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# Government Documents IN Small Libraries

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**Government Documents  
IN  
Small Libraries  
BY  
CHARLES WELLS REEDER**

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## Government Documents in Small Libraries

**By CHARLES WELLS REEDER,  
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[Substance of an address before a meeting of librarians held under the auspices of the Library Organizer of the Ohio Library Commission, Ohio State University, October 8, 1909.]

The problem of government publications in the small libraries has been discussed at much length by librarians, but it is still far from a definite solution. In fact, there can be no general settlement of many phases of this question, for each and every library must decide what its own policy and attitude shall be toward this class of publications.

It is generally admitted that some libraries ought to have all the publications that are made for distribution, and therefore a system of depository libraries is maintained by the government. The libraries which are not favored with this privilege are compelled to make a selection from the great number of documents and there is the essence of the problem for discussion here. The question of what to get involves the selection of certain publications which will be useful to present patrons of the library and the acquisition of those for which a demand can be created. For instance, if the library is located in a rural section, there will be a big demand for publications relating to agriculture, and a larger proportion of such documents will be secured than for other subjects. If the students of the high school are interested in debating present day questions, the publications of the government relating to the existing political and economic

conditions will be in demand. In the final analysis, the librarian must feel the pulse of the community, as it were, and secure the classes of government material which correspond most nearly to the demand. At the same time, by making use of bibliographies, of department lists of publications and of the reference section in the Documents Office, the demand for this class of literature can be materially increased and documents secured which are not already in the library.

The purpose of this discussion is to suggest a list of government publications which will be of use in a small library. Before doing so, the various methods of securing documents must be mentioned, as the way will be indicated with each document serial in the following list. First of all, there is the system of depository distribution which is based on the act of January 12, 1895. The idea is to place in all sections of the country complete collections of all public documents which are printed and made for distribution. This privilege is granted by law or through the request of senators and representatives. The second way in which large numbers of documents are distributed is through the congressional quota. This practice is a very old one, being used for the first time in 1791. Each member of Congress is given a quota of all documents published by that body, the number varying with each document. These are distributed by the order of the congressmen and are sent out under their franks. As a rule, the libraries will receive very prompt and courteous attention from their representative in Congress to any request made for publications. Thirdly, the departments and bureaus have mailing lists including public officials, institutions of various kinds and interested people. Usually a request by a library to be placed upon such a list is granted; if not, a letter to the congressman will bring the desired result. Finally, the Superintendent of Documents is authorized to sell the government publications at a price sufficient to cover the actual expense of paper, press work and binding. The amount is always small because the main costs of typesetting and stereotyping are eliminated from the price. There are some publications which are secured by sale only, this rule applying to libraries as well as to individuals.

The list of publications which will be useful is as follows: The *Farmers' Bulletins* of the Department of Agriculture are brief popular articles which give in simple, concise language the results of investigations and experiments. They also outline methods for farm procedure and offer instructions and suggestions for the practical farmer. The annual edition of these bulletins is over six and one half million copies. By law eighty per cent. of these are placed at the disposal of the members of Congress, the remaining twenty per cent. being in the hands of the Secretary of Agriculture. Libraries will be placed on the mailing list, or single copies will be sent on application to a senator, representative or delegate, or to the secretary of the department. An *Index to Farmers' Bulletins 1-250* was issued as *Bulletin 8* of the Division of Publications, Department of Agriculture; *Circular No. 4* of this Division is a *Farmers' Bulletin Subject Index*, and contains a list of the subjects of the *Bulletins* arranged alphabetically. It is revised at frequent intervals. The Library of Congress issues printed cards for the *Farmers' Bulletins*.

The *Yearbook* of the Department of Agriculture is virtually an annual encyclopedia of popular, timely articles on special topics covering the year's work of the Department and the year's progress in agriculture. The law provides for an edition of 500,000 copies, but under the new system of public printing, the actual number issued is 300,000. The Department has 30,000 and the remainder is placed at the order of the members of Congress. Applications to either source will be filled, but requests had better be sent to the congressmen first. Two indexes to the *Yearbook* have been prepared: *Bulletin 7*, Division of Publications covers the annual volumes for the period, 1894-1900, and *Bulletin 9* of the same Division, the years 1901-1905. Catalog cards for all the articles can be secured from the Library of Congress.

The Division of Publications, Department of Agriculture, issues *Circular No. 2, Publications for Free Distribution*, which gives the titles of such publications. They are sent free as long as the edition lasts, application being made to the Secretary of Agriculture. *Circular No. 3* is *Publications for Sale*. These can be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, the remittances being sent by postal money orders, express orders, New York draft, or in currency, but never in stamps. There is also a *Monthly List of Publications* issued by the Department of Agriculture, which will be sent to any library free. Through these three lists a librarian can keep in touch with the publications of the most active publishing department of the government and secure the latest available information for the library patrons.

The *Annual Report* of the American Historical Association is devoted to papers by historians of national fame, to reports of the Public Archives Commission, and to the publication of historical bibliographical enterprises. For the students of American history no one set of government documents can be more valuable. The edition is rather limited, the law providing for 5,500 copies. As the Smithsonian Institution has so many exchanges, these reports are best secured from the quota allowed to Congressmen.

The International Bureau of American Republics is not essentially a United States government bureau, but one in which twenty-one of the republics of the Western Hemisphere have an interest. The *Monthly Bulletin* is printed in four languages—English, Spanish, Portuguese and French. It contains the latest information on the commerce, laws, new enterprises and general development of each republic. It is essentially a magazine of Central and South American events. This Bulletin cannot be obtained free, as the bureau sells nearly all its publications. The subscription price for the English edition is \$2.00 per year. A small library does not need the foreign edition. Communications should be addressed to the Director of the Bureau.

No library can afford to be without the publications of the Bureau of the Census. The volumes of the decennial censuses contain the statistical records of the nation's growth and development. If the full set of reports is not wanted, by all means the *Abstract* should be secured, as it contains the summaries. The series of *Bulletins* issued by the permanent bureau contains the recent statistics, estimates, and are the source for much of the data found in the annual newspaper almanacs. These publications are supplied free of charge to libraries upon application to the Director of the Census or to members of Congress. The Department of Commerce and Labor has issued a *List of Publications ... available for distribution*; the Bureau has also issued *Publications Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Censuses and Permanent Bureau*. The publications no longer available are marked with an asterisk.

The *Annual Reports* of the Civil Service Commission contain the data on the historical and statistical growth of the classified government service, the number and character of examinations, the appointments to service, the rules covering civil service appointment and the legal decisions of the Commission. The Commission has twenty thousand

copies of its annual report for distribution, applications for it being made directly to the Commission. The *Manual of Examinations* is issued January 1st and July 1st of each year, and give the date, place, character and scope of scheduled examinations. It will be found indispensable for those desiring to enter the government service. It will be furnished gratuitously by the Commission.

The *Congressional Directory* is issued in three editions for a long session, and in two for a short one. It contains the essential facts necessary for a valuable reference book on the government. There are biographical sketches of each senator, representative and delegate in Congress; committee arrangements are given for all members; officials and attaches of both houses are listed; biographical sketches are given for the heads of the executive departments; there is a roster of the chief officers in each department and in the consular and diplomatic service; finally, there is a brief outline of the official duties of each department, bureau and division in the government. The number issued is determined by the Joint Committee on Printing, but inasmuch as the *Directory* is issued as a Senate document, it can be secured by application to a member in Congress. If not supplied in this way, it can be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents. The last edition is the one to be secured.

The *Congressional Record* is published daily when Congress is in session and in a collected edition when the session is over. It is a verbatim report of all that takes place in Congress, and ought to be placed with the daily papers in a library. An *Index* is prepared every two weeks and one for the entire session. Besides the references to the bills, the index contains a history of each measure and the number of each committee report and document presented. Each senator has ninety copies and each representative and delegate has sixty-two copies. Librarians should make application to their congressmen for the *Record* at the beginning of each session of Congress, as new mailing lists are made out at that time.

The *Annual Reports* of the Bureau of Education are devoted to statistics concerning the educational system of the United States. There are also discussions and papers on important educational movements in other countries. The law provides for an edition of 35,000 copies, 20,000 of which are distributed by the Bureau. The reports from 1867 to 1898 are indexed in *A. L. A. Index*, 2d ed. Since 1906 much of the descriptive material in the annual reports has been eliminated and published as *Bulletins*. These contain many late monographs of importance and the results of study of new problems in education. Bulletin 2, 1908, is a *List of Publications ... 1867-1907*. The annual bibliography of education which has been issued for the past eight years in the Educational Review is now printed as a *Bulletin* of the Bureau of Education.

The *Experiment Station Record*, a publication of the Office of Experiment Stations, gives a technical review of the current literature of agricultural investigation, not only in the United States, but also throughout the whole world. It reviews books and annual reports of governments and the agricultural experiment stations in the various states and about 1,600 periodicals in twelve or more languages. The Office maintains a mailing list, and application for publications should be directed to the Director. The *Record* is also sold by the Superintendent of Documents at \$1.00 per volume, beginning with July, 1909. Previous volumes are \$1.50.

The *Annual Reports* of the Interstate Commerce Commission cover both the administrative and the quasi-judicial proceedings of the Commission. In its administrative features the report presents railroad statistics, discusses the uniform methods of accounting, and summarizes the results of enforcing the safety appliance laws, the hours of service act and the accidents law. Important decisions made during the year by the Commission and by United States Courts are reviewed. The reports are furnished gratuitously by the Commission to those who apply. Another valuable serial is the report on the *Statistics of Railways in the United States*. It is prepared according to schedules, and covers the mileage, the amount of railway capital, the earnings and income, the general expenditures and the accidents. This volume is also distributed free by the Commission.

The Bureau of Labor issues three serials which ought to be found in every library. The *Annual Reports* contain the results of investigations which the Bureau has made on industrial and social subjects. The *Special Reports* are on particular subjects, and are prepared as requested by the President of the United States or by either house of Congress. The *Bulletin* is issued bi-monthly, and contains the latest information on subjects within the wide field of labor and not included in the other reports. The *Annual Reports* and *Bulletins* up to 1898 are indexed in the *A. L. A. Index*, 2d ed. The Bureau issued an *Index* in 1902 which covers *Annual Reports* 1-16, *Bulletins* 1-39 and *Special Reports* 1-9. Application for these publications are best made to the Bureau and handled from its mailing list.

The most useful publication of the Library of Congress in a small library is the series of bibliographies compiled in the Division of Bibliography. They vary in size from approximately complete bibliographies to small reading lists on questions of current interest. Inasmuch as they are based on the largest collection of library materials in the United States, the bibliographies give an idea of existing references and sources which might not be suggested or even known in smaller institutions. Through library loans and the judicious writing for sources, the small library can supply liberal materials for study from these bibliographies. As to the distribution of these publications, the Library of Congress makes this statement: "With certain exceptions, the publications are not distributed gratis, except to institutions with which the library regularly exchanges." At any event, they can be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents for from ten to fifteen cents. The complete list of these bibliographies is published in the *List of Publications Issued Since 1897* (by the Library of Congress).

The *Daily Consular and Trade Reports* are issued from the Bureau of Manufactures. These are a collection of reports made by United States consuls in all parts of the world on matters of commercial and current importance, such as new inventions, crops, market possibilities and commercial relations in general. The Bureau will add a library to its mailing list upon application.

The Bureau of Statistics of the Department of Commerce and Labor issue two serials which are of use in small libraries. The *Monthly Summary of Commerce and Finance* is the leading statistical publication of the government. It gives a very complete and detailed statistical account of the foreign commerce of the United States, the internal commerce and the commerce with the non-contiguous possessions. The *Statistical Abstract* covers, in summarized form, most of the

important subjects in the wide field of government activity, and easily ranks as "the most useful summary of statistics relating to our country that is printed." The edition is limited to twelve thousand copies—three thousand to the Senate, six thousand to the House, and the remainder to the Bureau. Application for both serials can be made directly to the Bureau, and especially for the *Monthly Summary*.

In conclusion, the librarian that intends to be alive to his opportunity with government documents will get the *Annual Reports* of the Superintendent of Documents for 1907 and 1908 and commit them to heart. They contain the best explanation of the present plan of distribution and other problems with these publications that has been written. The library should receive the series of *Price Lists* and *Leaflets* now being issued by the Documents Office. The one is virtually a bibliography of some important subjects which the documents cover; the other is a description of some one document or some class of more than passing interest. Both show what can be purchased and the price of the publication. If the library has not received copies of *Free Lists Nos. 1 to 3*, they should be sent for. They contain a list of the documents which are offered free of all charge to libraries. Many rare and useful publications can be secured in this way. Finally, if possible, subscribe for the *Monthly Catalog of Public Documents*, which keeps the reading public informed as to what is now being published by the government, how and where the publications can be obtained and the purchase price.

Such are a few suggestions concerning important government serials in the small libraries. No account has been taken of single documents, of which a long list can be made. Nor have such problems as shelving, classifying and cataloging the documents been discussed. The endeavor has been to show what such a list of documents offers by way of additional reference source material and how it may be secured. Documents must not be despised because they are free. They are to be regarded with honor even in their own country.

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