

## The Government as Publisher: An Historical Review

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### I. INTRODUCTION

To most librarians, the topic of federal publishing activities immediately brings forth an image of the Government Printing Office and the seemingly endless expanse of dusting leather bindings that form the enigma of the Serial Set. Many might even agree with John Harvey Powell's opinion that "government documents are stiff, graceless things, scarcely the happiest subject for spirited discourse among polite people" (Powell, 1957, p. 107). They do seem to be so—more used by politicians as a backdrop for the cameras of television news interviews than by researchers or the public. The attitude of librarians toward government publications is dramatically realized in that they are segregated into dark corners of basements as places fit for collections of ancient volumes presided over by possessors of arcane knowledge mumbling incantations like "Jai Si Pea," "Sue Dock," and chants of "Mo' Cats" over requests for miracles of information that had been abandoned as hopeless by less adroit magicians working in the light and air of the reference department. This image, of course, is inaccurate. It is also misleading to curse the Public Printer and the Superintendent of Documents for the sins of commission and omission in areas over which these public officers have no control.

The Public Printer is precisely that—the printer of documents for Congress and the various other offices of the federal government. The act of publishing implies policy decisions as to format, potential audience, and content—and even production numbers and schedules—over which the GPO has had but little control. The intellectual decisions as to what and how many copies are to be produced are made by the Congress, the Joint Committee on Printing, the many agencies of the executive department, and the several semiautonomous agencies and corporations of the government. The publisher as the entity responsible for both the organization and distribution of publications and, ultimately, for the intellectual coherency and cohesiveness of the effort is not the GPO, but the entire federal government which has never successfully been charged with intellectual coherence. From this central premise—that it is not the GPO, but the entire federal government structure that is responsible for the publications—we can trace the myriad disfunctions that plague libraries that must deal with the printed documents of the government whether as depository libraries, agencies needing to acquire government documents to serve their public, or simply citizens needing information about the functions of the federal government.

This situation has not been meekly accepted by most holders of the post of Public Printer in its variety of titles. The waste accompanying government publications impressed the first man to hold the post. In his annual report for 1863, Jonathan D. DeFrees addressed a problem that has, in one form or another, plagued printers and librarians since the beginnings of the GPO. He complained that he was forced by law to print whatever was ordered by the Congress and the executive departments, and had no control over the number of copies ordered. He suggested that "a great saving to the Government may be made" if publications "of no general utility" were not printed (U.S. Congress, 1863, p. 2). This sentiment appears frequently in the reports and testimony of the Public Printers before various Congressional committees, and finally emerged in Section 704 of the Federal Publications Act of 1980 with the provision that all publications must be produced on a cost-recovery basis, unless subsidized by the issuing agency. The House Committee on Government Operations concluded after hearings on the bill, "If this results in the elimination of marginal publications and unnecessary contents, cost savings may be realized by the government" (U.S. Congress, 1980, p. 10). The concern about the cost of the

publishing activity and about the value to the government and the public has been a major interest in all consideration about government publication.

Much of the disfunctional aspects of government publishing derive directly from the relation of Congress to the executive departments and the ambivalent position of the Public Printer caught between the sometimes conflicting demands of these two branches. The ambiguous relationship of the Public Printer to the "publishing" activities of the federal government led Public Printer John J. Boyle to plead for protection against the demands on his office. He asked for a provision that would require "the Public Printer to do all printing which is submitted to him on a requisition accompanied by a certificate of necessity" to "protect" the Public Printer before the joint hearings of the Committee on House Administration and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration held July 10, 1979, to consider the revision of Title 44 of the U.S. Code (U.S. Congress, 1979, p. 90). This requirement would effectively repair the legal problem that has arisen from the historically evolved tradition that the GPO must respond to all requests for printing.

The simple assumption that the publishing activities of the federal government is the responsibility of the GPO is inaccurate. The real publishers are the executive departments and agencies, the Congressional committees, and the independent government agencies that compile, format, and authorize the publications of the United States government. This situation, of course, is not one that emerged with the modern GPO. Rather, it has existed from the beginning of the country, becoming intensified with the development of executive department complexity and complicated by the establishment of the information function of government in an agency of Congress.

This article is a review of the literature on the history of the federal government's publishing activities. It is a diffuse literature scattered through a number of different disciplines. Because of this, it fails to focus on many central problems of government printing and publishing. Rather, this historical research is more motivated by an interest in history, literary criticism, political science, journalism, and other fields only marginally involved with the GPO. Here we will consider the importance of the history of government publishing, some of the general histories that have been published, the relationship of libraries to government publications, problems in the texts of government publications, research into printing and printers for the government, and some of the areas of needed research.

## II. HISTORY AND THE GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

In recent years, historical research in librarianship has come under attack as irrelevant to the needs of the profession. Whether this is indeed true is irrelevant to this discussion. What is relevant is that the nature and patterns of use of government publications offer a compelling argument for the need for an historical understanding of the role of the government in publishing. Government documents represent more than the collections of statistics, information about government programs, and indexes to the fruits of federally funded research. They exist as the detritus of a series of policy decisions of Congress, the various executive agencies that produced them, and the acquisitions decisions of generations of librarians. As such, they achieve a significance far greater than they were intended and stand as the evidence of the evolution of the federal government and the United States from a rural agrarian society to one publicly concerned with responsibility to its citizens. While it has been assumed that the establishment of the office of the Superintendent of Documents with the Printing Act of 1895 represents the beginning of the modern era of public printing, the actual evolution of the GPO into the operation with which we deal today is largely a product of the expansion of the executive department during the Great Depression and the response of the Roosevelt administration to the social problems that came to be considered in the domain of the federal government.

When the GPO was established as an agency of Congress in 1860, most printing originated from the needs of Congress to carry on its ongoing business. The publications of the executive departments were insignificant in comparison to the needs of Congress. Though the 1852 Act required the Superintendent of Public Printing to provide copies of documents to executive departments, George Bowman complained to the Senate in his 1857 annual report that these departments made unreasonable demands on the facilities of Congress by requiring that

he furnish Congressional documents printed under the authority of Congress. He maintained that the order of Congress to print specific items should include the copies needed for the executive departments' purposes, or they should not be supplied at all. The problem, he asserted, was that the various departmental demands for publications ordered by Congress and originating in the executive offices were not authorized by law, and his legal authority did not empower him to release them. He complained, "There is no uniform rule observed in relation to this matter." The authorization for these copies came by requests from executive departments to one or the other house of Congress, to the Superintendent, or to other agencies. Congress had failed to establish a mechanism through which the printing needs of the executive departments could be met. In Bowman's view, the principal object of the law under which he operated was to provide for the printing of Congress. His only responsibility to the executive departments was "to provide for the printing of such blanks, circulars, and other matters, . . . as was necessary for the proper execution of the duties of their respective offices." It was the obligation of Congress, on the other hand, to authorize the publication of information about the government that would be of public interest "in such a manner as might, in their wisdom, seem right and proper" (U.S. Congress, 1857, pp. 12-13).

Seventy-five years later, the same complaint was again presented to Congress. By 1933, the requirements of the executive departments had grown much larger. The Public Printer reported that even though the GPO operated under the obligations of an executive order for fiscal restraint, the printing of Congress totaled \$2.7 million for the year, while that of the other departments was \$9.3 million (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934, pp. 13, 23). Clearly, the executive department had, by the New Deal, assumed its primacy in the publication and dissemination of government information.

With the New Deal, the agencies of both Congress and the executive branch greatly expanded their role in providing information. It was no longer the kind of information provided for archival purposes to document the activities of the various agencies. Rather, those agencies perceived a responsibility to inform their constituencies in the various services they performed. Except for the Agricultural Experimental Station publications, there was little attempt before the 1930s to produce materials to educate the public in areas with which these new agencies were legally charged. The audience for the publications expanded, by then, beyond that of the educated citizen seeking to know the activities of the government to those who needed to know how the government could help them in dealing with the economic and social changes in America.

The transformation in the nature of the federal government that came with the Roosevelt administration and the New Deal is indicated by a corresponding major change in government publishing. This was not so much in size or shape, but in the content and, eventually, in format. With the establishment of varied social service agencies, the type of information contained in publications changed as well as the audience for which they were intended. One can only wonder what George Bowman (or Robert Aitken) might have thought about an agency that could produce comic and coloring books along with some staid and proper statistical reports. There was, of course, some precedence for this even in earlier years. The General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in 1805, ordered the printing establishment of Manning and Loring of Boston to print The Constitution of the State of Massachusetts, and that of the United States, The Declaration of Independence, with President Washington's Farewell Address, especially for the use of school children. But, a mentality that would provide the Constitution and the Farewell Address of Washington to the young can hardly be equated with the creator of Sprocketman (bicycle safety) and a redheaded frog named Soozie (drug abuse). These characters were created for social service agencies to use in schools in much the same ways as special interest groups have entered into the areas of education in home economics, with the production of materials and programs that promote specific products for use in the home as a function of advertising.

Most historians of the role of the government in publishing the proceedings, internal activities and, in some cases, the propaganda of various agencies have conceived the lines of demarcation between historical periods to be those of the legal framework around which the publishing activities of the government have been structured. This is probably not the best of the alternatives by which the role of the government as an information-producing agency might be assessed. The papers of the first 14 Congresses form the earliest obvious division. The

publications produced under the guidance of the office of the Superintendent of Public Printing from 1854 to 1860 define another. A third, the establishment of the Government Printing Office in 1860 through the sale of Cornelius Wendell's printing plant, has always marked a watershed in the history of government printing. The Printing Act of 1895 forms a logical end to this period, at least to librarians. Librarians actively participated in its passage and, as it regulated the distribution of documents and established a system of bibliographic access, libraries were its greatest beneficiaries. But this was not completely the legislation that librarians needed. The legislation of 1922 in which depositories were allowed to select the types of documents they would receive and the Depository Act of 1962 that established the regional depository system are also major events that defined periods in the history of the government as a publisher.

The crucial matter to librarians is not so much the legislation that has affected the GPO, but the publications that have resulted. This is not so much a legislative problem as it is a function of the changing relationship between the departments of government and the GPO. What is important, then, is not the legislation but the decisions and assumptions that have determined what is to be published by the government. These of course are slated to, but do not necessarily correspond to the historical segments that redefined by the history of the legislation affecting government printing, but most attempts at broad general histories of the phenomenon rely on the framework of the legal history, rather than on the changing nature of the publications themselves and the government's role in the development of public information.

### III. GENERAL HISTORIES OF FEDERAL PRINTING

The GPO and the publishing activities of the federal government have received little scholarly attention as historical phenomena. As yet, no acceptable general history of the GPO, its precursors, or the information activities of the federal government exists. We have several attempts of varying quality that provide historical information about the GPO and its functions, but one as yet that can stand as a comprehensive and authoritative survey of the topic. All ultimately fail to coherently synthesize the mass of detail that comprises the 200-year history of the government's publishing activities. Rather, raw information unencumbered by a search for form or meaning characterizes the two most used efforts at historical understanding of the 1130.

The earliest—and still much used—effort was that of Robert Washington Kerr in 1881. Kerr's original intent was "to furnish something which could answer as a guide to the many visitors who yearly inspect the different departments of the Government Printing Office" (Kerr, 1881, p. 7). His intent got out of hand, however, and the opening chapters of the book [give us the earliest attempt to trace the history of the government's role in printing and publishing. As history, the effort is primitive at best, but it has stood as a major source for historical information on the early GPO. Both Robert Kling (1970) and Laurence Schmeckebier (1925) have prefaced their descriptions of the GPO with chapters on the history of federal printing. Both contributions are frequently cited. This popularity does not derive from their substance as history, but from the paucity of historical literature on the topic. Indeed, the approach in both is perfunctory at best and seems more to be obligatory introductions to the descriptive text than significant historical efforts.

The only large-scale attempt at describing the history of the GPO came about when, under the direction of Public Printer James L. Harrison, history of the GPO and its precursors was prepared for the Centennial Celebration Committee ("100 GPO Years", 1961). While informative, this work does not go far beyond a simple chronology. Indeed, the book is not organized by issues or themes, but presents a year-by-year account of the operations of the printing plant. In the conclusion to this effort, the compilers acknowledged that "there may have been a too-heavy emphasis in this GPO history on the typesetting and press units." A glance through its pages will confirm this. But, the compilers apologized only for neglecting the other units of the GPO—"the maintenance workers; electrical and machine shop; the delivery section;" and others ("100 GPO Years," p. 164). They did not apologize for the failure to come to terms with the purpose of the GPO and the role of printing in the federal government. This was, of course, as it should be. The GPO in the eyes of the producers of this history is a printing shop and not a publisher. The full role of the federal government as a publisher has still to be approached from an historical perspective.

The establishment of a journal devoted to government documents, *Government Publications Review*, has opened a great potential publication channel for historical material on government documents. The *Journal of Library History* and various other journals in history and political science in which one might expect to find treatment of this topic are probably too editorially specialized in other areas to afford this possibility, and have failed to offer much in this area. *Government Publications Review*, however, has contributed two recent articles that offer hope for significant future attention to research into the history of federal government publishing. Stephen W. Stathis (1980) of the Library of Congress' Congressional Research Service presented an excellent overview of government printing from its beginnings through the 1970s. The major failure of this article is that it is simply not enough. Stathis has accomplished an admirable task of hitting the high points of government printing, but there is only so much that can be accomplished in 12 pages of text.

Stathis' article is joined by Jerrold Zwirn's (1980) survey of government printing policies prior to the GPO. These serve as excellent collateral reading in courses in government documents. Zwirn's effort suffers the same problem as Stathis'—nine pages are not enough to do the job. Zwirn and Stathis have, however, earned the gratitude of students who are no longer assigned the arid waste land of details on costs and presses of the centennial history—"100 GPO Years."

Two excellent longer studies of the pre-GPO period have also recently been published. Culver H. Smith (1977) has addressed the political use of newspapers before the establishment of the GPO. The view that the activities of the federal government are "news" in the sense of being of general interest to the American public, and the importance of newspapers in colonial and revolutionary America led naturally to the practice of publicizing the acts of Congress and the executive branch through newspapers. From there, it was only a short step to the use of public printing by newspapers as a form of patronage based on political support and party affiliation. Smith traces this development from the beginnings of party politics to the ultimate

solution to the corruption inherent in such a system by the establishment of a government-owned printing plant. William E. Ames (1972) covered a narrower scope in his history of the most important of these newspapers, the *National Intelligencer*, published by Joseph Gales and William Seaton. This is an outstanding contribution to the literature that is not only crucial for our understanding of the means of publicizing government information before the intrusion of the government into the printing industry, but also for our understanding of the role of newspapers and publishing in nineteenth century American life.

Dissertations in library science have been a mainstay of librarians' research efforts. In recent years, they have tended to emphasize methodologies that have investigated the use of documents, rather than the documents themselves. One of the few that has addressed the historical problem of the GPO is that of Sarah Miller (1980), which was accepted for the Columbia DLS. She has addressed the particularly thorny problem of the distribution of government publications before the establishment of the office of Superintendent of Documents with the printing act of 1895. This legislation regularized distribution by establishing the federal depository system and sales program along with the development of complete bibliographic access to the publications. This, of course, has now been accomplished to everyone's satisfaction. Unfortunately, she has declined to release the dissertation because of possible copyright problems until it finds an outlet through publication, so that this work cannot be commented on here.

#### IV. LIBRARIES AND GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

An area of research that has been almost totally neglected has been the relation of libraries and librarians to policies of the GPO and especially to the office of the Superintendent of Documents. In recent years, the role of the Depository Library Council in evaluating and establishing policies of the GPO has become important. Thus, depository libraries represent a significant element in the system of disseminating government information—a factor recognized by the GPO and by librarians. But, this interest and the concern of librarians greatly predates the social agitation of the 1960s and the official acceptance of documents librarians in the process of decision making.

The role of the ALA and, in particular, the lobbying activities of President Klas August Underfelt (The Congressional Printing Bill, 1892, pp. 123-124) in the passage of the legislation that eventually established the present distribution channels for government publications with the Printing Act of 1895 are areas that deserve attention. Librarians have been involved, since the earliest attempts, to formulate a national policy, but the effectiveness of their efforts has yet to be investigated and documented. In recent years, librarians have had a significant effect on the publishing activities of the government through the Depository Library Council. Historically, they may have had a similar effect. As yet, we simply do not know if this recent phenomenon is the result of the heightened social consciousness of the 1960s, or a long-standing attempt by librarians to influence the legislation directing the GPO. The proceedings of the ALA Committee on Public Documents published during the 1930s indicate that the concerns of librarians were not with the products of the GPO but with the housekeeping chores and finding lists that were, by consensus, the proper occupation of librarians of the period. These concerns, at first glance, do not differ from those found currently on the pages of Documents to the People, or voiced at the present meetings of various committees of ALA's Government Documents Round Table. But the transformations in librarianship over the past eighty years would logically seem to indicate a change in the relationship of libraries and librarians to federal government publishing—this is a hypothesis that has yet to be tested.

## V. THE PRINTING OF GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

Another area that has suffered neglect in research is the actual printing of public documents. The literature of government publications has taken little notice of what may well be a major problem in the field—that of the bibliographic integrity of government publications. The assumption has been made by documents librarians and by documents users that the texts of government documents are stable, and that a citation to a particular document or a reference in an index will have the same meaning to any user of any document collection that contains that particular described item. There is, however, a body of evidence to indicate that this may not be the case. The assumptions we have made about the integrity of texts from one item to the next are suspect on the basis of evidence supplied by other research.

Textual criticism is a technique that has, with few exceptions, been applied to literary texts where the lack of an authoritative text could betray the literary critic into egregious blunders. The often-cited classic example of this problem hinges on a misprint of only one letter which led an otherwise reputable critic, Francis Otto Matthiessen, into a curious misinterpretation of a passage from Herman Melville's *White Jacket*. A minor misprint in the Constable Works edition changed Melville's image of the "coiled fish of the sea" to "soiled fish of the sea," thereby radically altering the image created in the text and Matthiessen's interpretation of the author's vision of the depths (Nichol, 1949).

Textual criticism has been claimed by various members of English departments to be the most scientific manifestation of literary criticism. But there is some debate over this assertion (Tanselle, 1974). This debate is reasonable inasmuch as it represents an attempt to establish an objective research perspective in a discipline in which the paradigm of research has always been idiosyncratic and subjective. The discussion cannot ignore the fact that the techniques developed and utilized by the textual critics and the objectives pursued in their work form a corpus of research that is methodologically sound and, further, has resulted in conclusions that are both significant and useful—the two major tests of research.

The essential purpose of textual criticism is to establish the authority of a text. The concepts of state, issue, and edition and the importance of printing priorities have been well established through the work of Walter Wilson Greg, Ronald Brunless McKerrow, Alfred William Pollard, Fredson Bowers, and numerous contributors to the *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America*. In earlier years, librarians contributed to textual criticism much more heavily than they do today. Indeed, librarians played a prominent role in the founding and early years of the Bibliographical Society of America. The organizational meetings of the society was held in St. Louis in 1904 in conjunction with the annual ALA conference (*Bibliographic Society of America*, 1904, pp. 25-26); and there was even some serious discussion about the desirability of organizational affiliation with the ALA (Roden, 1906, pp. 21-22). A glance at the 1905 membership roster (*Bibliographic Society of America*, 1907) shows that

of the 137 personal members—including such luminaries as J. Pierpont Morgan and Thomas J. Wise—70 were identified as librarians. Many others may have been librarians also, but were not specifically identified as such. This early interest waned and, with the establishment of the University of Chicago Graduate Library School in the 1930s, library research turned away from a bibliographic interest in textual criticism toward the application of social science methodologies to library problems. Sociological research has been of great value to the profession and to an understanding of how documents users approach their information needs. But, its widespread acceptance as the central methodology of library research has limited our ability to direct research efforts in a wide variety of areas, not the least of which is the bibliographic problem of dealing with federal government publications. We have left bibliographic research to literary critics and not to those concerned with libraries and their use.

The Serial Set undoubtedly presents the greatest challenge to the textual critic. It dominates the landscape of government publishing. The practice until 1860 of issuing executive publications as either House or Senate documents—or both in some cases—and the practice, after the establishment of the GPO, of issuing annual reports both as Executive and Congressional publications complicate our difficulty. This particularly occurred since these different editions frequently differed in pagination and, perhaps, also in content (Schmeckebier and Easton, 1969, pp. 109-116).

Any documents librarian knows the problem of filling spaces in the Serial Set with executive department issues and of piecing together runs of executive department publications with duplicates from the Serial Set. But, few are really aware of the difficulties of dealing with the perplexities of the bibliographic history of early—or even late—publications of the government. James Ingersoll Wyer at the 1926 meeting of the Public Documents Round Table at the ALA Atlantic City Conference was probably the first to approach these complexities and, in doing so, undoubtedly voiced a concern that was common long before. Wyer observed that for the first three or four decades of government printing, the publications were "tossed off unbound, often without title pages, of varying sizes, often with no numbers, dates, designations or descriptions, thus obligating the pioneer catalogers and indexers frequently to rely solely upon internal evidence as to the essential bibliographic data." Wyer pointed out that Adolphus Washington Greely had found that even listing the documents of the first 14 Congresses was impossible because of the confusion attendant upon their printing (Wyer, 1926, p. 891). Greely's task was so complicated by the history of early government printing that he could not even distinguish accurately among official government publications and the various reports and offprints produced by private printers (Powell, 1957, p. 107-108).

The importance of this problem has not been widely recognized by librarians. The number of active researchers in the field of library and information science is so small and the number of significant problems so great that many would submit that a study of this kind could only drain energy from more worthwhile projects in favor of a frivolous quest. Indeed, this question of importance has been one that has even plagued bibliographers. Edwin Wolf II, a prolific textual critic, dismissed this question. Importance he maintained, "depends upon whose ox is gored." The toilers in the field of bibliography have "never hesitated to record the trivial merely because it was trivial." The practice of avoiding value judgments on the significance of content has not led to a corpus of literature in which central problems are solved before peripheral problems are handled. Bibliographers have, rather, attacked "interesting" problems rather than significant ones and "it is sometime a later edition of a deservedly forgotten work which has been spotlighted as the key to a certain facet of printing procedure," rather than those central to literary history (Wolf, 1972, p. 37). But, of course, like other historical work, much effort must be expended on the amassing of detail before synthesis and generalization can result. Each detail of printing variance adds incrementally to the body of evidence that ultimately accumulates into the sum of our historical knowledge.

The question that arises is: if a minor misprint can betray an honest critic such as Matthiessen into a blunder, what effect might the same printing technology have on the production of government publications, particularly in light of what we know about the practices of early government Printers and early government publication? The answer now is that we have no answer. Very little has been done on the bibliographic history

of the federal government. Wolf called federal publications "a jungle unto themselves," because only the most important of federal documents have become objects of study. The Declaration of Independence in all its early printing has had attention (Walsh, 1949; Goff, 1976). The various documents associated with the fourteenth amendment have not. Wolf only looked at a few of the less important possibilities, but found some important problems. He concluded, "I hate to think how many minds with how many mops will be required to start at the beginning and work through" (Wolf, 1972, p. 33).

If we accept the premise that government publications are important sources of information and the publications of Congress relating to legislative actions, the interpretations of legal actions, the proclamations and interpretations of the executive departments, and the explanation of the activities of the government to the people are important, we must be concerned with the texts of these documents. There is little, but nonetheless disturbing, evidence that these texts are not as accurate as we have assumed and the great possibility exists that indexing based on specific collections may not be accurate enough for us to adequately aid users of government documents.

Though little has been done with the textual analysis of government publications, enough has been brought to light to cast doubt on the accuracy of some texts. In his annual report for 1898, Public Printer Frank W. Palmer expressed concern about the practice of issuing the same text in a "multiplicity of editions ...in different styles of binding, with varying title-pages and back-titles ...so that one may possess three or four copies of the same work without discovering from their outward appearance that they are all the same document" (U.S. Congress, 1898, p. 25). I submit that the problem may be more important than Palmer's statement would indicate. If we have a multitude of various editions, they are not, bibliographically, "all the same document," and the "multiplicity of editions" may well contain significant textual variance. Further, we do have evidence of textual variation in at least some specific examples.

Since the early printing for Congress has received the most attention of textual critics, the majority of examples unearthed are from this period. Wolf found, for example, that the 100-copy edition of the Proceedings of a General Court Martial, Held at Brunswick, in the State of New Jersey, ... For the Trial of Major General Lee printed by John Dunlap in 1778 differs in some significant ways from the reprint that was produced for sale. In fact, the two editions, except for the last gathering, were printed from different settings of type. Wolf cites some minor points that distinguish the two editions, but unfortunately does not note how significant the variants are in text. However, the differences in endings of lines and catchwords indicate that there may be some major differences in the texts of the two (Wolf, 1969, pp. 265-66). In 1774, the Bradfords printed a volume containing the Bill of Rights, the List of Grievances, various resolutions of the Continental Congress, and other miscellaneous documents. By the end of the year, 20 different editions of this were available. Congressional Journals of 1774 and 1775 were available in various editions, each claiming to some degree of sanction by Congress (Friedenwald, 1897, pp. 170-71). John Dunlap printed the Rules and Articles for the Better Government of the Troops Raised and Kept in Pay by and at the Expense of the United States in 1776 which exists in only one edition but with a number of variations as it was, like most other texts of the period, revised in press for various reasons. (Wolf, 1969, p. 277).

There are many more minor problems that have been noted in passing in the literature of the government publications. One problem that has come to recent attention is the existence of what appears to be a bibliographical ghost in the Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate. In 1921, it was apparently published in two parts, the first being the proceedings, and the second, the index volume. No library has reported holding a copy of the first part, and only one copy of the index has been located in the Office of the Executive Clerk of the Senate (Barrett, 1981). That the index was actually printed is demonstrated by the copy found. Presumably, since it is the index, there was something to be indexed and the proceedings were actually produced. There may be many ways to explain this phenomenon, but the one that seems most plausible is that the document was recalled because of textual errors and never reissued in a corrected version. The recent recall of an HEW publication, *The Life Styles of Nine American Cocaine Users: Trips to the Land of Cockaigne*, because of errors in raw data with the promise to reprint a corrected edition adds some support for this

hypothesis. There is, of course, ample evidence for this sort of problem in the past. The early years of government printing provide numerous examples of publications paid for by the Continental Congress, but not available in any form. These are, perhaps, examples of bibliographic ghosts in the history of American documents, or because they were printed in editions of less than 100 copies and are the "still-born" of the revolution (Powell, 1957, p. 75).

The essential point is that general research in the history of American printing has indicated some real and important problems in the bibliographic integrity and texts of the publications of the federal government. The problem of textual integrity has been aggravated in recent years by the wholesale reproduction of collections of historical and literary materials in reprint or microform sets. The editors of these projects have tended to accept, uncritically, any copy that came to hand for reproduction, without regard for the authority of the text and the possible variants from a preferred text that may be present. They have also tended to accept imperfect bibliographic descriptions from any source available, without a critical awareness of the textual anomalies that might be significant (Wolf, 1972, p. 35). The phenomenon has spread to government documents collections when the private sector intruded into this realm in the last decade with the "dual media editions" of some major indexing suppliers. While we do not know what bibliographic problems may surface, the assumption that this reprinting and micropublication has occurred with uncritical acceptance of any copy available, and the strong possibility that there are text problems in government documents suggest that a great amount of research needs to be undertaken. The publication under various editors of the *New American State Papers* by Scholarly Resources of Wilmington, Delaware, in an attempt to provide wider access to the American State Papers in an augmented edition to libraries that have had no access to the source documents, has imposed a new problem for government information. While this is a useful addition to the resources of many libraries, the perspective of the editors on the value of the various documents reproduced is sometimes questionable. But, their acceptance of texts that are suspect in light of the printing technology of the period makes the publication of such a monument even more critical. To any reputable historian, the publication of this sort of material is crucial, especially if they attempt to write utilizing the resources of smaller institutions, as many competent scholars must these days. However, the quality of the texts cannot be assumed. What we are left with is the assumption of historians and librarians that the texts locally available are accurate. But the fact remains that there is no assurance that any text is accurate and only research in this matter can inform us about the problems we may encounter when we attempt to work with them.

## VI. THE PRINTERS

A research area closely related to the texts of the documents themselves is research into the legion of printers of government publications who served the needs of the government before the establishment of the GPO. Perhaps the most complete survey in this area to date is John Harvey Powell's (1957) contribution as the Rosenbach Fellow for 1956 at the University of Pennsylvania. Powell offered an excellent—though necessarily limited—overview of the bibliographic problems of government printing from 1774 to 1814. Powell did not become involved with the analysis of individual documents to any extent, but did a commendable job of describing the early printing practices that characterize this early period of public printing. When the government moved to Washington in 1800, at least eight or more printers moved their operations to the muddy roads and primitive facilities of the incomplete planned city. (Silver, 1967, p. 69). When the revolutionary government went to Philadelphia, there were only about 25 printers at work in the city that was for years to remain the center of American printing and publishing (Blumenthal, 1977, p. 14). The history of this movement of men and machinery, paper and type, from the major population and cultural center of the United States to profit from the largess of the Congress and the demands for printing form a significant aspect in the history of the United States and in the publications of the new government. Most collectors would agree that 1800 rather than 1500 of necessity marks the end of the incunabula period in North America. The founding of the new capitol brought printers hoping for the business of the government and dramatically changed the nature of American printing, especially as far as the federal government was concerned, when it is remembered that at least the early years of the federal government produced some of the most important books of the new nation.

Like the literature of the general history of government publishing activities and that of the variance in issues and editions of the items, the literature of the printers is spread over a broad range of disciplinary concerns. The problem with each of these is their limited purpose and execution. With a few exceptions, the research in this area has been limited not so much by the vision of the authors as by the availability of material and the needs of the writers for topics. This has conspired to fracture the literature of government documents into segments that have not allowed a coherent vision of the problem to surface.

The standard histories of American printing contain some useful information about government printers. Oswald (1937) and Thomas (1810) are probably still the most detailed on the government printers. But both suffer from a problem inherent in such surveys—they are too comprehensive to contain much detail. Of course, the availability of primary source material has increased greatly since their writing. More current histories of printing are more useful for the information about individual printers, the conditions under which they worked and printing practices that would be common to those who served the government. Rollo G. Silver (1967), Helmut Lehmann-Haupt (1952), John Tebbell (1972-81) and Douglas McMurtrie (1936) have contributed greatly to our general knowledge of American printing and publishing. All of these efforts are concerned with the general history of American printing, and leave the printers that were contracted to Congressional work buried under masses of detail about other contemporary printers that had not the good fortune to serve the Congress.

Other more focused efforts have touched upon printers that were fortunate enough to enjoy government work. William and Carol Spawn (1963) examined, for the Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, the waste book of Robert Aitken in an excellent example of the identification of an early American bindery. Aitken's press was noted for the high quality of its work, so much so that the quality ultimately won him a Congressional contract for a short time. Aitken's essential claim for interest was neither his binding, nor his government contract, but that he produced, at the request of Congress, the Aitken Bible—the first English Bible printed in North America. It must be admitted, that the impulse behind Spawn's work did not originate from the importance of either Robert Aitken, his Bible, or his bindings, but in the availability of Aitken's waste book from the Library Company of Philadelphia and the help of the librarian, Edwin Wolf II.

Carl R. Kropf (1980) made use of similar evidence in the same journal with his paper on Samuel Harrison Smith's account books from the end of 1794 through early 1796 that had somehow found their way into the Peter Force papers at the Library of Congress. From these, Kropf extracted an excellent account of the details of early printing, much of which applies to the early printing of the government. It, as other efforts, shows some of the scholarly problems of relying not on a coherent attempt to piece together the story, but on the reporting of the pieces of information that fall to hand and represent not so much the attempts of scholars to adequately add to the store of knowledge, but to incrementally add to the primary sources of the documents that form the development of an adequate picture of the history of government information.

Frequently, these increments are difficult to fit into the bibliographic puzzle. Even such a seemingly unlikely source as *Journalism Quarterly* has contributed to the literature of the early printing history of the government. In 1934, Alfred McClung Lee described the genealogy of the Philadelphia Public Ledger tracing it back to the *The Pennsylvania Packet* and the *General Advertiser*, which was established as a weekly by John Dunlap in 1771. Along the way, Lee noted much work by Dunlap and his partner, David Claypoole, as printers for the federal government. His concern with the history of the newspaper and his limited perspective on the significance of the printing partnership to the history of federal publishing limits its importance to this review.

Another area that has been touched upon, but not explored in any depth are the "semi-official" publishers of the government. Edwin N. Carpenter, Jr. (1956) addressed the military utilization of presses. Even as late as the 1880s, army field presses were commonly utilized for the printing of order forms and even soldiers' newspapers and poetry. Earle Lutz (1952) pointed out that the problem is even more complicated than this. If we consider that the production of presses owned by the government are government publications, we must allow that the production of the army field presses are also. But then a question arises about the publications produced by the

soldier-printers utilizing the liberated presses of Southern printers during the Civil War. There were numerous short-lived newspapers produced by federal troops in just that way that not only are not considered when we talk about government publications, but are not adequately described anywhere. The use of locally available equipment in other American wars has not been explored at all.

## VII. RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

This review cannot encompass the entire historical role of the government in publishing. There is no cohesive body of literature in this field. The research that has been done spans a broad diversity of disciplines from journalism to literary criticism, through political science and history, to items that fall only to the realm of library science. Perhaps the most pressing need in this study is a comprehensive bibliographic listing of the work that has been done in all of these areas that relate to the topic. The reports of research that have been undertaken are so diffused through other concerns and scattered throughout scholarly publishing that most of them relate only peripherally to the history of the GPO. The concerns of writers in history have been the political role of information. Textual critics and bibliographers are concerned with the literary accuracy of the texts. Librarians have been motivated by the "care and feeding" of the collections and physical volumes. Most research has been only minimally occupied with the central concern—the federal government as a publisher.

The bibliographic work is, however, only needed as a prelude to the more basic necessity for those of us interested in the government's printing—a comprehensive, detailed, and analytical history of the Government Printing Office and the role of the federal government in the dissemination of information to the public. With the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, the Paperwork Reduction Act, the legislation introduced to reform the GPO, and the implications of other legislation, the relationship of the federal government to the idea of public information has recently become an issue of national importance for libraries. This is the case because the production and distribution of information about government activities, programs, and even basic research funded by the government directly affect the library's ability to serve the public.

A large problem is the relationship of the GPO to the activities of the executive branch. The recent attempts to revise Title 44 of the U.S. Code have raised questions again that have characterized the debate over the government's role in publishing since the beginning. Through its history, the GPO has carried on its activities in a hazily defined legal structure that is responsible for the range and types of publications emanating from government offices. The authority of non-Congressional agencies and bureaus to require the printing and distribution of publications has been questioned by virtually everyone ever holding the office of Public Printer. The legal ability of any agency to order printing seems never to have been precisely defined and has ever been a source of discomfort to printers over the cost and quality of the publications ordered and the demands of departments for copies of documents published as the Congressional Serial Set. The Public Printer had never been explicitly authorized by Congress to supply these demands. A history of the relation of the Congress and the executive departments to the GPO, particularly as it is related to the types of publications produced, would be a useful addition to the literature.

Each of these would, of course, be monumental tasks. A large number of more easily manageable and still useful contributions could be made in tracing the publishing histories of individual departments of the government. One has only to walk randomly through any selected sections of the Superintendent of Documents classification to observe the evolving styles and types of publication that reflect the history of the policy decisions on the nature of government information and publishing. As an alternative to this approach, an historical treatment based on a subject area would also be appropriate. Such topics as monetary and land use policy, health, and education are concerns shared by a number of agencies that, while ostensibly charged with differing purposes, have been operating with differing aspects of the same or similar problems.

Another area of research that offers possibilities is that of the publications themselves and the printers that produced them at the order of Congress before the establishment of the GPO. Research in these areas has been characterized by a haphazardness and has accumulated by bits and pieces with little design or shape. It has more often been prompted by what research material may be at hand, rather than by any coherent concept of a holistic

problem in need of a solution through research. The research that has been undertaken in these areas indicates some serious problems that need much further investigation. To paraphrase George Lincoln Burr who was sent to Europe by Andrew D. White of Cornell to collect manuscript material for White's private library, we have enough material here to keep generations of graduate students occupied (Bainton, 1952, p. 33).

There are, of course, areas that have not been touched on in this brief review. Although little work has been done on the publishing history of the federal government, even less has been done on publishing at the state level. The problems that have occurred at the federal level are repeated in those of the various states. But, because most states have no centralized printing facility and little bibliographic control over their official publications, the problems are exacerbated. And, municipal publications, as any librarian who has attempted to acquire them can testify, present problems completely outside the realm of rationality.

Given the fractured nature of the literature, this review cannot aspire to comprehensiveness. But, I trust, it does point toward some major concerns and gaps in our knowledge of the historical role of the government in the production and distribution of public information. Without this kind of research, we are dealing with only part of the problem we have as document librarians and users. Collections of government publications exist as more than individual titles of varying utility to the public. They represent the history of the relationship of the federal government to its citizens in the evolution of decisions about what properly constitutes public information.

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