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The New York Public Library

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New York Public Library
Microfilm

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

5TH AVENUE & 42ND STREET

New York, December 24, 1938.

Dr. David H. Stevens
General Education Board
49 West 49th Street
New York City

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Dear Dr. Stevens:

Here is a memorandum just handed me by Mr. Carruthers based on the thoughts occasioned by the completion of our micro-filming of "Freedom's Journal". This was the first negro newspaper published in this country, and Mr. Schomburg, then in charge of the reference collection on negro life and work in our 135th Street branch, made to me the suggestion of reproduction last spring just before his unfortunate death in June.

x 100
microphotography

Mr. Carruthers' memorandum develops the idea of expanding our work in this field. We believe an instructive opportunity is open for experimenting in the possibilities of microfilm, particularly in the matter of furnishing other libraries texts of important material at hand here and in some cases nowhere else.

The appeal of most of these is evident. Our files in Americana are extensive; in the early British parliamentary documents we have much that other libraries lack; the periodicals in the social field are of timely interest.

I think particularly of some of the journals in Yiddish of which we have probably the most extensive file in existence here or anywhere else. Their significance lies in the indication of the intellectual efforts and the social interests of those immigrants in the eighties and the early nineties, the results of which we see today in such important matters as the needle trades unions. With a study of sources of this kind one can understand much that otherwise would remain nothing more than a field for speculation, not to say bewilderment.

Some typical titles in the various fields just mentioned are noted on the enclosure.

If the suggestion seems worthy of attention and you care for further details, we are, of course, at your service.

Truly yours,

H. M. Lydenberg,
Director

Enclosure.
DS

Mr. Lydenberg:

The "Freedom's Journal" microfilming project is now completed -- except for collecting the money. It is a great satisfaction to reflect that in this way twenty-five libraries from Amherst and Dartmouth, as far south as Texas, as far west as California, now have all the known text of a periodical that none of them had before. It was at Mr. Schomburg's suggestion, as you recall, that we began last summer to collect negatives of the text of this important landmark in negro history, the first negro newspaper published in America, issued weekly in New York from March 16, 1827 to March 28, 1829. No library had a complete file. Broken files were found in such widely separated places as the Library of Congress, Boston Public Library, Cornell University Library, and elsewhere. (Issue number 53, for March 28, 1828, is missing, but we are not certain whether it was ever printed or whether it merely represents an error in numbering.)

As our own camera, though fair enough for ordinary work, would have been too expensive and exacting of time and attention for a satisfactory large scale job, we turned to the Recordak laboratories in New York City for the negatives, positive prints being made in the Rochester laboratories. Prices below the commercial rate were obtained in both cases. The total cost of the project including filming, printing, inter-library loan charges, and transportation of the finished prints was \$87.15. This amount was distributed among the twenty-one subscribing libraries at a net cost to each of \$4.15. Each of the four cooperating libraries involved in the making of the film received a free copy.

This result is so gratifying that it leads me to ask whether our experience here does not call for a systematic extension of this type of work. The plea for action is supported by another consideration, namely, that we must in the near future make a systematic effort to preserve material on our shelves that is in poor condition, and is of sufficient importance to demand either (1) treatment with silk or tissue paper or (2) microfilming.

Hitherto we have been content with the first method. It is fairly satisfactory, but it is also selfish as directed primarily to our own needs and uncomfortably indifferent to potential help for other libraries not so fortunate as we are in the possession of these texts. On its favorable side should be set also our ability to do work of this kind, both by experience and by possession of equipment assembled over many years.

Microfilming, however, is cheaper and more nearly permanent than the other method. It has what seems to me an even further advantage in that it permits us to share our own good fortune with other libraries in a way as lasting in its benefits as it is inexpensive in cost.

Microfilming has another plea in its favor in that even if we treated these materials with silk or tissue and kept them on our shelves we should not be able to benefit other institutions by means of inter-library loan, because in practically every case these volumes have been bought from our trust funds which restrict their use to the building. We should by microfilm thus extend the contact between these important source materials and the scholars who need them in other parts of the country.

Its disadvantage for us is that our present equipment, both material and personal, is inadequate. Our experience and technical training are capable of much better results than now stand to their credit. All we need is newer and more extensive equipment than we now own.

We now have a Photorecord camera used in an awkward corner of the photostat work room, and a Stineman reel used in one of the photostat dark rooms. To extend this work in fitting fashion will call for extensive additional equipment, such as a heavy duty production camera with accessory apparatus such as bookholders, sliding cradle, lights, light meter, filters, and so forth; a processing unit; a film printer; a projection printer; an inspection viewer; rewinds and splicing apparatus; a motor-driven drying reel with apparatus for temperature and humidity control; a micro-filming workroom, a special dark room, a room for mixing chemicals, and a special storage room for master negatives, with necessary accessories.

To buy and install this equipment would cost something like \$10,000. If in addition to this physical setup we had \$15,000, we could in the course of five years photograph from a million and a half to two and a half million pages. This would represent anywhere from seven to twelve thousand volumes of about two hundred pages each. Cost of equipment is, of course, a charge to capital account; operating costs would run to something like \$5,000 a year, decreasing year by year as income from sales increased, but calling certainly for as much as \$15,000 to assure a fair trial for the effort.

What prospect is there of securing this? We are all sure that if material equipment and assistance of this type could be provided the result would be of lasting benefit to American scholarship and research.

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph H. Carruthers

December 24, 1938.

Suggestions for microfilm reproductions from
New York Public Library files

American magazines and newspapers before 1800

Americana before 1800

Scientific periodicals such as Die Deutsche Chemische Gesellschaft
Berichte

Our collection of French royal edicts up to the time of the revolution

Our Talleyrand collection of material pertaining to the French
revolution

Migne's Patrologia, both Greek and Latin

Early legislative journals of the various American states and
territories

London (and Oxford) Gazette (1665-date)

British Parliamentary Papers, 1731-1800

Journals of Parliament
Lords (1509-1800)
Commons (1547-1800)

New York Times Analyst (1913-date)

Die rote Fahne (the Communist organ for the German republic)

Die Zukunft (1867-1870)

New Age (1894-1906)

New York Yiddishe Volkszeitung. 1886-1889. Editors: M. Mintz and
A. Braslavsky. (Not an official labor organ but reflecting
labor interest at a time when labor could not yet afford a paper
of its own. Some of Rosenfeld's poems of labor were published
in it. Continued as Teglicher Herold, 1894-1905. Its motto
was "Science, organization, liberty". It supported Henry George
in the New York City election 1886.) ✓

Arbeiter Zeitung. Weekly. 1890-1902. Editors: J. Rombro and A.
Cahan (the present editor of the Forward). (Organ successively
of the United Hebrew Trades, Socialist Labor Party -- branch of
the American party of that name -- Socialist Trade Union, Labor
Alliance, etc. When the Abendblatt was started in 1897 the
Arbeiter Zeitung became its Sunday edition.)

The Abendblatt. 1897-1902. Editors: J. Rombro and A. Cahan.

Wahrheit. Weekly. February 15, 1889-July 12, 1889. (First anarchistic periodical published in Yiddish.)

Abendzeitung. March 18, 1906-May 12, 1906. (Only appeared for two months. "A daily edition of the Freie Arbeiter Shtimme". Editor: S. Janovsky. First daily anarchistic newspaper in Yiddish.)

Freie Arbeiter Stimme. Weekly. 1890-1892; 1899-date. Editors: D. Edelstadt, S. Janovsky, J. A. Maryson, J. Kahan. (Was intended to be an impartial organ and free platform for both Social Democrats and Anarchists. Later with the Social Democrats having their own organ, it became chiefly a cultural anarchist weekly, with a literary interest.)

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