



# Introduction

ROLLAND E. STEVENS

ROBERT HERRICK once wrote: "Attempt the end, and never stand to doubt. Nothing's so hard but search will find it out." He may not have been thinking of library acquisitions, but the research librarian might well adopt this couplet as his motto. There are, of course, a variety of ways of obtaining needed items for the research collection. An old joke begins a recipe for a Rumanian omelet by advising, "First steal two eggs." While no writer is going to advocate theft as a method of acquisition, except as a last resort, the research librarian must employ many ingenious and unorthodox schemes in order to obtain the publications needed by his institution.

The literature of librarianship includes an occasional paper on acquisition, but it would be an exaggeration to say that the subject has been overworked. Nevertheless, the appearance of another issue of *Library Trends* on the subject—the issue of April, 1955, under the editorship of Robert Vosper, was centered on acquisition trends—and especially one following so closely on the preconference institute, "New Dimensions in Acquisitions," sponsored jointly in June 1969 by the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council, seems to call for some justification. We do not attempt merely to bring up-to-date the various aspects of acquisitions covered in the Vosper issue nor to cover again or add to the topics discussed in the institute. Instead, we consider acquisitions from a special point of view: problems faced by research libraries and solutions used to overcome them. Compared with most other types of libraries, the research library adds to its collections, not only a much greater quantity of books and journals but also a much greater variety of subjects, formats, languages, and types of printed material and a much larger percent of non-current publications. One-fifth or more of the books acquired in a given year by the research library are likely to be books

Rolland E. Stevens is Professor, Graduate School of Library Science, University of Illinois, Urbana.

that were out-of-print at the time of acquisition, a proportion much higher than would be found in the average college, public, school, or special library. The same thing would be found for items published abroad (one-half or more), for those in languages other than English (one-third or more), or for non-trade publications (a tenth or more).<sup>1</sup> In addition, support for one or more area programs is increasingly required from the research library, with a consequent need to acquire publications from countries having no organized book trade. Acquisition of publications from foreign countries, in unusual format, and issued outside normal book channels, not needed (or needed only in very small numbers) by the average college, public or school library, requires complex and often ingenious methods. The use of such techniques is not limited, of course, to the research library, but since necessity does beget invention, it is in the research library that they have been developed.

Besides focusing on the research library, this issue further limits its scope to the procurement function of the library. It does not concern itself with forms, files, organization, administration, or work flow in the acquisitions department. The division of topics selected has been by problem area. Some of these are formats of publications: books, serials, documents, and microforms. Others are related to methods of procurement: blanket orders, acquisitions of special collections, and out-of-print titles.

Lawrence Thompson, speaking from many years' experience in building research collections, opens the issue with a discussion of acquiring the most difficult types of books and pamphlets. He makes a strong point of the importance to the acquisition librarian of knowledge in at least the following areas: languages, history of the book trade, history of scholarship, and outstanding special collections throughout the learned world. Among the problem areas in the acquisition of books and pamphlets, he stresses quasi-official and obscure government publications, limited editions, pamphlets, and ephemera outside the regular book channels. The importance of selecting capable domestic and foreign jobbers and of maintaining mutually beneficial relations with them cannot be over-emphasized, and several of the contributors to this issue, as well as Thompson, have made a special point of this. Gift and exchange as a method of procurement cannot be neglected since many ephemera and obscure publications can be obtained in no other way.

The acquisition of serials presents possibly even more problems than searching out monographs. William Huff, looking at these prob-

## *Introduction*

lems, was one of several contributors who polled research librarians for their practices and opinions. His report of their policies and methods in acquiring serials is considerably enriched, however, from his own knowledge and experience. The problems brought in by the accelerated growth in the number of serials published and by the increasing dependence on them in research are offset in part by the appearance of improved bibliographies. Despite minor differences among libraries, the general pattern of serials acquisition in research libraries seems to include, among others, the following trends: 1) the number of current subscriptions is increasing rapidly, as are costs per title, especially for scientific titles, 2) for foreign subscriptions, agents in the country from which the material is desired are being used increasingly instead of agents in the United States, 3) area programs are greatly increasing the need for serials from these developing countries, and 4) reprints are sought increasingly for obtaining back files. Huff calls attention to the problems of paying large service charges to agents for expensive subscriptions, of obtaining serials by means of blanket orders, and of relying too much on gifts and exchanges in the acquisition of serials.

The increasing use of blanket orders for currently published monographs led us to include this method among the problems to be discussed. Most research libraries have one or more blanket orders, usually for monographs in the social sciences and humanities rather than in science, according to Norman Dudley, who explored the matter by means of questionnaire. The advantages reported most frequently were the prompt receipt of titles after publication date and the even coverage of all subjects, in contrast to the spotty coverage resulting from faculty selection; the main disadvantage reported was the uncertainty as to a specific title being received automatically or not.

One of the most difficult of acquisition problems, however, is locating out-of-print books. Felix Reichmann, a well-known bookdealer in Europe before he became head of Cornell University Library's technical processes, has investigated this area thoroughly, again aided in part by a questionnaire which he sent to research librarians and dealers. Drawing on his own considerable experience, as well as that supplied by respondents, he emphasizes the need for good relations and understanding between librarian and bookseller. Sending want lists to trusted dealers is widely practiced; advertising, auction buying, and book buying trips are less commonly used.

The acquisition of entire private collections, of great importance

in the research library, usually requires special attention and procedures. H. Richard Archer applies his considerable experience in the rare book field to advising about the several phases of this kind of acquisition: learning about the availability of such a collection, making the decision to acquire, negotiating for it, observing precautions in accepting gift collections, and appraising large gifts as tax deductions.

Government documents and other non-commercial publications were mentioned by Thompson as being among the most troublesome monographs to get. Peter Paulson examines this problem more intently. Chief among the difficulties are the lack of adequate bibliographies of these non-trade publications, the small editions in which many of them are issued, and the inability to find a dealer who will procure them for the library. Exchange, gift solicitation, and the use of the Documents Expediting Project are among the best ways to obtain them. Collections of documents in microform enable the library to acquire many that are not available in original format.

Microform, although often difficult to learn about and to obtain, is another form of library material that cannot be ignored by the research library. Unlike the college, public, or school library, the research library seeks microform more frequently as a means of acquiring unique and rare titles that cannot be found in original form than as space- or cost-savers. Roma Gregory outlines the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing material in microform and appends very valuable lists of non-commercial microform suppliers in Europe and the United States and of bibliographies and aids useful in procurement of microforms.

The popularity of area programs during the past decade has set many problems for the acquisition librarian. The main difficulties are the complete lack of an organized booktrade in many of the developing countries and the dearth of librarians in this country who can read and write in the necessary foreign languages. Robert Stevens surveys this development, pointing out the problems and outlining the most successful methods of acquisition from these countries. Orders must be accompanied by explanatory correspondence in the vernacular language, and attention must be given to each order instead of setting up mass order routines. Buying trips to the countries involved are indispensable, and exchanges of publications are frequently the only way to obtain needed titles.

Reference has already been made by several writers in this issue

## *Introduction*

to the importance of sound relations between librarian and book-dealer if the acquisition of hard-to-find materials is to be successful. Helen Welch Tuttle expands on this important relation in a separate article. Both in and out of the American Library Association there has been an increasing and healthy cooperation in recent years between the library profession and the book trade. This must continue and grow for the mutual advantage of both groups.

As a final paper in the issue Robert Downs reviews current developments in research library acquisition and points out the direction in which it is headed. The success of recent and current cooperative acquisition programs, the ambition of the National Program of Acquisition and Cataloging, experiments by the Center for Research Libraries and the Hampshire Inter-Library Center, the trend toward centralizing research resources in a state or region in a few strong libraries from which all libraries in the region might draw, and the beneficial effect of new microreproduction and telefacsimile techniques on the sharing of research resources all lead Downs to a justified optimism about the future of research library acquisition.

What imaginative and ingenious librarians have already accomplished in bringing to their collections the elusive and obscure publications from all parts of the world may provide some reason to be satisfied. But the problems of acquisition are by no means solved yet and will probably never be fully answered. Research, as everyone knows, has the characteristic of ever uncovering new, hitherto unthought-of fields to investigate and of requiring graphic data that libraries have not anticipated and have not collected. If some day we do find ways of automatically and easily getting the quasi-official and ephemeral publications of the developing areas, it will be the business archives, the theatre handbills, Sunday school bulletins, and private correspondence of unimportant people that will cause acquisition librarians trouble.

## *Reference*

1. U.S. Library of Congress. Information Systems Office. *The MARC Pilot Project: Final Report*. Washington, D.C., 1968, pp. 177-78. Only the statistics for Rice University, UCLA, University of Florida, and the other research libraries were noted. The statement on out-of-print publications was estimated from the statistics on orders by date of imprint. No information on fraction of titles that are non-trade publications is given in this table. All of these data are partly or wholly based on the experience of the author and of other acquisitions librarians.