

The Documents Expediting Project in Its First Year¹

THE DOCUMENTS Expediting Project was set up in cooperation with the Library of Congress July 1, 1946, by the joint Committee on Government Documents for the procurement and distribution of war documents and other publications not handled by the office of the Superintendent of Documents. During and immediately following the war, numerous libraries, including the Library of Congress, tried unsuccessfully to obtain copies of documents which were issued by many government agencies but not distributed through the usual channels. As more and more of the requests from libraries were ignored or refused completely, several different librarians, whose institutions were members of the Association of Research Libraries, urged the establishment of an expediting office in Washington. The assumption was that they could achieve their objective—originally the acquisition of war documents—by cooperation where they had failed in their attempts as single institutions. Prior to this definite demand, the joint committee had concerned itself with more general matters, such as improving the depository system, the possibility of issuing a list of processed material soon after its appearance, suggesting changes and possible improvements in the *Monthly Catalog*, etc., Since, however, acquisition of otherwise nondistributed government publications seemed to be of paramount importance, the joint

committee dropped its preoccupation with abstract document problems and concentrated its activity on the establishment and maintenance of a documents expediting office.

In response to an inquiry sent out by the joint committee on Sept. 7, 1945 to 178 libraries, 32 indicated a willingness to support the project in amounts varying from \$500 to \$25. Those canvassed comprised the membership of the Association of Research Libraries, the members of the National Association of State Libraries, a selected list of larger public libraries, and a selected list of college and university libraries not included in the A.R.L. list. Total indicated subscriptions came to approximately \$5000; and the Library of Congress offered office space, telephone facilities, and fiscal arrangements as its share in the undertaking. With this as a start, the joint committee—perhaps we should say that from this point on “joint committee” becomes a euphemism for “chairman”—proceeded with the task of finding a man or woman who could actually do the expediting and maintain the office. Innumerable trips to Washington for consultation and interview of prospective candidates became necessary, but all our efforts met with failure until we obtained the name of Walter B. Greenwood, who was with the Ethnogeographic Board until June 30, 1946. “Bart” Greenwood proved to be our man, and with him as “expediter” the project got under way. The Library of

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Congress graciously made room for him in the Exchange and Gift Division of its Acquisitions Department and placed its facilities at his disposal. With the prompt payment of a \$500-subscription by one of the original proponents of the idea the project became a reality and documents began to pour into the Library of Congress Annex for distribution to the "DocEx" libraries participating in the project.

Subscribers Have Profited

In the first year of its operation the project has distributed over 283,000 pieces to its subscribing libraries. Of this number, the Library of Congress, holding the highest priority, received a total of 5856 pieces, most of which it was unable to procure in any other way. Other libraries have received fewer pieces, but in every case, the participant has received far in excess of the value of its subscription, so that participation has proved worth while for every one concerned. As an indication of the success of the project, mention should be made of the fact that the project has supplied the library of the Superintendent of Documents, and consequently the *Monthly Catalog*, with hundreds of pieces which it never had received before.

In addition to the material distributed by the project, the expediter has obtained thousands of other items which are sent directly by the issuing agency to the "DocEx" libraries. This means that contacts were made with the agency and wherever mailing lists were maintained "DocEx" libraries were added if not already there. In several instances Mr. Greenwood has persuaded agencies to establish mailing lists where none existed before or to establish a central list of libraries which are to receive all of the processed material issued by the particular agency. Such arrangements were made with the Naval Research Laboratory,

the Atomic Energy Commission, the Civil Aeronautics Administration, the Tariff Commission, the Weather Bureau, and the Federal Public Housing Administration. In every case attention has been called to the need for the expeditious arrival in the libraries of publications widely reviewed in the press. In this connection it may be said that the project makes a check of the daily papers to discover such items released to the press but not distributed to the libraries through established mailing lists. The project tries to get these items in quantity and then distributes them directly to the "DocEx" libraries from its own office.

The documents expediter has not confined his procurement activities solely to the field of United States government documents but has sought also to obtain for the participating libraries the publications of the many international agencies which maintain offices in Washington. The "DocEx" libraries are receiving these materials by means of mailing lists and by direct distribution from the project's office, just as in the case of U.S. documents. This latter method was followed for the publications of the Far Eastern Commission and the Inter-American Defense Board. For example, the project is receiving for distribution from the Far Eastern Commission its press release series, Civil Affairs Division, War Department, "Weekly Report on Japan to the Far Eastern Commission," Japanese legislation, etc.

War Documents Distributed

In keeping with the original purpose for which the project was established, the field of war documents was explored early to determine the availability of publications falling within its scope. With declassification procedures under way in most wartime agencies, a real opportunity was at hand to procure these hitherto unobtainable documents. Although most agencies were in

general willing to furnish their publications to interested libraries, the shortage of personnel and the lack of funds largely prevented such special activities. The task of distributing these documents would have to be done by some other means or not at all—and it was precisely here that the basic thinking which underlay the establishment of the Documents Expediting Project proved to be soundest. The office has provided the necessary channel of distribution for this type of document, which can be obtained in no other way. The representative of a group of cooperating libraries makes contact with the agency (or its successor), demonstrates the libraries' needs for its publications, and accepts responsibility for distributing and for carrying out any other details in connection with release of the publication in question. Every declassified document had to have its declassification authority verified to avoid any breach of security regulations, and in addition, each copy had to have its restriction canceled before it could be sent to a library. Through liaison with the various declassification committees of government agencies, the expeditor has sought to learn of documents as soon as they were released and then to procure copies for the participating libraries. In several instances the project has succeeded in initiating declassification procedures for some types of publications.

The Library of Congress has made available for the project's distribution a wide variety of U.S. military government documents (in English) procured by the Library of Congress Mission in Europe. Here, too, the interest of the participating libraries warranted the expenditure of considerable effort to process these materials for distribution, especially since many of the titles were not available from any other domestic source. Some documents, such as the *OMGUS Military Government Regulations*, had to be assembled before being distributed to

the libraries; this single title entry involved the handling of some 125 parts for each copy assembled. The same was true of the *Official Gazette* of the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea. For the Library of Congress as well as for other government agencies the project has provided a machinery of distribution not otherwise available.

As one of its activities, the project issues a mimeographed bulletin containing information about documents which may be of interest to participating libraries. Being in daily contact with many government agencies, the documents expeditor often gets news of new or forthcoming publications and never misses an opportunity to offer the services of the project to the agency. This liaison cannot be considered the least of the benefits of participation in the project.

Libraries Must Support Project

During the first year of operation the project has received foundation support to help defray distribution costs, and we are hoping for similar aid for the second year. But what the project requires more than anything else is a wider basis of support from libraries. Apparently it is not generally known that the quantity of documents issued by government agencies in Washington but not distributed by the Superintendent of Documents equals the quantity issued through the Government Printing Office. The so-called all-depository libraries, therefore, receive at present only a part of the total production of government agencies, and it is this vast quantity of nondistributed publications—printed, multilithed, mimeographed, etc.—which the joint committee is anxious to get into the hands of libraries before the supply is exhausted or destroyed. We have demon-

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the way to more scientific analysis and fundamentals in government publications as a communication medium in American life and as a publishing venture in the realm of research and administration.

The future course should be one in which the Superintendent of Documents becomes increasingly conscious of libraries and their clientele as consumers and, in turn, libraries become increasingly aware of the resources and management problems of the office of the Superintendent of Documents. A cursory reading of the past two annual reports reveals sufficiently a picture of the managerial problems. In any event, several steps warrant attention in the road ahead. The office of the Superintendent of Documents is not merely a sales agency; it has great potentialities and should strive for a position of leadership in cataloging and bibliographical control of federal publications of all kinds. The subject approach must be exploited to the fullest. When it develops that funds and personnel are inadequate to maintain the balance of vast, free distribution and sales on the one hand and necessary bibliographic and indexing activities on the other, organized library opinion through the A.L.A. National Relations Office and through members of Congress should be mobilized well in advance of the appropriations deadline. Libraries should press for a change in legislation which would make

it possible to obtain a liberal appropriation for travel by the Superintendent of Documents—for the purpose of visiting depositories, witnessing documents collections and librarians in action, and gaining first-hand knowledge of the importance of bibliographic and indexing aids in libraries.

We must impress deeply upon the Superintendent of Documents that, through the instrumentality of libraries, government publications are brought into the hands of scholars, technicians, researchers, subject specialists, and American library patrons as a whole. Large as the volume of sales by the Superintendent of Documents may be to private individuals it nevertheless represents but a small fraction of the larger clientele, actual and potential, reached through the medium of libraries. The pursuit for all processed publications must continue and a system of distribution perfected—a prime responsibility of the Superintendent of Documents and the successful achievement of which would greatly cement the relationship with American libraries. *Major bibliographic or cataloging activities, for all practical purposes, appear to be possible only on a self-sustaining basis*, as evidenced in the large library enterprises of the Library of Congress.

The quality of the relationship will depend upon the quality of understanding and good faith of the two parties.

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strated pragmatically that these materials are available to those libraries which are aggressive enough to go after them on a cooperative basis. Furthermore, with an economy-minded Congress and with printing costs mounting higher and higher, it may well be that libraries may have to rely more and more on the kind of service

provided by a documents expediting office for the acquisition of government publications. To guarantee adequate distribution of the many publications now on hand the joint committee invites additional subscriptions to the Documents Expediting Project and assures every participant a substantial return on its investment.