

# Faculty Research Edition

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# The Use of Accession Records in College and University Libraries

Madeline H. Dixon

During the summer of 1960, the Savannah State College Library Staff began to wonder if some time and energy might not be saved if the accession record were discontinued. Since this is the era of labor and time saving devices, we were looking at many of our own procedures with a critical eye.

What is an accession record? It is a numerical record of all books and pamphlets that have belonged to a library. The library supply houses have printed forms for this record. In most cases space is provided for the accession number, author, title, publisher, date, source, classification number, price and remarks.

Just what purpose does the accession record serve? It is useful for indicating the number of volumes added to the collection for any particular period of time, from whom the volumes were purchased, and what they cost. Since the entries in the record are dated, it serves as a chronological list of all books the library has ever owned.

The recording of the items in the accession record is usually done by a clerical assistant. If the staff is small, the work may be so heavy that it is inconvenient to check as often as is necessary. Since the source, date and cost are the only items in the accession book which are not in the shelf list, may it not be possible to add this information to the shelf list card, or some other record, or to do without the information altogether?

Before our final decision was made, letters were sent to colleges and universities all over the country. The replies received were helpful, some detailed, and some both interesting and informative. In order to assemble the information, a master chart was set up with the following columns:

Name of Library	Use Accession Record	Accession Number with Information on Shelf List Card	Copy Number but No Accession Number	Accession Number But No Accession Record
No Accession or Copy Record	Remarks			

Of the 97 replies received, 22 libraries use the detailed accession record. Seventeen libraries use the accession number with information being placed on the shelf list. Twenty-five libraries use a copy number (i.e. copy 1, copy 12.) Twelve libraries use the accession number but no accession record. Twenty-one libraries in Group I usually just

stated that the detailed accession record was still used. From one library it was reported that the staff was ready to dispense with its use. At another library the record is "useful for inventory." And at a state college library, the record is a "state requirement for inventory record." Still another library reports its help with inventory and for the use of accrediting boards.

Of the libraries in Group II, those using accession number with information on the shelf-list, one library reported the discontinuance of the record in 1910. One library uses the procedure of recording daily catalog statistics on special forms, compiling the same statistics weekly, monthly, quarterly and annually. Here only the quarterly and annual reports are permanent. Another library lists only the first and last numbers on daily records. One library which gave up the detailed record "twenty or thirty years ago" uses a separate series of numbers for the bound periodicals. A library in this group keeps a record of gifts because this is "required." One library does not accession serials and duplicates at all. For duplicates a copy number is used. The old accession books of another library have been placed in the manuscript collection.

Group III libraries use a copy number (e.g. copy 2, copy 7) instead of an accession number. These libraries were varied in the procedures used for recording source, price and date of purchase. The procedures reported were: information is added to shelf-list card; details of purchase are entered on a copy of the order form and returned to a "filled orders" file; "a count of the library materials forwarded to catalog department is kept." One library was just beginning to use the system of copy numbers.

The libraries in Group IV still stamp an accession number in the books but they do not keep the detailed record book. One library places the accession number on one of the multiple order forms and files these forms numerically. For one library the catalog and the shelf-list are the only permanent records. One library uses numbered prepunched IBM cards. Several libraries give the first and last numbers used in one given day, separating by category—that is, purchases, gifts, bound periodicals, etc. One library keeps only a record of the last number used. At the end of the year the number of discards is subtracted from the last number used. The numbering machine is then set back to offset the discards. So far there has been no problem with some books having the same accession number.

Libraries in Group five use copy numbers (copy 1, copy 2) but not the consecutive accession numbers. In this category there are libraries which have never used accession numbers, libraries which discontinued the accession number as far back as thirty years ago and libraries which only recently made the change to copy numbers. One of these libraries keeps a record book by date of orders listing gifts, bound periodicals, film and microfilm. One library keeps a permanent file of order cards which is annually placed in a vault for insurance purposes. In one library the acquisition count begins with the number one (1) each July 1. Separate counts are made for serials, monographs,

binding and documents. The date of acquisition is placed on the shelf-list and author cards of one library. One library places its only record of source and price on the order cards which are kept for five years. Other libraries either keep no information concerning purchase or they place this information on the shelf-list card.

One library has a procedure which almost places it in an entirely different category. Here the number used is an order number. The same number is given to all books on a specific order.

The practices of the libraries in Group IV were the ones on which Savannah State College Library based its final decision. A simple record sheet was developed to include the date of accessioning, the first and last numbers used, type of acquisition—purchases, documents, United States Exchange, gifts, bound periodicals—and total volumes accessioned. Phonorecords were not recorded in this count.

In this change of procedure the advantages seem to far outweigh the disadvantages of continuing the old procedure. Much time has been saved in the process of cataloging. The order information is available on the order cards which are filed by classification number and kept for one year. When books are lost or discarded, only the shelf-list and card catalog are checked. Fines for lost books are based on replacement cost rather than original cost. Until such time as it is found that these items of order information are absolutely necessary and are not available in any other source, this library will operate without a detailed accession record.