

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS COLLECTIONS POLICY STATEMENTS

Manuscripts

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I. Scope

This policy statement pertains to original collections of manuscripts in either paper or born digital format (personal papers, organizational records, single items or small groups of papers), microform copies, and physical or digital facsimile editions of individual manuscripts and codices. Although this policy is written with the Manuscript Division's leading custodial role in mind, the general principals of sound manuscript and archival collecting enumerated here may also apply to original manuscripts held in other Special Collections Divisions or in Area Studies collections. Federal records administered by the Library's Records Management office are not covered by this policy.

This Collections Policy Statement covers actual manuscripts. Books and other formats *about* manuscripts (including paleography, codicology, archival practice and related topics) fall outside of the scope of this statement.

II. Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement

As the nation's de facto national library, the Library of Congress strives to build an expansive, yet selective, collection that records the creativity of the United States and is reflective of the nation's diversity and complexity. The Library's mandate is to have collections that are inclusive and representative of a diversity of creators and ideas. A priority includes acquiring material of underrepresented perspectives and voices in the Library's collections to ensure diverse authorship, points of view, cultural identities, and other historical or cultural factors. The Library also seeks to build a research collection that comprises a globally representative sample of international materials that are diverse in voice and perspective, relative to their places of origin, further supporting the Library's mission to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for Congress and future generations.

Diverse collecting is mentioned within many of the Library's Collections Policy Statements. In addition, the Library has adopted several specific collection policies in an effort to ensure it is building an inclusive and representative collection. For more information, see the Library's Collections Policy Statements on [Ethnic Materials](#), [LGBTQIA+ Studies](#), [Women's and Gender Studies](#), [Independently Published and Self-Published Textual Materials](#), and [Countries and Regions with Acquisitions Challenges](#).

III. Research Strengths

The Library's preeminent areas of distinction in manuscript holdings are the U.S. presidency (major collections of the papers of 23 American presidents); U.S. Congress (the papers of more than 900 members); U.S. federal judiciary (more than three dozen Supreme Court justices from John Jay to Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and more than two dozen jurists from the district and appellate federal courts); military affairs, diplomacy and foreign policy (secretaries of state from Thomas Jefferson to Madeline Korbel Albright); arts and literature (Jane Johnston Schoolcraft through Herman Wouk and Philip Roth); entertainment (select theater, television, radio and film); science (Andrew Ellicott to Nina Federov; psychology (Sigmund Freud and his circle); journalism (Horace Greeley to Daniel Schorr); African-American history and culture (Booker T. Washington to the NAACP and Rosa Parks); the history of the Library of Congress and the institution's contributions to library and archival practice; and U.S. women's history (Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Patsy T. Mink). Emerging areas of strength include LGBTQIA+ studies and environmental history.

IV. Collecting Policy

The Library of Congress acquires manuscript source material for the study of the history and culture of the United States. The Library will not acquire manuscripts merely for their value as autographs, nor will it ordinarily acquire (except by gift) individual manuscripts for which photographic or digital copies, accurate transcriptions, or published facsimiles are generally available. Practical considerations which necessitate a selective policy within this broad field include the physical condition, digital sustainability, size, and organization of the material being offered and the extent and nature of any proposed restrictions on access or use of the collection, as well as the present collections of the Library, the institution's primary responsibility to Congress, limitations of staff and space, and the collections of other U.S. archival repositories.

Manuscript materials are typically acquired through donation by their owners as gifts to the Library. Only in very rare circumstances will the Library consider taking custody of material as a deposit or loan without agreement on future transfer of ownership; this would only occur with a commitment to donate the deposited materials at a set time. Selected manuscript items or collections are also obtained through copyright deposit, transfer, or by purchase when funds are available and circumstances permit.

A. Personal papers

1. Personal papers -- United States

- a. The Library will acquire the personal papers of nationally eminent Americans whose activities have significantly influenced the history, law, and culture of the United States or the national policy of the United States government, and the personal papers of other individuals whose papers constitute important source material for the study of the period which they cover, shedding light on major movements, developments, controversies, cultural patterns, or events.
- b. Examples of individuals who are not nationally eminent but whose lives intersect with historical events and whose papers constitute source material of substantial importance include letters of soldiers and nurses written during the Civil War, letters and papers of migrants crossing the Western plains during the nineteenth century, and letters and papers of individuals involved in significant reform, religious, or social movements, or that provide

social commentary or new perspectives on American law, history, and culture. See also the Collecting Policy Statement for [Folklore and Folklife](#).

- c. The Library defines personal papers in the broadest sense to include correspondence, diaries, notebooks, research notes, logs, scrapbooks, printed matter, memoranda, journals, production material for publications, photographs, biographical data, letterpress copies, microfilm, and digital content. Personal papers may also include audio and visual materials, printed items, and ephemera, some of which will stay with the papers in the Manuscript Division and some of which may be transferred to other divisions for preservation and access.
- d. The Library of Congress considers several factors when acquiring digital works to ensure long-term preservation and accessibility of collections. The resources the Library consults to achieve this goal include [Sustainability of Digital Formats Planning for Library of Congress Collections](#) to assess preservation factors and [the Library of Congress Recommended Formats Statement](#) to assist creators and librarians with selecting appropriate formats. When considering re-formatted materials, the Library consults guidelines outlined in the [Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative](#). In all instances, the Library seeks to acquire materials that are equal in quality to the original version, best edition, or master copy.
- e. The Library is committed to acquiring collections which provide representative coverage of each period in the history of the United States, as well as representing the geographic range and cultural diversity of the country.
- f. Collections of personal papers which qualify under the terms above will be identified and acquired, provided that the integrity of a collection is respected; i.e., the collection has not been divided, with the major part already present in, or committed to, another repository.

Fragmentary groups of U.S. personal papers: The Library of Congress acquires fragmentary groups of personal papers that conform to the stipulations of Section IV.A.1. under the following conditions:

- a. when the fragmentary group fills a gap in, or is complementary to, an existing collection in the Library of Congress;
- b. when the fragmentary group appears to be all that has survived (as is often true of collections of the more distant past);
- c. when a donor cannot be persuaded of the inadvisability of dividing a collection;
- d. when additional fragmentary groups are known to exist at other repositories, no one of which can be considered the main body of the papers in question. (In conformity with Section IV.A.1.f. above, the Library will not acquire fragmentary groups of personal papers when the main body of these papers is known to be in another American repository and the fragmentary papers are sought by that repository);
- e. when the fragmentary group forms a part of a special subject collection which embraces other forms of library materials (books, prints, maps, etc.), and the entire collection is desired by the Library, or meets the needs of Library projects;

- f. when materials that fill the criteria in IV.A.1 become available on a competitive purchase basis through dealers or auctions.

Single items: Single items which conform to the stipulations of Section IV.A.1. will be acquired only when:

- a. they fill gaps in existing Library collections, or
- b. they are of considerable importance, e.g., diaries, narratives, letters, or speeches describing or commenting on a particular historical event, period, or person.

Manuscripts of published works: It is the policy of the Library of Congress not to acquire manuscripts of published works apart from the personal papers of the author. Individual exceptions to this general policy may be made when some or all of the following considerations apply:

- a. the author is nationally eminent, the work is intrinsically important, and the manuscript contains materials, such as extensive revisions, which are important for a study of the author's creative methods in general and the individual work in particular;
- b. the manuscript would significantly supplement personal papers of the author or of related figures already in the Library's collections;
- c. the acceptance of the manuscript would contribute substantially to the acquisition of personal papers desired by the Library.

2. Personal Papers -- Non-United States

Ordinarily, the Library of Congress will not acquire the personal papers of persons most strongly associated in their life and work with countries other than the United States. In considering individual exceptions, the following factors will be weighed:

- a. the importance of the papers as source material for the study of the United States;
- b. the presence in the Library of closely related collections which the proposed acquisition would complement;
- c. the eminence of the individual as a world figure and the importance of the papers as source material for the study of history and culture generally;
- d. any prior rights to the papers claimed by the individual's own country (as with material considered cultural patrimony) where those interests preclude expatriation;
- e. the location and ownership of the collection (in the United States or elsewhere, in institutional or private hands, etc.);
- f. whether the collection is available as a gift or by purchase;
- g. the holdings of other American repositories in relation to the collection under

consideration;

- h. the present safety and security of the papers.

C. Records of organizations

1. Organizational Records – United States

The Library of Congress generally does not acquire the administrative records of current organizations. The Library believes that it usually is in the best interest of organizations to retain their own records and develop programs to administer and preserve them according to canons of modern archival practice. The Library may, however, consider limited acquisition of:

- a. records from organizations with which the Library conducts joint programs to promote Library activities, goals, or objectives;
- b. records from organizations that have enduring value in documenting issues and episodes in American politics and culture;
- c. records of organizations that document the collective voice of a group or community that is underrepresented, or that represent an alternative perspective to organizational records held in the division (e.g., labor and management, suffragists and anti-suffragists organizations);
- d. discrete portions of organizational records that align with its founding by or the active leadership of an individual whose personal papers the Library seeks or has acquired.

Records of organizations that do not meet these criteria will not be solicited or acquired if offered. Records already part of the Library's holdings which, upon review, are found not to meet these criteria, will be considered as candidates for disposition.

The Library of Congress will consider additions to records of organizations already in the collections, if those records clearly have broad scholarly interest and if they augment or fill gaps in collecting areas. Future records received from organizations must, as a general rule, be pre-processed to some degree agreed to by the Library and the originating organization (or legal successor) before they arrive at the Library. The Library will be prepared to offer advice and, in some cases, assistance to enable such organizations (or their successors) to pre-process collections on their premises prior to delivery to the Library. Alternatively, they may supply the Library with funds or personnel to process the organization's records once they arrive onsite in the Manuscript Division. For additions to existing collections, organizations are strongly encouraged or mandated to convert from paper to born-digital delivery of records. Web archives that enhance and contextualize current holdings will be proposed and curated in accordance with collecting priorities and staff initiative as set forth by the [Web Archiving Supplementary Guidelines](#).

2. Organizational Records – Non-United States

The Library of Congress will not ordinarily acquire the original records of organizations in countries other than the United States. Individual exceptions to this policy will be made only in the rarest instances; and only when in addition to meeting the conditions specified in Section IV. B., Personal Papers – Non-United States, the organization is considered to have played a role of such enduring

national importance in the history and culture of the United States that its records would constitute source material of exceptional importance for the study of American history and culture. All of the specifications and criteria set forth in Section IV.C.1., Organizational Records - United States, shall apply.

D. Reproductions of manuscripts in microform or digital formats

1. General criteria

Manuscript collections in microform or digital formats or successor technologies may be acquired by copyright deposit, exchange, gift, or purchase, and shall not be subject to the limitations noted above for original manuscripts. The public offer of a commercially filmed or digitally reproduced manuscript collection shall be considered a publication, and the acquisition policies for other publications shall be followed as far as applicable. When a micropublishing or digital publishing project includes a variety of original formats, any problems concerning assignment of custody and service will be resolved in consultation with the recommending officers and custodial divisions concerned. In acquiring microform or digital copies of manuscripts, the provisions of the [Microfilms-Quality](#), [Electronic Resources-Supplementary Guidelines](#), and [Web Archiving](#) Supplementary Guidelines will be consulted.

2. Reproductions – United States

The Library will acquire microform or digital copies of selected unpublished manuscript and archival materials when such materials meet the criteria specified (see above Section IV.A. for original manuscript materials). In judging the importance of two or more items, when funds are limited, the following priority order will be followed:

- a. collections in private hands, especially when the integrity or preservation of the collection is imperiled;
- b. collections of presidential papers;
- c. collections that will complete, supplement, or complement existing collections of the Library of Congress;
- d. other available collections of widespread potential research value.

3. Reproductions – Non-United States

The Library will observe the following policies in acquiring microform or digital copies of unpublished manuscript and archival materials originating in other countries:

- a. A special effort will be made to acquire reproductions of unpublished materials relating to the history of the United States;
- b. bodies of manuscripts relating to the general history of the Americas.

The following will be acquired on a selective basis:

- a. materials from the archives of foreign governments, and other manuscript and archival collections of potential research value in any subject of major concern to the Library, except

those collected per Section IV.D.3.a;

- b. unpublished guides, catalogs, inventories, calendars, and other means of access to collections abroad;
- c. codices antedating the general use of printing which supplement the Library's holdings.

E. Legal documents

Copies of legal documents often arrive at the Library as part of the personal papers of Supreme Court justices, lower court judges, attorneys, and legal advocacy groups. For formal collecting guidelines, see the [Law Collections Policy Statement](#).

F. Codices and individual manuscripts: facsimile editions

The Library attempts to acquire a comprehensive collection (United States and Non-United States) of codices in facsimile editions, especially those originating prior to the year 1500 A.D.

1. General criteria

The Library will acquire facsimile editions of individual manuscripts in accordance with its customary policies governing acquisition of current printed materials. The following criteria will be taken into account:

- a. completeness (all introductory pages, even without text, should be included);
- b. color accuracy;
- c. preservation of original size and format;
- d. margins and binding of facsimile to correspond to original;
- e. uniqueness of work being printed;
- f. meaningful commentary, translation of text.

If facsimile editions are available in more than one size, preference is given to facsimiles that are the same size as the original; in the absence of a size match, smaller is preferred to larger.

V. Best Editions and Preferred Formats

For guidance regarding best editions for material acquired via the Copyright Office, see: <http://copyright.gov/circs/circ07b.pdf>.

For guidance regarding recommended formats for material acquired via all other means; e.g., purchase, exchange, gift and transfer, see: <http://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs>.

For information regarding electronic resources, open digital content, web archiving, and data sets, see the following Supplementary Guidelines: <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/electronicresources.pdf>, <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/opencontent.pdf>, <http://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/webarchive.pdf>, and <https://www.loc.gov/acq/devpol/datasets.pdf>.

VI. Acquisitions Sources

Manuscripts are currently acquired principally from donations by individuals and organizations, according to guidelines described in this *Collections Policy Statement*. The Manuscript Division also obtains collections and single items through purchase from individuals and professional manuscript dealers. In addition, the division receives transfers from the Copyright Office, other institutions, and other custodial units of the Library. The division anticipates that in the future it will acquire its collections from these same sources.

Some acquisitions are negotiated jointly or in consultation with other special collection divisions and recommending officers of the Library. This may occur when collections contain mixed media and the preservation of and access to these formats is best supported elsewhere in the Library.

Meeting the Library's Diverse and Inclusive Collecting Statement (see Section II) requires continual evaluation of the documentary landscape, sources of expression, current events, and socio-cultural trends to maintain effective collecting policies and acquisitions methods. Changes in the creation of materials covered by this policy statement may necessitate collecting efforts not explicitly referenced here. Such efforts will be handled on a case-by-case basis while the Library evaluates the need for policy statement updates.

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