

Excerpt from  
February 1941  
Trustees Confidential  
Bulletin

2nd R  
ACLS  
Microphotography

Grants from the Foundation:

\$75,000 to the Library of Congress

\$30,000 to the American Council of  
Learned Societies

MULTIPLYING BOOKS THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

There are more than 6,000,000 books and pamphlets in the Library of Congress, some 1,500,000 maps and charts, 1,400,000 volumes and pieces of music, over 500,000 etchings, engravings, woodcuts, and other prints, to say nothing of a vast stock of manuscripts - making our national library by far the largest collection in the world. Its resources have always been in demand by writers, scholars, and research workers in various fields, but never have they been so conveniently available as at present. One factor in promoting this easy availability is the photographic duplication laboratory which was set up in 1938 with Foundation funds.

Even before 1938 certain assistance in photoduplication had been provided; the object in the first instance being to procure copies of important European source material. The Foundation appropriated \$40,000, supplementing larger gifts from Mr. Rockefeller, Jr., and with this support the Library of Congress sent its representatives into ten European countries to make photographic copies of original documents bearing on American history, particularly on the foreign affairs of the United States. By 1935 more than 2,000,000 of these significant European records had been copied and the copies were classified, catalogued, and deposited in the Library building in Washington.

Meanwhile, outside libraries as well as scholars and other individuals were requesting duplicate photostats of these imported items, as well as of other material in the Library's collections. To render such



service the Library had a small shop in a basement room, but the equipment was primitive and so limited in output that it was barely able to care for demands made by members of Congress and by the administrative staff. A project for a complete, balanced, modern laboratory was submitted to the Foundation late in 1937, and in January, 1938, an appropriation of \$35,000 was voted - \$25,000 to buy equipment, and \$10,000 to serve as working capital. With these resources a remarkable transformation has been accomplished, as a recent visit to Washington revealed.

Instead of the old cramped quarters, the new laboratory occupies commodious space in the Annex recently erected east of the Library building. Installed here is a remarkable array of equipment, cameras of various sizes for photographing in microfilm, other cameras for photostatic reproduction, enlargers, processors, projectors - everything necessary to a complete duplication service. There is a photostat machine in which the sensitized paper is exposed, printed, developed, fixed, washed, and dried in an unbroken sequence of automatic operations. Another exceptional piece of equipment is a high speed microfilm camera with which bound books can be photographed page by page. This camera is now engaged in reducing the bound files of the Washington Star to microfilm, condensing into a few hundred spools the entire issue of this newspaper since its beginning in 1853. A similar record has been made of the earlier years of the Washington Post, and other newspaper files have also been microfilmed here.

But the greater demand is for photoduplications of books, documents, prints, and other exceptional items which are rarely available outside the Library of Congress. Thousands of requests have been received for photostats of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and



the first and second drafts of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. These four subjects are the ones asked for most often. Sometimes a library will order a complete filming of some rare book, other times the request will be for only a selected page or sequence of pages. Once an item has been photographed, the film is added to the stock and future orders are supplied from it. Requests come from all parts of the United States, and from many foreign lands. Charges are kept low; a recent comparison with commercial houses in Washington showed that the Library of Congress rates were 50 per cent lower, but even so sufficient profit has been made to purchase several thousand dollars worth of new equipment during 1940. As an index to the growth of the service, these figures are significant: microfilm exposures during the year ending June, 1937, were 13,643; during the year ending June, 1940, they were 243,109.

And now the Library of Congress is to benefit from still another Foundation grant for photoduplication, though in this instance the appropriation was made not to the Library but to the American Council of Learned Societies. Within recent months this Council completed a canvass of the needs of American scholarship that can be met through microfilm copies of books and documents, and its first choice fell on the indexes of the Public Record Office in London. These provide the key to eight hundred years of British history. They give the dates, proper names, and place references to original documents bearing upon practically all the great personalities of government, trade, industry, science, literature, art, and other pursuits. A Chaucer scholar will find here, for example, references to all the official documents touching on the life of his hero - and so with researchers seeking data about Roger Bacon, Cromwell, Milton, Pitt,



Isaac Newton, and thousands of others. In order that microfilming of these irreplaceable indexes may be begun at once, the Foundation appropriated \$30,000 to the Council in January. Plans are made to have the microfilms brought to the United States as rapidly as they are completed, to be deposited in the Library of Congress. Here they will not only serve the convenience of our scholars, but will constitute a valuable insurance in case one of those indiscriminate Nazi bombs should smite the original file in London.