

The Yale Collection of Dealers' Catalogs

SOON after the Yale University Library moved into its new building various collections which had been forced into attics or cellars for lack of space in the old building, were given adequate room and were gradually made available to the public through individual catalogs or by representation in the main catalog. One of these collections, comprised of auction and secondhand book dealers' catalogs, had been growing for many years through the natural cumulation of such material in a university library and through the wise decision of the librarian to keep such material, even though it had to be stored in inaccessible corners of the old building.

Many of the catalogs had been absorbed into the general book collection through the years. Sale catalogs of important private libraries became bibliographical tools of great value to both research scholars and to catalogers, not only because of the valuable material they contained, but because of the careful and detailed descriptions found in them. A great number of secondhand book dealers' catalogs were also added to the general collection, not because of the rarity of the books listed for sale nor because of the method of description of these books, but because these catalogs were valuable subject bibliographies—in many cases the best available.

However, the "seepage" of book catalogs into the general book collection was a very minor flow when the collection as a whole is considered. And once it was brought into the new book tower, even though shelved

on the seventeenth stack floor (at that time still not officially open to the public) it was agreed that something should be done to make it more useful. This promised to be a tremendous task, as the catalogs were in no order, and the first problem of sorting and arranging seemed almost impossible, with all the other extra work entailed with the arrival in the new building. However, because it was a new building and because, for the first time in years, there was plenty of room, everyone was filled with enthusiasm and was willing to undertake whatever labors would render the whole library collection more useful to its readers and also make the best use of the new surroundings.

In the beginning the collection of book catalogs was one of the minor problems. Everyone realized its value, but there were many urgent tasks. Finally, after several conferences between the departments involved, particularly between the reference librarian and the head cataloger, it was decided that the reference department would undertake the arrangement of the catalogs and, eventually, the making of some sort of checklist of the material. This decision was reached after it was agreed that it would be much too expensive to catalog the collection, and that for all practical purposes a checklist would serve. The aid of student assistants was to be relied on, both for the sorting of the catalogs and for the listing, and one member of the reference department was to supervise the work and develop the collection and the checklist as the work

progressed. The author was given that task, and for ten years it was her "extra-curricular" or "busy" work.

Cataloging Procedure

After much discussion, and with the sympathetic advice and counsel of the head cataloger, a general plan of cataloging procedure was adopted. This differed considerably, and for the most part deliberately, from that followed for the main catalog. There were to be two large groups, each with its own classification number—the auction sale catalogs, and those issued by secondhand book dealers. Under these two general headings the material was to be arranged alphabetically by name of dealer, Cutter numbers being assigned for each dealer. Generally accepted serial cataloging procedure, with such simplifications as seemed practicable, was then established.

After the catalogs had been sorted, work was begun on the checklist. Short title entries were used for the individual catalogs, and as many as possible were entered on each card, always leaving spaces for missing numbers in the series when such gaps were evident. In each entry, however, the various kinds of material being offered by the dealer were indicated, so the short title was more of a subject entry than a strict title. Of course the date of the catalog was always given when it could be discovered, especially for the auction sales. In unnumbered series these dates were used for the book numbers.

The names of owners of the private libraries which were being offered for sale were also noted in these title entries. This became quite a task, as any one can understand who has glanced at a Sotheby sale catalog. However, it was considered important information, and even after the second checklist was started, set up by the names of these owners of libraries offered for sale either at auction or in the second-

hand book trade, it was continued in the first checklist. The last bit of information for each title (used only for the auction sale catalogs, of course) was a note indicating whether the catalog was priced, partially priced, or priced with names of buyers.

The sorting was done on the seventeenth stack floor, and the making of the two checklists and the marking of the catalogs was carried out by student assistants on duty in the main reading room, where they served as monitors during the evenings. Due to the physical separation of the material from the workers doing the work, as well as to the constant turnover of student assistants, many discrepancies crept in, so that the checklist is far from perfect. It has, however, served its purpose in making the collection more readily available to the public, and, in the very process of its making, it enabled Yale to discover what the collection lacked as well as what it contained.

Besides this tremendous backlog of material there was at the same time the constant acquisition of new catalogs to be added to the collection. All new catalogs were placed on open shelves in the main reading room for faculty consultation for a period of several months. They were then taken from these shelves, entered in the checklists, marked, and sent to the stacks to be added to the general collection.

Many problems arose as the work progressed. Some were solved satisfactorily, but many were only settled by compromise decisions. This was due sometimes to the amount of untrained assistance which had to be relied on, but it was also due to the fact that no one, either trained or untrained, had enough time to spend on the problems. In a way, this may have been just as well, as the primary purpose was to make the collection usable.

One of the questions which arose in the very beginning was the advisability of set-

ting up the dealers' catalogs by country and then alphabetically by name of dealer. Rightly or wrongly, this was decided against, as it was argued that few dealers limited their catalogs to books either treating their own country or published in that country. Another arrangement considered was that of setting up auction catalogs by country and then by date, as had been done in the two printed catalogs of book auctions.¹ This was decided against, as Yale was interested in acquiring as complete runs of various dealers' catalogs as was possible; and, for this reason, the arrangement by dealer seemed more logical, especially as the two printed lists could be used for the other approach for the countries and periods covered by them.

The question arose whether or not to include catalogs of furniture, prints, art objects, paintings, etc., when issued by dealers who also published book catalogs. This was settled rather arbitrarily when it was determined to enter all catalogs of any dealer who at any time issued book catalogs. This decision was made chiefly because of the lack of time for complete supervision, and is not an entirely satisfactory solution to the problem.

It was decided to protect the rare and valuable catalogs by shelving them in a gridded section of the same stack floor on which the general collection was shelved. While any catalog may be shelved here for some specific reason, a general rule was established to cover all early catalogs. Those of English and Continental sales held before 1800, and of American sales held before 1850, are automatically shelved in the gridded section. The entries in the checklists for these catalogs are so marked, and

all are represented by dummies in the main collection.

The problem most desired of solution, and still not touched, is the formation of a subject catalog or checklist of the whole collection. Several attempts were made, just to see if it could be done, but under the existing conditions they were all found impracticable. In the first place, to make the subject catalog useful, each catalog would have to be examined by one person who would assign subject headings. This was impossible, as the one person who was supervising the work was, for most of her time, a reference librarian. She could partially supervise the work of student assistants, as they came and went, but could not begin to examine each catalog and assign subject headings. Also, it was soon found that a very small section of a large catalog might be quite important as a subject bibliography of a very minute field, and that that same catalog might need entries for eight or nine other subjects as well. Where to draw the line? It was finally agreed that second copies of good subject bibliographies should be treated as they were in the old days—incorporated into the general book collection and into the card catalog as subject bibliographies. This, of course, was only begging the issue of a complete subject catalog of the whole collection, which would still be the ideal solution.

Growth of the Collection

Before the work of sorting the catalogs had begun, the proof sheets of George L. McKay's list of American book auctions began to arrive, with the request that Yale's holdings be noted. The preparation of this union list was encouraging because it showed the new interest in making such collections available, but at this time it was impossible for Yale to give an adequate picture of her holdings. Those sale catalogs which had been considered important

¹ British Museum. Department of Printed Books. *List of Catalogues of English Book Sales, 1676-1900, Now in the British Museum.* London, British Museum, 1915.

McKay, George L., comp. *American Book Auction Catalogues, 1713-1934; A Union List.* New York, New York Public Library, 1937.

enough to be incorporated in the general book collection could be found in the main card catalog, but the great mass of the catalogs was still in such chaotic disarrangement that checking was practically impossible. However, insofar as was possible, holdings were noted on the proof sheets, and when the book appeared it became the most important source of reference in the attempt to complete the Yale files of American auction catalogs. In checking holdings of English sale catalogs as well as attempting to fill in gaps in this field, the British Museum list referred to above was used. These two volumes were invaluable in identifying many anonymous sales, as well as providing a goal in the attempt to assemble as complete a collection as possible, at least in the field of English and American sale catalogs.

If a comparable volume for French auction catalogs had been in existence, one of the chief problems would have been much simpler. In 1909 Yale received, as a bequest from the estate of Morris Tyler of the Class of 1870,² his collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century French auction catalogs. These represented sales of important private libraries. All were in excellent condition, beautifully bound, and many were priced and had the names of buyers in manuscript. They had been cataloged at the time and, as a valuable part of Yale's bibliographical collection, were left intact when the rest of the catalogs were gathered. Because of the method of procedure for French auction sales (all of which were sold by an official auctioneer, no matter whose library was being sold or which dealer was offering the material), the setup used for book auctions in other countries was impossible. The only practicable arrangement was by date of sale, and all French auction catalogs, with the ex-

ception of the Morris Tyler collection, have been set up on the shelves in this way, but no checklist has as yet been made. The unusual arrangement, combined with the presence of the large and important Morris Tyler group already incorporated in the general book collection, seemed to necessitate a quite different treatment and also more time for study before an adequate procedure could be established.

As the collection became more available, and because of this fact attracted the attention and interest of more people, it was felt that some effort and money should be spent in filling in the more serious gaps. This was made possible first through the Ganson Goodyear Depew Memorial Fund, established in 1930 but not used for the purchase of auction catalogs until 1935 and later. In 1935 a collection of two hundred early auction catalogs—English, French, German, and Italian—was purchased through this fund, and from that date on it was used to increase holdings, especially in the field of seventeenth and eighteenth century English and American catalogs. This gift is described briefly in the *Yale University Library Gazette* for April 1937.

In 1936 Henrietta C. Bartlett presented to the library, in memory of her father, a collection of valuable catalogs, most of them priced and many having names of buyers. This collection includes both English and American sale catalogs, and a number of them are of particular value as they contain marginal notes by Miss Bartlett referring to the provenance of some Shakespeare item, or of some other English classic of the same period.

The next gift received by the Yale Library which added considerably to its collection of catalogs, especially for nineteenth century American and English sales, was the library of George Watson Cole, presented by him in 1937. While this distinguished bibliographical library was, for

² Yale University. Library. *Report of the Librarian . . . July 1, 1909-June 30, 1910*. New Haven, 1910, p. 22.

the most part, kept together as the George Watson Cole Collection, the sale catalogs were incorporated in the collection of auction and secondhand book dealers' catalogs. Mr. Cole's catalogs were in excellent condition and in many cases were priced and had names of buyers in manuscript marginal notes.

The order department had been the original source of the bulk of the collection, and their catalogs, received daily, continued to form the largest single source of current acquisitions. This department was at the same time interested in filling gaps and could always be counted on to find a little extra money to purchase a prize catalog which came on the market. And it was not long before a new duty was added to the person in charge of the collection—the checking of secondhand book catalogs in which sale catalogs were being offered for sale. This was done most willingly, for in many instances it was possible to acquire the important catalogs which came on the market in this manner—though it was interesting to watch the prices rise as more and more libraries became aware of the value of these catalogs and began to do something with their own collections. With this operation the circle was complete.

Besides buying individual catalogs, several large lots were acquired which did much to round out the collection. In 1942 a group of about 5600 catalogs was purchased from the library of the Union Theological Seminary. This lot consisted, chiefly, of long and fairly complete runs of foreign secondhand book dealers' catalogs, and it was particularly strong in German dealers. The runs went back into the middle nineteenth century and came up to 1920, helping to fill a very definite gap in the Yale collection.

The largest purchase was made later the same year, when the Wilberforce Eames collection of catalogs was acquired and,

along with it, many New York Public Library duplicates. As the New York Public Library had fallen heir to the catalogs from the American Art Association Anderson Galleries, Inc., when they went out of business, Yale acquired in this great lot of ten thousand catalogs many of the official catalogs of this firm—in most cases carefully priced. While many of the Eames catalogs were kept by the New York Public Library for its own great collection, those acquired by Yale did much toward completing its own files and at the same time were of value because of the notes and prices, or indications of value, made by Mr. Eames in the margins. With the acquisition of this last lot of material, Yale's holdings became so comprehensive that it was decided no large collections would be bought in bulk in the future. A great group of duplicates was accumulating, even after second copies were kept, and third copies were being used for subject bibliographies. These are used by the order department for sale and exchange purposes.

Present State of the Collection

During these years, approximately from 1932 to date, the collection has had the friendly interest and support of many friends of Yale. Members of the faculty, as well as of the library staff, have turned over their own copies of catalogs as they have finished with them and often have given their personal copies of early sale catalogs in some particular field in which their interest has centered. With such generous cooperation and interest on all sides it is no wonder the collection has grown to impressive proportions. The catalogs themselves are still shelved on the seventeenth stack floor of the book tower, but they now fill eight double-faced ranges, not including the two ranges of third copies waiting to be used as subject bibliographies nor the seven shelves of early catalogs in the grilled sec-

tion. The checklist in the reading room now has cards standing for 3030 dealers, 292 auctioneers, and 2738 secondhand book dealers; and the book trade of practically every country in the world is represented here by at least one dealer. These cards now fill twenty catalog trays, while the second checklist of owner cards for sales of private libraries is about the same size.³

Such general figures, however, give an inadequate picture of the collection as a whole. Only when comparing Yale holdings with other accumulations or with the printed lists of sale catalogs mentioned above, can it be adequately presented. Of the 5030 nineteenth century American sale catalogs listed by Mr. McKay, 1013, or about one fifth, are to be found at Yale, as well as thirty-five which are not given in the printed list. And, of the 4652 catalogs in the McKay list for the years 1900-34, Yale has 3914, or about three-fourths. This shows, as might be expected, that Yale is much weaker in the early years, and it is this period which is being constantly supplemented with new purchases as sale catalogs appear on the market.

It also might be interesting to note some of the important American auction firms and Yale's holdings of their catalogs. Bangs, of New York, in business under various names from 1837 to 1903, is represented in the McKay list by 2766 sales, of which Yale has only 686. This, however, is a fairly good showing, for it is very difficult to find copies of the early Bangs sales. Henkels, of Philadelphia, is not well represented at Yale for his early sales, but a fairly complete run is to be found from 1885 on. Five hundred and forty-six sale catalogs of Merwin Clayton of New York are to be found at Yale, with only sixty-one of those listed in McKay missing. Libbie, of Boston, covering the period from 1878 to

1919, is represented by 604 catalogs—a respectable showing, but far from a complete run. And for Leavitt, of New York, for the years from 1856-92, Yale has just about half the number listed by McKay, *i.e.*, 310 catalogs out of 621. Of the more recent firms, as is to be expected, Yale's holdings are more nearly complete. The files for Anderson Galleries, American Art Association, and the combined American Art Association Anderson Galleries, Inc., are practically complete, and this is also true of the Parke-Bernet file.

It is more difficult to give an adequate picture of Yale's collection of English sale catalogs. The British Museum list, going back to 1676 and coming down only to 1900, puts Yale at a decided disadvantage. Her nineteenth century holdings are fairly good, but before that time they cannot be compared with the British Museum collection. However, it might be stated that the file of Sotheby catalogs at Yale numbers 710 through 1919, and is practically complete from 1920 to date. Other English firms are well represented, especially Christie, but much work in this field is yet to be done. Comparative figures for foreign sale catalogs are impossible to obtain, but Hoepli, Gilhofer and Ranschburg, Hiersemann, and many others are well represented.

The catalogs shelved in the grilled section are, for the most part, early American and English sale catalogs. There are about fifty American catalogs of sales held before 1850. English sales before 1800 are represented by 45 catalogs, and those held from 1800 to about 1845 (which it seemed wise to segregate), by a total of 146 catalogs. Here also are shelved lists for a few early German, French, and Dutch sales.

Nothing has been said specifically here about the secondhand book dealers' catalogs, as it is impossible in so short an article even to give statistics concerning individual companies. But, for the outstanding

³ All the figures in this paper about the Yale collection were compiled in August 1944.

dealers of all countries, Yale's collection has good runs, and for many out-of-the-way countries it is surprisingly representative.

The Use of the Collection

The various uses to which such a collection of book catalogs can be put seem innumerable. The most obvious ones are those which in themselves would hardly justify the time, labor, space, and money which have been spent on the Yale collection. The tracing of the provenance of a rare book is a fascinating task and in some instances an important one, but it can be done without such a collection being assembled in a university library. And even descriptions of rare books can be found and the history of their prices studied without the use of such tremendous numbers of catalogs. It is only when these uses can be tied in with many others, more strictly in line with the research work to which a university library is devoted, that such a collection can be justified. As the organizing progressed, more and more use was made of the collection and in more and more different ways.

The great value of these catalogs as subject bibliographies has been mentioned, but it must be emphasized here once more. Time and again the catalog of some collector's private library, finally sold at public auction, has become the definitive bibliography in the special field which was his interest. And as it was a collector who built the library, the catalog is apt to contain every possible item connected with the subject. Many unique copies are here found described and, often, items no longer in existence.

Other libraries have been built around the writings of one man, and such catalogs not only present splendid bibliographical material relating to his writings, but usually

give additional information found in manuscript notes in specific copies in his handwriting. Biographical information, as well as added light on the critical interpretation of the author, can often be found in such catalogs. Sometimes the books described, with the manuscript notes in them, have disappeared, and the quotation in the sale catalog is the only extant reference. In fact, the tracing of manuscript material is one of the most important and constant uses to which the collection is put. Not only the manuscript notes in books, but separate manuscripts offered for sale with books or in collections by themselves, are often now only known through their entries in these sale catalogs.

In more general terms, the catalogs of private libraries assembled at various periods and in various countries give good pictures of the literary life of the time. And the individual library of a great man, no matter what his field of activity, is always an important source for the historian or biographer in his interpretation of the man. Catalogs as a group also present the development of the history of books and printing, the changing tastes of those who buy and collect books as well as of those who write them, and an over-all picture of the literary background of various countries at different periods.

In spite of these brief notes as to the use of the Yale collection, it still could not be justified as a "paying proposition." But its organizing is one of the tasks which a research library feels needs no such justification. For the comparatively few students and scholars who find here the pieces needed to fit into their complicated scholarly puzzles, the collection is as necessary as any other part of the library. To make it available is an obligation which a research library willingly undertakes.