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Editorial Projects as Derivative Archives

During the last quarter century, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale has grown from a provincial teacher's college with an enrollment of a few thousand to a full-fledged university with nearly twenty thousand students. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this tremendous growth and expansion is how unremarkable it is: across the country state universities have followed a similar pattern. The metamorphosis has been accompanied by explanatory literature in which appropriate political, economic, and social factors march in review. Somewhere on the list, however, modern technology must appear, and in explaining how Carbondale has become a research center of sorts, capable of sustaining a project of collecting, editing, and publishing a comprehensive edition of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* (in some twenty volumes) and a host of other scholarly enterprises, I am struck by the influence of both air conditioning and photocopying. The fact that cotton was grown around Carbondale during the Civil War should immediately suggest that artificial intercession with the climate is a precondition of year-round intellectual activity. The influence of photocopying, a bit more subtle, deserves closer examination.

The Xerox age—a time when photocopying became a routine part of life instead of an esoteric technique—came upon us with such dazzling suddenness that all its implications cannot yet be appreciated. In the study of American history, old distinctions between big league libraries and the bush league no longer pertain: reprinting through photocopy, a variety of microform reproductions of books, newspapers, and manuscripts, and easier access to extremely specialized material photocopied through interlibrary loan, have enabled new libraries to serve scholars as well as established libraries which have been building their collections for decades. In libraries with appropriate ambitions and resources, research collections can mushroom overnight, and provinciality becomes a matter of choice rather than location.

The Xerox age has also made possible massive comprehensive editions of basic documents in American history. By assembling files of photocopies of manuscripts scattered across the country, editors can apply comparative analysis to papers housed thousands of miles apart. Textual accuracy is obtained by repeated reference to the photocopy of the original manuscript. The diffusion of photocopying equipment permits a canvass of collections located far from the beaten scholarly path, and the incorporation of materials otherwise certain to be neglected from private autograph collections and the smallest institutional holdings. In other words, for the first time the manuscript resources of the world are available to compilers and editors. In addition to facilitating scholarship, this offers to owners, both institutional and private, a method of making available their property at remote points without parting with it. Photocopied documents have textual protection against disasters such as fire, and owners can more easily

prove ownership in case of theft.

Thanks to the Xerox age, new interest in documentary editing, and a greater demand for authenticity in American history, scholarly projects involving the collecting of the papers of leading figures in the American past have multiplied rapidly in the last twenty years. The files of photocopies for future volumes have aroused curiosity among scholars investigating related topics. Researchers who hope either to take a shortcut to research or wish to guarantee comprehensiveness in their coverage of manuscript material are now interested in examining the files assembled for editorial projects.

Certainly such requests for access cannot be denied easily. Most editorial projects are located physically within libraries which have a long tradition of providing general access to their materials and of seeking to attract visiting scholars. The projects themselves, established to provide an invaluable tool to present and future scholarship, have drawn greedily on the knowledge of existing experts in the field. Most multivolume documentary compilations tap various forms of government funds for aid in their expensive projects, assuming additional responsibility to the public.

At the same time, requests by outside scholars for access to photocopies present important problems. The explosion of scholarly population in the same period when these documentary projects were getting underway means that considerable numbers of potential researchers are involved. Work already demanding large expenditures of time and energy might well be hampered by new claims on these resources. Practicing editors already find their versatility strained by the demands of their documents, the administration of office staff, the endless search for money, and the delicate diplomacy of publishing. They might well pause before making the transition from scholarship to service—from hammer to anvil—to consider the implications.

The difference between mammoth editorial projects involving the assembling of photocopies and the normal research of any scholar in American history is really one of degree rather than kind. Research files, once crammed with tattered transcriptions and paraphrases, now more often testify to the wisdom of early investment in photocopying stock. Individual academics, of course, feel free to share their photocopies with their friends or not, but editorial projects as organizations feel obliged to set policies, and here a sense of generosity encounters harsh reality. Editorial offices—usually too small—are designed for editorial purposes rather than for library functions. Projects limited in their personnel —and this includes almost all—will be pressed to provide the necessary aid to "qualified scholars." This last phrase, of course, presents its own problems: definitions of "qualified scholars" have always been elastic, though much of the snobbery implicit in the phrase has been eroded in the past few years as old barricades based upon degrees and academic credentials (often involving jobs) become increasingly untenable. As a result, open must mean *open*, closed mean *closed*. Time applied to the preparation of additional volumes would certainly better serve a larger number of scholars than aid provided to individual visitors. In addition, editorial project files, like individual scholarly files, are arranged for a specific purpose rather than for general use, and cannot be made available in their entirety to outside scholars without considerable rearrangement and the creation of additional finding aids. Providing half a loaf may involve confrontation with an enraged researcher with bread-knife in hand.

Long-term projects are risky enough at best; the odds against their completion are increased by any alteration of

the original purpose. They face recurrent problems of funding, which they must seek on the basis of the originality of their work and its unique importance, a case which would be weakened by prior publication of any substantial body of the documents involved. Guarding against this could involve checking scholarly credentials, integrity and intention as well, and perhaps even supervising research. Under such conditions open access would conflict with principles of free inquiry.

But by all odds the greatest difficulty does not come from within the project itself but from those institutions upon which it is dependent for original documentary material. In making photocopies of manuscript material available, more and more libraries are granting only limited rights, insisting that material be used only for specific purposes and not for the creation of derivative archives based on photocopies. The arrangements between the Grant Association and the hundreds of libraries which have furnished materials for its major project are tangled and complex; yet the files of photocopies cannot be arranged so as to take into account all these varieties of conditions. When photocopies have not been provided with explicit conditions that they be used only for a documentary project, these conditions are often implicit; materials have often been furnished the Grant Association for our edition of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* by libraries which would be most distressed to find them in wider use. Any policy of open access endangers the entire project by threatening to dry up vital sources of supply, and no project finding its chief value in comprehensiveness can afford this. Our policy cannot be based upon a consensus of policies of those institutions furnishing material: we must include documents from those libraries most restrictive and to do so must comply with their conditions.

By placing restrictions on the use of photocopies from their collections, libraries by no means follow a selfish or foolish policy. In the use of photocopied materials, misattribution of source is a constant threat stemming equally from carelessness and caution on the part of scholars. More concerned with the content than the provenance of documents, some writers will not distinguish between derivative archives and owners of original manuscripts simply because they do not want to take the time to establish the true source. Others will cite the derivative archive as a means of avoiding excessive claims to scholarship. After all, if a researcher has seen, for example, six photocopies of letters of which the originals are in a large manuscript collection in the Library of Congress, he can hardly claim to have examined that Library of Congress collection. Some believe that accuracy in citation demands reference to the photocopy rather than to the original. While the Library of Congress will hardly perish because of such misattribution, many libraries depend upon head counts for their funding; librarians, archivists, and curators believe that they have a role in the scholarly process somewhat more significant than that of the stock clerk, and they expect, and will even demand, contact with any researcher who wishes to make use of manuscript collections. They quite properly resent use of selected photocopies as a method of avoiding careful examination of coherent collections. In negotiating purchases of documents costing hundreds of dollars for relatively small numbers of sheets of paper, they must justify this expenditure in a world where research could proceed with photocopies of the same documents costing pennies. Libraries which have created microfilm editions of some of their manuscript collections have recognized that the age of the scholarly pilgrim is closing without, however, surrendering the right

to provide access to their collections on their own terms.

Confronted with various questions concerning access, the Grant Association conducted an informal canvass of similar projects, but discovered no consensus. A few projects are open, a few are closed, but many have either not yet realized the implications or have not yet decided on a policy. Some files are open to some scholars—those "who can help us more than we help them"—and closed to others. This middle course appears especially dangerous since it could give rise to charges of favoritism, heightened as some collections once open are forced either to restrict access, or to have access closed to them by essential libraries. After considering the problem with much painful ambivalence, the directors of the Grant Association finally settled upon a policy which attempts to provide the greatest aid to all other scholars in the field without harming the project itself:

> Because of various problems growing out of limitations of space, staff, and time, agreements with institutions and individuals who own original documents, and publishing commitments, the Ulysses S. Grant Association has reluctantly decided that it cannot provide researchers with access to its files of photocopies of documents it does not own.
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> Original material, unavailable elsewhere, owned by the Grant Association, is open to all qualified researchers.
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> The Grant Association has been organized to prepare an edition of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant,* and cannot practically or legally assume the function of a library or archive.
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> In order to further scholarship, requests for information concerning the location of original documents, as well as other requests for biographical and bibliographical information, will be answered to the best of our ability within the limitations of staff and time.

If these remarks indicate strict opposition to derivative archives, then a few more words are needed. Manuscript material essential to the study of American history is scattered across this country in an illogical pattern which often frustrates or distorts research. Unique materials essential to understanding our past can be held, and abused, as private property, and there is no reasonable prospect of any massive bureaucratic shuffling of these resources to put papers physically where they belong logically. Almost all librarians and most private collectors recognize that ownership of manuscript material imposes responsibility as well as pleasure. In collecting material for documentary publication, editors have been repeatedly encouraged by generous cooperation at many points. But documentary editions meet only part of the need of making manuscript sources generally available.

Since scholarship has so long been shaped and inhibited by the physical location of the sources, and the situation is not improving, the creation of derivative archives, now technically possible, might well be placed high on the library agenda. One location, for example, for the photocopied papers of leaders of the American Revolution, or one large collection in black history drawing on manuscripts available across the country, could create new dimensions of scholarship. Such collections must, of course, be created with a full understanding of their nature and purpose in the form of a relationship between consenting libraries. Source locations must be carefully noted on the photocopies; researchers must be induced to comply with conditions for citation. In the meantime, informal dissemination of photocopies, including general use of files assembled for purposes of documentary editing, creates more scholarly problems than it solves.