

GRANT T. SKELLEY

# Characteristics of Collections Added to American Research Libraries, 1940-1970: A Preliminary Investigation

*During the years 1940-1970 301 American libraries were reported in College & Research Libraries and College & Research Libraries News to have added 1,454 collections. In this report the collections are analyzed by (1) type of library, (2) type of collection, (3) means acquired, and (4) sources of gifts (to academic libraries).*

## INTRODUCTION

THERE IS A CONSIDERABLE, if not substantial, amount of writing about "book selection" and "collection building" in libraries of all kinds. Little seems to have been written, however, about the role that has been played among research libraries in general by the practice of acquiring collections of library materials—as opposed to adding individual titles one at a time. It is the purpose of this paper to make an informal, preliminary report on an investigation based on one reasonably usable data base, with the hope that it may suggest and contribute to some more thorough and more conclusive studies.

American libraries have been growing since colonial times partly by means of acquiring, in bulk, existing collections. But documentation and details of most of these transactions, and of the nature of the collections, are for the most part either lacking or widely scattered and difficult of access. For a fairly recent pe-

riod, however, a starting point, at least, exists. From its first issue, dated December 1939, *College & Research Libraries* and, more lately, *College & Research Libraries News* (hereinafter referred to as *C&RL* and *C&RL News*) have included, with some variations in presentation and arrangement, news of recent acquisitions by libraries throughout the United States and Canada. With certain qualifications brought out later in this report, these published descriptions of what American libraries were adding to their resources in the form of collections provide a sample of what has been going on.

The term "research library" is subject to definitions that vary according to individual predilections and persuasions. (One notices without comment the distinction made in the title of the journal used as the primary source for this investigation.) Consequently, no attempt has been made to discriminate among the libraries whose acquisitions were reported. With a few exceptions to be noted, every added collection that was reported in the pages of *C&RL* and *C&RL News*, 1940-1970 inclusive (1,454 collections in 301 libraries), has been

---

*Grant T. Skelley is assistant professor, School of Librarianship, University of Washington, Seattle.*

counted and categorized according to (1) type of library, (2) type of collection, (3) means acquired, and (4) sources of gifts. Definitions are given below.

A word about scope. *C&RL* at first listed people who supplied the journal with information about new acquisitions, and these people were called "reporters." Mention of them was soon discontinued, and some of the editors of *C&RL* during the period covered have informed the author that the large majority of the descriptions that appeared (and appear currently) were derived from news-releases, and that virtually all of such announcements they received appeared, sometimes in edited versions, in subsequent issues of the journal. Other sources accounted for a small number of the collections reported.

Within that scope—the scope of the news sources *C&RL* has and the news it published—exclusions in this study include (1) Canadian libraries, since there were so few reported; (2) one or two instances where the library could not be positively identified from the information given; (3) one or two cases where collections were jointly acquired by two or more libraries not in the same system; (4) the second or third mention of any one collection; (5) those cases where the description was unclear as to whether or not books were acquired as a lot, and (6) those collections that were said to have been formed by an agent of the library going on a buying junket.

No attempt was made to quantify the growth these collections represented in terms of number of volumes or other units. When given, sizes ranged from two volumes (and other larger quantities as specific) to eight tons to three truckloads to a 14,000,000-item archival collection (that of Ford Motor Company, given to the Edison Institute in

1965). The years used in the tables are the years in which collections were reported in *C&RL* or *C&RL News*, and are therefore not necessarily always the years they were acquired.

#### DEFINITIONS

##### *Collection*

A collection was any group of materials containing two or more items, with the exception that a run of a single serial title was not considered a collection. However, runs of two or more serials were considered to be a collection.

##### *Type of Library*

*Academic/Private*—Any academic institution of higher education not supported by state or municipal funds. A unit of a multiunit system was identified and tallied only under the parent institution.

*Academic/Public*—Any academic institution of higher education supported by public funds. A unit of a multiunit system was identified and tallied only under the parent institution.

*Other*—A library that does not qualify as either type of academic library, or as a "public" or "state" library, i.e., the kind of library that would commonly be referred to as "special" or would be in a category almost by itself, like the Newberry, Folger, Huntington, etc.

*Public*—With one exception, a tax-supported library serving a city or county. Branches were tallied by system. The exception is the Library of Congress, included here on the basis of its tax support. (How its inclusion affects the statistics for public libraries is brought out below.)

*State*—A state library and its branches. Branches, such as the Sutro Branch of the California State Library, were tallied as with "public."

##### *Type of Collection*

*Author*—Used to designate a collec-

tion of books by one author, or of the manuscripts of his works, or both. Correspondence and "papers" were categorized as a subject collection (see below).

*Book*—Used to designate any collection of printed books, serials, pamphlets, etc.

*Genre*—A collection of certain types of material, book or nonbook, where author or subject was not the unifying principle: Victorian fiction, incunabula, clay tablets, recorded music of the 1920s, books from one private press, etc.

*Heterogeneous*—Applied to any collection that was not distinctly an author, genre, or subject collection, such as the occasional "gentleman's" library reported.

*Manuscript*—Applied to any collection consisting of manuscript books, holograph or partly holograph letters and documents (also typewritten), diaries, business records, log books, etc.

*Mixed*—Used to describe any collection that contained any combination of books, manuscripts, and nonbook material as defined for purposes of this report.

*Nonbook*—Reserved for material not fitting the description of "book" and "manuscript," including the one or two instances of clay tablets, but usually being such as phonorecords, etchings, films, maps, theater programs, and "realia."

*Subject*—A collection of books, manuscripts, or nonbook material (or mixed) that pertains to a given topic or area of study. The way some of the collections were described, the choice of designating a collection as "subject" was more or less intuitive, but usually there was little indecision.

#### *Means Acquired*

*Gift*—Many acquisitions were called "gift" in the description. When the

term was not used, the operative word was almost always either "received" or "acquired." Those collections that were said to have been "received" were classed as gifts; those said to have been "acquired" were classed as "unspecified" (see below). Collections said to have been purchased with a money gift from some donor were classed as gifts.

*Loan*—There were so few of these as to be inconsequential, and they might legitimately be considered *de facto* gifts. Technically, however, there is a matter of legal title involved.

*Purchase*—Includes only those specifically so designated, except for collections said to have been purchased with a gift of money, which were included as "gifts."

*Unspecified*—Includes those collections which, according to the descriptions, were not clearly gifts, loans, or purchases.

#### *Sources of Gifts*

(This information applies only to collections added by academic libraries, in an attempt to gauge the significance of alumni and faculty as donors among the reported gift collections.)

*Alumni*—Besides the collections which were specifically identified as the gift of a living alumnus, this category includes those collections said to have been from "the estate of" or "the family of" (etc.) a deceased alumnus.

*Faculty*—Inclusion in this category of donor was determined in the same manner as for alumni, with "faculty" being broadened to include administrators and librarians.

*Unspecified*—Includes all gift collections for which the relationship of the donor to the school was not given.

#### REMARKS

The data of the sample analyzed here do not lead convincingly to any generalized conclusions, but they do call for some remarks and raise some questions.

TABLE 1  
COLLECTIONS ADDED, 1940-1970 (BY YEAR)

Year	Type of Library					Means Acquired					Type of Collection				Total	
	Academic/ Public	Academic/ Private	Public	State	Other	Total	Gift	Purchase	Loan	Unspecified	Total	Book	Manuscript	Nonbook		Mixed
1940	13	15	2	1	0	31	26	1	1	3	31	18	4	3	6	31
1941	17	10	1	0	2	30	17	0	0	13	30	12	3	6	9	30
1942	6	7	2	0	2	17	7	6	1	3	17	7	6	1	3	17
1943	13	20	3	9	5	50	35	2	1	12	50	15	23	3	9	50
1944	17	19	1	0	0	37	25	1	0	11	37	16	11	2	8	37
1945	17	17	0	0	1	35	30	2	0	3	35	15	13	1	6	35
1946	20	13	0	2	0	35	34	0	0	1	35	26	4	2	3	35
1947	13	20	0	0	0	33	23	1	0	9	33	13	7	4	9	33
1948	4	16	3	0	0	23	18	2	0	3	23	13	3	2	5	23
1949	4	9	2	0	0	15	11	0	0	4	15	8	1	4	2	15
1950	9	8	2	0	0	19	12	1	0	6	19	9	6	2	2	19
1951	6	11	4	0	0	21	16	4	0	1	21	15	3	1	2	21
1952	7	18	4	0	0	29	22	1	0	6	29	14	9	1	5	29
1953	7	10	2	0	0	19	13	3	0	3	19	13	4	0	2	19
1954	10	13	2	0	0	25	13	4	0	8	25	7	10	0	8	29
1955	8	17	3	0	1	29	16	7	0	6	29	13	11	0	5	29
1956	16	14	0	0	0	30	21	1	0	8	30	13	2	1	14	30
1957	18	22	2	0	0	42	32	3	0	7	42	11	18	2	11	42
1958	25	33	7	0	1	66	44	6	0	16	66	31	16	2	17	66
1959	11	30	3	0	3	47	38	6	0	3	47	26	14	1	6	47
1960	14	12	3	0	5	34	26	4	1	3	34	15	15	3	1	34
1961	35	21	1	0	6	63	37	4	0	22	63	28	21	3	11	63
1962	38	39	2	1	9	89	54	16	0	19	89	43	23	4	19	89
1963	43	29	5	1	4	82	56	6	0	20	82	42	25	3	12	82
1964	22	27	4	0	2	55	38	3	0	14	55	33	14	0	8	55
1965	18	16	0	0	2	36	21	3	1	11	36	21	4	5	6	36
1966	28	21	3	0	1	53	30	7	0	16	53	32	10	3	8	53
1967	55	55	3	0	3	116	45	8	0	63	116	28	67	2	19	116
1968	54	37	7	0	1	99	58	9	0	32	99	30	50	0	19	99
1969	29	37	16	0	3	85	46	7	0	32	85	26	46	4	9	85
1970	28	62	16	0	3	109	62	10	0	37	109	32	60	2	15	109
Total	605	678	103	14	54	1,454	926	128	5	395	1,454	625	503	67	259	1,454



*Type of Library*

It will be seen from Tables 1 and 2 that a not unexpected pattern emerges in that academic libraries reported receiving by far the most collections—a total of 1,283, or 88.5 percent of all reported. The evenness of distribution between public and private academic libraries (41.5 percent and 46.5 percent) is misleading, however, in light of the fact that twenty-five public academic libraries acquired 398 collections, while sixteen private academic libraries acquired 418 collections. In other words, 15 percent of the academic libraries accounted for 64 percent of the collections acquired by both types, and 21.5 percent of the public academic libraries accounted for 66 percent of the collections acquired by that type, and 10.5 percent of the private academic libraries accounted for 62 percent of the collections acquired by that type. (See Table 4 for ranked lists.) In the total sample, 148 (49 percent) of the libraries reported only one collection.

Forty-five (15 percent) reported ten or more.

The figure for public libraries is likewise misleading, for, as pointed out above, this category includes the Library of Congress, which accounted for seventy-seven, or 75 percent of the total number reported by public libraries.

A similar situation exists with state libraries, where one such library (Virginia) reported 50 percent of the thirty-one-year total of fourteen collections in one year (1943), and overall reported ten, or 71.5 percent of the total for this category.

Libraries in the "other" category show a more normal distribution, with a total of twenty-two libraries reporting fifty-four collections, although the figures are somewhat skewed by the fact that one library (the Truman Library) reported seventeen, or 31.5 percent of the total.

*Type of Collection*

There was of course an extraordinary variety of materials, subjects, authors,

TABLE 2  
COLLECTIONS ADDED, 1940-1970: SUMMARY

Characteristics	Type of Library					Total	Percent
	Academic/ Public	Academic/ Private	Public	State	Other		
Book	312	287	14	2	10	625	43.0
Manuscript	169	219	72	10	33	503	34.0
Nonbook	25	32	5	0	5	67	5.0
Mixed	99	140	12	2	6	259	18.0
Total	605	678	103	14	54	1,454	100.0
Author	36	59	15	4	2	116	8.0
Subject	405	415	75	8	39	942	65.0
Genre	63	77	8	1	6	155	11.0
Heterogeneous	101	127	5	1	7	241	16.0
Total	605	678	103	14	54	1,454	100.0
Gift	334	489	69	14	25	931	64.5
Purchase	84	32	3	0	3	122	8.5
Loan	2	2	0	0	0	4	—
Unspecified	185	155	31	0	26	397	27.0
Total	605	678	103	14	54	1,454	100.0
Alumni	2	34				36	4.5
Faculty	40	40				80	9.5
Unspecified	292	415				707	86.0
Total	334	489				823	100.0

and genres represented among the 1,454 collections analyzed here, and to single out several for mention would not even begin to give any indication—much less a representative cross-section—of the richness and diversity that enhanced the resources of American libraries during the period covered. One should think that nearly everyone connected with research libraries knows of great collections, for example, the Rosenwald at the Library of Congress, but what impresses one in the course of reading this thirty-one-year record from beginning to end is the amount of less glamorous but probably in its way equally useful research material that settled quietly and without fanfare into library sanctums of somewhat lesser majesty. Though these are only samples, they give powerful evidence of the fact that American research libraries do have the lodes and troves of resources their promoters so often routinely (though now and then inflatedly) claim they do.

That manuscript collections come as close as they do to equalling the number of book collections (34 percent and 43 percent respectively) might come as a surprise, since one would suppose that more people collect books than collect (or save) manuscript material. When one considers that the category "mixed" (18 percent of total) most often was a mixture of books and manuscripts, frequently appearing to be predominantly the latter and thus laying fair claim to being called a manuscript collection for all practical purposes, the distribution of the two kinds of collection becomes yet more even.

#### *Means Acquired*

As might be inferred from the definitions of "gift," "purchase," "loan," and "unspecified," above, this area is the one in most need of more exact information. However, if the sample is indicative, there was an impressive number of

gifts during the period: 931 (64 percent) overall, 824 (56 percent) for all academic, 334 (55 percent) for academic/public, 489 (72 percent) for academic/private, 69 (67 percent) for public, 14 (100 percent) for state, and 25 (46 percent) for other types of libraries. It is probably not unreasonable to assume that a large proportion of the "unspecifieds" are also gifts. Attributing reasons for the higher incidence of gifts in private academic libraries than in public academic libraries is beyond the scope of this study, but the finding is nonetheless somehow not surprising.

#### *Source of Gifts (Academic)*

The figures would seem to indicate that alumni of private schools are far more of a mind to give to their alma maters than those of public institutions (thirty-four of the former, two of the latter), and that faculty members of public institutions are relatively more generous than those of private, although in absolute numbers both received the same number of collections (forty) from faculty members.

#### SOME QUESTIONS

This inquiry into some characteristics of the amassing of collections raises certain questions, some of which are:

1. To what extent has the acquisition of specific collections influenced the subsequent collection building policy of the library concerned?
2. To what extent has the acquisition of specific collections influenced the research and curricular development at academic institutions?
3. To what extent do research programs and instructional programs attract gift collections to academic libraries?
4. To what extent are the special collections made known and made available? (An approach to an an-

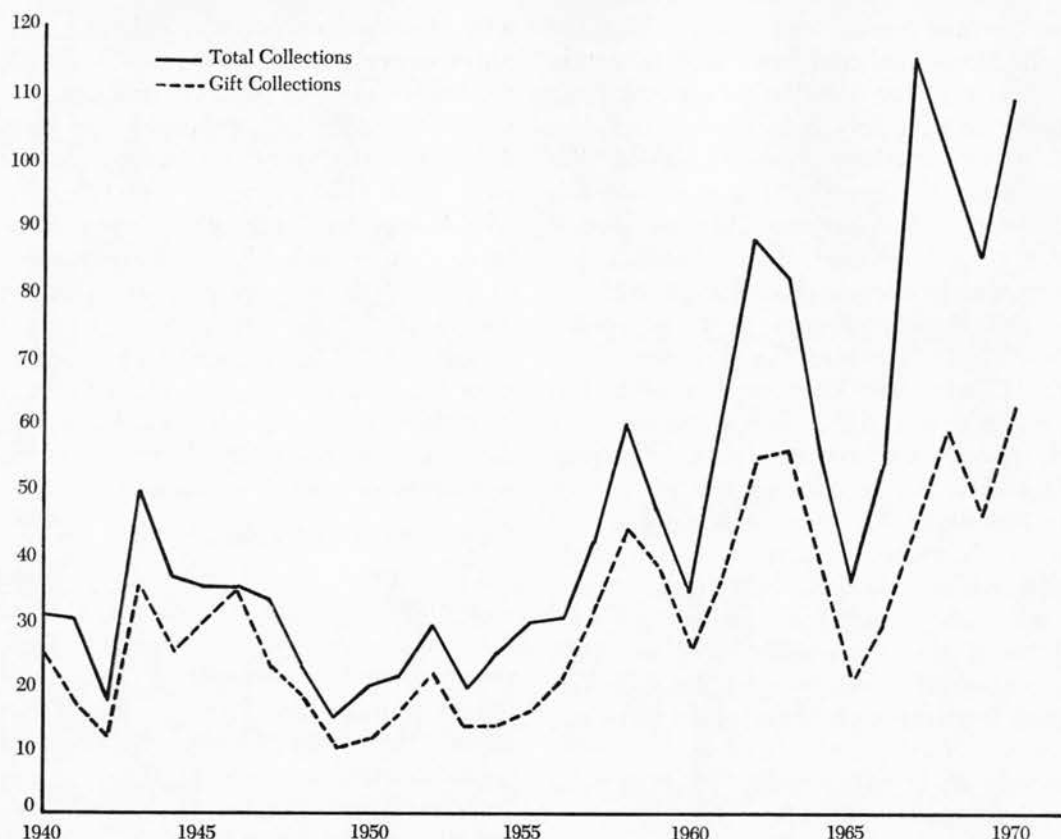


Fig. 1

Total Collections and Gift Collections by Year, 1940-1970

swer to this question is underway, based on the data gathered for this paper.)

5. What is the cost effectiveness of gift collections? Of purchased collections?
6. How much unneeded duplication and relative dross results from the acquisition of some collections? What does such duplication and dross cost the library in terms of staff time, increased cataloging backlogs, and reduced service?
7. What effect have donors' choices of donee library had on the ultimate utility of the collection to the scholarly community and other potential users?
8. Do the fluctuations displayed in

Figure 1 represent a true picture of the collections-adding activity during the period, or merely the fluctuations in public relations activity? Why the sharp decline from 1943 to 1949? Why the precipitous decline 1958-1960, 1962-1965? Or the large increases between 1960 and 1962, 1965 and 1967? How much will the Tax Reform Act of 1969, which plugged the loophole regarding taxes on appreciated value of personal property donations, affect donations from 1970 on?

9. What is the relationship between acquisition (or "selection") policy and the acceptance of gift collections? In other words, how of-

TABLE 3  
NUMBER OF COLLECTIONS REPORTED BY NUMBER OF LIBRARIES, 1940-1970

Number of Collections	Academic/		Number of Libraries			Total
			Public	State	Other	
77			1			1
51		3				3
45		1				1
38	1					1
37		1				1
34	1					1
32	1	1				2
23	1					1
22		1				1
21		1				1
20	1					1
19		1				1
17	1	1			1	3
16	2	1				3
15	4					4
14	1					1
13	1	2				3
12	1					1
11	3					3
10	7	3	1	1		12
9	1	1	1			3
8	1	2				3
7	3	1				4
6	3	3			1	7
5	1	4				5
4	7	7			2	16
3	14	11	1			26
2	15	23	1		5	44
1	46	83	2	4	13	148
Total	116	151	7	5	22	301

ten are gifts and gift collections accepted solely on the basis that the library can then claim to have some scarce or prestige item(s), regardless of how they relate to the nature of their collection, or of the fact that the most logical

and useful place might be in a different library?

10. Does the relationship between size and reputation of a library and the number of collections it acquires bear out the time-honored adage that "gifts beget gifts"?

TABLE 4  
ACADEMIC LIBRARIES REPORTING TEN OR MORE COLLECTIONS, 1940-1970

Number of Collections (N = 816)	Names of Parent Institutions	
	Private (N = 16)	Public (N = 25)
51	Columbia, Stanford, Washington U.	
45	Yale	
38		U. California (Berkeley)
37	Northwestern	
34		U. California (Los Angeles)



TABLE 4—Continued

Number of Collections (N = 816)	Names of Parent Institutions	
	Private (N = 16)	Public (N = 25)
32	Syracuse	Southern Illinois U.
23		U. Minnesota
22	Cornell	
21	Duke	
20		U. Virginia
19	Princeton	
17	U. Rochester	U. Missouri
16	Harvard	U. Houston, U. Kansas
15		Ohio St. U., Pennsylvania St. U., U. Illinois, U. Kentucky
14		Kent St. U.
13	Dartmouth, New York U.	Indiana U.
12		U. Delaware
11		U. California (Santa Barbara), U. Vermont, U. Wisconsin
10	Joint Universities, U. Southern California, William & Mary	Michigan St. U., U. Arizona, U. Pennsylvania, U. Pittsburgh, U. Texas (Austin), U. Washing- ton, U. Wyoming

## RECEIVING LIBRARIES

Table 3 shows how many libraries in each category reported a given number of collections. Since it has already been pointed out that academic libraries accounted for almost 90 percent of the collections reported during the period, that the Library of Congress dominated

the public library field, that one state library was the major performer in that category, and that the number of collections reported by libraries in the "other" category was relatively evenly distributed, only those academic libraries that reported ten or more collections during the period are identified in Table 4.