writer has been associated with three microcard ventures, the Lost Cause Press, the Falls City Microcards, and the University of Kentucky Press microcards of original publications. In every instance each publication is provided with a heading which constitutes adequate descriptive cataloging, and there is one subject heading and both Library of Congress and Dewey class numbers. The Library of Congress card number, when available, is provided on all Lost Cause Press publications, and it is legible to the naked eye. The Louisville Free Public Library's series of Americana in Thomas Jefferson's library provides the option of buying printed cards for each title. In one microfilm project the material offered will be furnished only with catalog cards. This latter procedure seems to be by far the best, since penny-wise, pound-foolish librarians will be compelled to catalog adequately the material they are buying in bulk. This cataloging at source costs money, and it means that the product is more expensive, and yet this expense is infinitely less than if individual libraries attempted to do their own cataloging.

One of the grave shortcomings of some microfacsimile publishers seems to be a lack of understanding of fundamental library pro-

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cedures. Virtually all of us in libraries which hold rare or unique material have been annoyed at times by certain microform publishers who assume it is a right rather than a privilege to copy our holdings. It is our obligation to provide copies of our unrestricted materials to responsible scholars, but we have no special obligation to commercial firms. The microfacsimile publishers who ask for copies of rare and unique materials without recognizing the service cost factors and without offering some sort of a return courtesy for using these materials deserve no special consideration. The publisher should always offer to pay incidental expenses (shelf service, packing, shipping of negatives, etc.), and he should have a standard policy for giving some sort of a token reimbursement to the owner-library. The Lost Cause Press has followed the policy of offering the owner-library either a set of the microcard prints or credit to the extent of the cost of these prints. There have been no objections to this policy, and it is at least as generous as that of any other microfacsimile publisher.

The assumption of many microfacsimile publishers that their product is superior to the original and efforts to persuade librarians on this point seem to skate the dangerous brink of the unethical. In only two instances, viz., modern newspapers and current bulky records, can we properly prefer microfacsimiles to the original. Otherwise, the codex book is here to stay for the foreseeable future. Until the microfacsimile can do everything that the book can—go fishing, go to bed, ride on the subway, and provide aesthetic enjoyment in its physical state, it will never take the place of the book as we know it.

Some librarians who have entertained notions of vast filming projects have been as unrealistic as the visions of certain publishers. One parvenu library, with dollars at its command which it did not properly appreciate, ordered negatives of an entire manuscript collection of more than 5,000 pieces, but it could give no specific reason for wanting the material other than that it would be a desirable acquisition. The request was properly rejected, although the owner-library would undoubtedly be willing to reconsider if there were some strong, legitimate reason for filling such an order.

Some very few of the have-libraries (nearly always medium-sized institutions) have followed a policy of sitting on manuscripts for years in the vain hope that one of its patrons or faculty members will exploit them. It would seem legitimate to withhold manuscripts from microfacsimile reproduction for a limited period of time, but not indefinitely. The length of this period must be decided in individual

cases, but, in general, five years would seem to be a reasonable limit to hold off outside scholars if a collection is not being used locally. Most donors of special collections give not to establish a monopoly, but rather to deposit their collection in the institution likely to give it the most effective use.

What seems to be most urgently needed in any program for building resources with microfacsimiles is the same precious quality that is essential for all other aspects of library administration: common sense. The disrepute into which microreproduction has fallen in some quarters is due not so much to the reactionaries who reject any deviation to the traditional form of the book, as to foolish policies of selection and unwise publishing programs. The microfacsimile, like the codex book, is here to stay. Its utility is well nigh unlimited, but both librarians and publishers must show common sense, flexibility, and foresight to help the microfacsimile achieve its maximum potential.

Bibliographical Notes

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2. Harkins, W. G., *et al.*: *Microfilm in University Libraries: A Report. College and Research Libraries*, 14:307-316, July 1953, reported that the majority of libraries whose microfilm holdings were studied had no definite policies on microfilm acquisition.

3. Jackson, W. A.: *Some Limitations of Microfilm. Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 35:281-288, Fourth Quarter, 1941, gives some of the bibliographer's objections to microfacsimile, and after almost two decades these strictures are still valid.

4. Carruthers, R. H.: *Directory of Microcopying Services and Available Positive Films. In: Raney, M. L., ed.: Microphotography for Libraries, 1937*. Chicago, American Library Association, 1937, pp. 45-63.

5. Rider, Fremont: *The Scholar and the Future of the Research Library*. New York, Hadham Press, 1944, pp. 191-193.

6. Metcalf, K. D.: *Implications of Microfilm and Microprint for Libraries. Library Journal*, 70:722, Sept. 1, 1945.

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8. American Studies Association. *Bibliography of American Culture, 1493-*

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1875. D. R. Weimer, comp. and ed. Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1957. Weimer, D. R.: Microfilm and Bibliography; American Civilization to 1876. *Library Journal*, 80:2072-2074, Oct. 1, 1955.

9. Williams, E. E.: Microbibliography; A Possible Alternative to Microcards. *A.L.A. Bulletin*, 39:450-454, Nov. 1945, suggests the possibility of binding bibliographies with microfacsimile copies (obviously meaning opaques) of the materials they list and of providing nickle-in-the-slot machines for custom-made reproductions for the borrower's files. Tate, V. D.: Microreproduction and the Acquisitions Program. *Library Trends*, 3:444, April 1955, prophesies: "The time will come when no bibliography will be regarded as complete unless it serves as the index or finding list for a complete edition of its contents in some micro format which may be purchased entire or selectively from a deposit, pool or commercial source."

10. Other types of agencies may also serve as a depository for negatives. The Arab League's Institute of Arab Manuscripts seems to have made substantial progress on one of the most urgent needs of our times, the microcopying of the whole corpus of Islamic manuscripts. Over 15,000 Arab Manuscripts Filmed. *Unesco Bulletin for Libraries*, 12:218-219, Aug.-Sept. 1958.

11. In some instances libraries are voluntarily making negatives of their most valuable manuscript holdings, e.g., the University of Leyden. Leyden Manuscript Collections. *Unesco Bulletin for Libraries*, 10:158, July 1956.

12. It is altogether possible that the ease of operation and the relative cheapness of future equipment may enable nearly all libraries to have push-button laboratories. Scott, Peter: The Miraculous Bubble: A Look at Kalfax Microfilm. *Library Resources and Technical Services*, 3:40-46, Winter 1959, suggests that libraries may well do their own printing of translucent positives of 16 and 35 mm. film in the future instead of waiting a week to a month for service from a commercial processor.