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Part III - General Monographic Bibliographies

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Part III—General Monographic Bibliographies

By BALFOUR J. HALEVY*

My charge is to talk about general monographic bibliographies, a term so loose that I can make my own selection. It must be understood that my knowledge, apart from book knowledge, of most of these comes from my work with Morris Cohen on BEAL. Mainly we have used these tools as selection devices for inclusion in our bibliography, but on occasion as aids in identifying references from other sources. In the real world of legal history research, the latter is the most likely used.

Most do not have any means of subject approach; they, therefore, cannot be used as a means of subject research. The one great tool that has been created since we started work on the bibliography is what we call Mansell, i.e. *National Union Catalogue of Pre-1956 Imprints*.¹ I need not describe in detail to this audience the fantastic riches of the book form of the *National Union Catalogue*, however, there are certain features that are worth noting.

I had assumed, in my naivete, that one thing Mansell would not have was ghosts; a union catalog is, after all, the product of many individual catalogs. A library catalog is produced by individual catalogers looking at an item and recording it; they have to have an item to look at, ergo there may be mistakes—catalogers are human—but no ghosts! Well catalogers are, or in the past have been, quite subject to human error, particularly with difficult, pamphlet type material. Even from the best libraries we have had answers that their Mansell entry cannot now be traced to any item they now have in their library. One can sometimes, of course, explain such a happening as loss. Often the explanation has to be serious miscataloging, such as errors of date; cataloging part of a book or pamphlet as a separate item; conflating two or more editions of a multivolume set into one entry and creating a ghost edition. Thus I would warn you that an item in Mansell with one location, even from the most prestigious institution, is no guarantee of its current existence or even ever having existed. Of course,

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¹ *The National Union Catalogue, Pre-1956 Imprints*. London, Mansell, 1968-

sometimes one is morally certain the item existed but cannot now be traced. The BEAL project is at the moment frustrated by the following series of events:

Mansell has an entry for an edition of *Conductor Generalis*, a guide to the law mainly for Justices of the Peace, sheriffs, etc. The source is the Harvard Law Library. The same item is listed with very detailed title page transcription in James, a list of legal treatises in the British Colonies and American States before 1801.² Harvard Law Library does not now have a catalogue entry for this particular edition. The cataloging and transcription are so good that I am convinced the book existed and is not a ghost, the job is now to locate a copy.

I have spent an inordinate amount of time on a tool known to every librarian, but it is of such cardinal importance for anyone trying to trace Americana, or for that matter any other books, that I thought this was justified.

To explain Evans³ to this audience would be redundant, but I would emphasize from bitter experience the number of ghosts that essential work contains. I think our working hypothesis now is becoming that if an Evans title has not been located in Shipton & Mooney, *Short Title Evans*,⁴ it does not exist. Shipton & Mooney gives Evans' source of the title, which is often a newspaper ad "just published," etc. Where they are convinced it is a ghost they say so.

Sabin again needs no explanation here but, because they are relatively new, you might not know of:

- a) Molnar, J. E.
Author Title Index to Sabin. Metuchen, Scarecrow, 1974. 3 v.

A useful book in locating a Sabin item when one has a difficult citation, e.g. wrong Sabin number in a reference, or incorrect author citation.

² In *Harvard Legal Essays*, Cambridge, 1934, reprinted Freeport, N.Y. 1967, p. 159-211.

³ Evans, Charles. *American Bibliography: Down to and Including the Year 1820*. Chicago, Privately printed for the author by the Blakely Press, 1903-59.

⁴ Shipton, C. J. & J. E. Mooney. *National Index of American Imprints Through 1800; the Short-Title Evans*. Worcester, Mass., 1969.

- b) Thompson, Lawrence S. *The New Sabin*. Troy, N.Y., Whitson, 1974. 2 vols. and indices so far.

A rewriting of Sabin with some additions in L.C. style cataloging and entries, all the items having been examined.

A useful set is a subject index for each volume. When this set is complete we will have, I believe, for the first time, an ability to search by subject the vast corpus of Americana that is in Sabin. However, there are some doubts as to whether this set will be completed.

Two general bibliographies that I admire are Shaw & Shoemaker⁵ (covering 1801-1820) and Shoemaker⁶ (1821—now up to 1831). These editions fill a total gap (S & S) or improve on a very difficult tool. (Shoemaker redoing Roorbach⁷). I admire them because they have the guts to do something working from secondary sources, which with all faults is a vast improvement on what was available beforehand. Bibliographers as a breed are too often, I think, looking for perfection, instead of producing in a reasonable time something that will help scholars and librarians, even though not perfect. Morris Cohen and I have possibly been guilty of this. Shaw & Shoemaker have even killed off many of the ghosts it created in *Corrections: Author Index 1966*.⁸ Needless to say, these two need to be treated with caution: If you are chasing something only cited in Shaw & Shoemaker, do not assume a high level of accuracy.

⁵ Shaw, R. R. & R. H. Shoemaker. *American Bibliography: A Preliminary Checklist for 1801-1819*. New York, 1958-63. 19 vols.

⁶ Shoemaker, H. *A Checklist of American Imprints for 1820*. New York, 1964.

⁷ Roorbach, O. A. *Bibliotheca Americana: Catalogue of American Publications, Including Reprints and Original Works, From 1820 to 1848*. New York.

⁸ Shaw R. & R. H. Shoemaker. *Correction, Author Index*. New York, 1966.

The next type of bibliography I want to discuss is the State, or regional, bibliography. Some of the most recent ones are of the highest bibliographical standard; some of the earlier ones leave something to be desired.⁹ I suppose the items can be divided by the W.P.A. project (Historical Records Survey) which produced the American imprints inventory.¹⁰ These were State and some local imprint lists for varied chronological periods and are of varied quality. Ghosts are not totally unknown. Where there is no later State bibliography, they are useful tools. Unfortunately, these and most State and local bibliographies have no subject indices, but as I have said, as a start on verification, they are most useful. However unless the bibliographical standards of the Historical Records Survey checklist/or State Bibliography are high, Mansell might be a faster and adequate means of clarification for most purposes. This obviously won't work for letters of the alphabet not covered yet.

There are several special subject and/or period bibliographies which we have found of use. An example is: Adams,¹¹ on the constitutional controversies prior to that unfortunate rebellion that you are celebrating this year. These have the great advantage of giving one subject access, as well as having a high level of bibliographical information.

In conclusion, for our purposes as servers of legal historians the aids discussed above are essential in spite of all the faults that I have note. Since most of us will not have many of them in our own libraries, it is essential we find their nearest location and send clients to them if we can't do the search ourselves.

⁹ Some recent examples of good quality are: Aiden, J. E. *Rhode Island Imprints, 1727-1800*. N.Y., 1949; McCorison, M. A. *Vermont Imprints, 1778-1820*. Worcester, 1963.

¹⁰ See Winchell, 8th ed. AA357.

¹¹ Adams, T. R. *American Independence: The Growth of an Idea*. Providence, R.I., 1965.