
Collecting North Caroliniana

Alice R. Cotten

Selection of material to be included in the North Carolina Collection is very simple—there is no selection. Every book, pamphlet, article, that can be secured, relating to North Carolina, is carefully preserved.¹

This statement of sixty years ago was the collection development policy for the North Carolina Collection at the library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from its beginning. It served the collection well, providing flexibility and an "open door" policy for many ephemeral items that otherwise might have been lost. But today one library cannot collect *all* items relating to every city, town, crossroad, school, organization, business, and organization in the state. Much of this responsibility rests on local libraries. This article will recommend that public and academic libraries actively collect and preserve printed information about local people, events, organizations, institutions, and buildings, and will suggest the need for cooperation among libraries to ensure preservation of North Caroliniana.

The first question is how to define "North Caroliniana." It includes nonfiction and fiction, poetry and prose, monographs, pamphlets, documents (local, state, and federal), maps, newspapers, journals, magazines, annual reports of business, newsletters, photographs, broadsides, dissertations, theses, clippings, recordings, and films about the state, its people, or any of its political, geographic, or social divisions. It can also include material written by North Carolinians, regardless of the subject.

The combined holdings of the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill and the North Carolina State Library in Raleigh are nearly comprehensive in their collecting on the state level. Both collect local items too, but on a more limited basis. Of course, neither has all the municipal documents, the local church histories, the bird club newsletters, the programs from the dedications of new schools or parks, the maps showing proposed new developments or zoning regulations, or the local

newspapers. No one library can collect that extensively for every municipality in the state. Even if a library had the money, time, space, and staff to collect at this level, many of these ephemeral items are produced in limited quantities for a specific event, and the supply is quickly exhausted.

The greatest need today in the field of collecting North Caroliniana is for the acquisition and preservation of local information. Who is keeping local government documents—council minutes, annual reports, budgets, thoroughfare plans, ordinances and charters, proposals for waste dumps, and zoning regulations? Some public libraries are, and are doing the job well. One success story is that of the High Point Public Library, which a few years ago began a municipal documents collection and an index to the local newspaper. Their director, Neal Austin, reports that it has been an "effective low-cost project."² In 1980 and 1981, the Documents Section and the Public Libraries Section of NCLA adopted resolutions and guidelines encouraging public libraries to reach agreements with local governments to collect and provide access to municipal documents. Some libraries showed interest, but there has been little coordinated effort since then. This project is worthwhile and deserves renewed emphasis.

There is also a need to preserve local, small-town newspapers. The Division of Archives and History in Raleigh administers an excellent program that identifies, films, and makes available for purchase all eighteenth and nineteenth century newspapers, but there is no coordinated effort to assure that twentieth century local papers are preserved anywhere. A week rarely passes that someone does not come to the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill to ask for an issue of a small paper. He shakes his head in disbelief as a staff member says that the collection does not have that paper. "But you get *all* North Carolina newspapers, don't you?" he asks. "After all, you *are* the North Carolina Collection." We explain that we get only a few newspapers, mostly major dailies on microfilm, and that he should

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check with a library in the area in which the paper is published. Some newspapers do keep backfiles, but these are often incomplete, unavailable to researchers, or deteriorating. The historians, sociologists, political scientists, and genealogists of the next century will have to work without one of the essential sources of their professions unless we as librarians collect, preserve, and make available local newspapers.

Clipping files, or vertical files, of selected articles from local papers can be valuable. The North Carolina Collection at Chapel Hill began its clipping file in the 1940s. By the mid-1970s, the file was large, deteriorating, and in need of an overhaul. The collection hired a student to go through the clippings (over 100,000), divide them into subject and biography, make an authority file, and

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arrange them in chronological order within each subject or name. The library's Photographic Services Section microfilmed the file and made paper prints from the film. The collection bound 164 volumes of biographical clippings and 190 volumes of subject clippings. The project took about three years and was expensive, but users are enthusiastic, and the bound volumes are used heavily. The collection anticipates adding volumes at ten or fifteen year intervals. While an undertaking of this magnitude is not possible for most libraries, a clipping file of local information may be possible and will be used extensively by enthusiastic researchers.

Actively seek and keep publications from local schools, churches, civic organizations, clubs, historical societies, businesses, banks, chambers of commerce, and other similar organizations. Who knows what future novelist, president, scientist, or anarchist may today be writing for your local school's literary magazine. Someone should be keeping yearbooks, church directories (church bulletins in some cases), reports of businesses, and local promotional materials. These will be invaluable for the study of a local community's change.

Among the most used items in the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill are programs, directories, and brochures from early twentieth century women's clubs. These materials show important developments in women's history and social history in our state and nation. But the collection doesn't have them all, particularly those

from small towns and rural areas. Minority materials of all sorts are important. Seek them and keep them if they are produced locally. The history of a community is incomplete without a record of the existence of the local Ku Klux Klan, the gay rights activists, and 'the Sneetches with stars upon thars' to complement the record of the Kiwanis Club, the Scouts, and the churches.

Ability to Predict

One of the most valuable qualities of a librarian responsible for a state and local collection is the ability to predict what will be valuable to future scholars. William S. Powell, former curator of the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill, was outstanding in this respect. In the early 1960s he began gathering the printed commentaries of a little-known but outspoken announcer from a Raleigh television station. These "viewpoint" editorials of Jesse Helms are now used extensively by the media, faculty and students of the university, and other researchers. Several years ago the collection, anticipating increasingly heavy use of these editorials, had them filmed for security, withdrew the originals, and made paper copies from the film. While all television or radio commentators will not go on to become senators, their editorials, if available, will reflect some of the concerns of the community for present and future scholars.

Another example of Professor Powell's farsighted collection development policy was his tenacious collecting of telephone books and city directories for many towns and cities. These are wonderful sources for many kinds of information. They can be used, with appropriate caution, to document who lived where at what time and what businesses operated in a given year. City directories provide additional information: occupation, name of spouse, whether a person rents or owns his house, who lives at each address, and who has each telephone number. Possibilities for use are numerous.

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Libraries sometimes overlook the value of local maps. These maps show growth, change, and development and should be collected and pre-

served permanently. In the late nineteenth century, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company in New York began printing large colored maps showing streets and structures in towns all over the United States. Today these maps are valuable resources for people doing architectural surveys, restoring homes, writing local histories, and many other projects. Locally produced maps are especially valuable, for they often show backroads or structures that do not appear on commercial maps.

Photographs are also part of North Carolina. Scholars of the next decade, or the next century, will be grateful to those libraries that preserve likenesses of local buildings, events, and people. With restoration efforts at a peak, many landmarks are being renovated for new uses, but many more historic buildings and houses have been demolished. For many of these buildings, no pictures exist.

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Information about local authors and collections of their works are important additions to any library. Small press publications, limited editions, privately printed or published works, articles in journals or magazines are often not collected at all. The North Carolina Collection at Chapel Hill collects the works of many authors, but some escape its attention until their work is unavailable. And the number of North Carolinians who write—and publish—is increasing, making it harder for one library to collect all authors. Some authors are willing, even happy, to donate copies of their works to their local library. In addition to acquiring the works of local authors, libraries can add newspaper articles about the author, book reviews, and dust jackets to supplement the actual writings. The "literary scrapbooks" at the North Carolina Collection in Chapel Hill provide researchers with a lot of information about Tar Heel authors and their writings, information that is hard to find through normal literary indexes.

As Marjorie Lindsey of the North Carolina State Library pointed out, most of these items are not books. Maps, photographs, pamphlets, leaflets, and broadsides all require special handling, preservation, space, and the staff to acquire and process them. This paper has recommended that libraries collect extensively on the local level, recognizing that libraries have limits on money, staff, time, and expertise.

Collecting North Carolina is a challenge, and no one library can do it all. Most public and academic libraries collect some local material. A few collect extensively. Most collect on a limited basis because of the restraints mentioned earlier. There appears to be a need for communication and coordination, a "network for North Carolina." But unless libraries assume responsibility for collecting and preserving local information, much of it will be lost, and a part of the literary and historical heritage of our state will be gone forever.

Acknowledgement

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References

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2. Jane Williams and Rebecca Ballentine, "Expanding Local Information Services in North Carolina Public Libraries," *Popular Government* 47 (Fall, 1981): 7.

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