

**THE MANUSCRIPT  
DIVISION IN THE NEW  
YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY**

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The Manuscript division in the New York public library by Victor Hugo Paltsits

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**VICTOR HUGO PALTSITS**

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IN THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

BY  
VICTOR HUGO PALTSITS  
KEEPER OF MANUSCRIPTS

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NEW YORK  
1915



MANUSCRIPT DIVISION-RESEARCH ROOM

**THE MANUSCRIPT DIVISION  
IN THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY**

By VICTOR HUGO PALTSITS, KEEPER OF MANUSCRIPTS

IN former years manuscripts were concentrated in the Lenox Library Building, mainly in rooms of a mezzanine floor. Upon the evacuation of that building in the spring of 1911, the manuscripts were placed in the present Central Building, in conjunction with the rare and reserved printed works of the American History Division, save that an overflow of manuscripts was segregated in a part of the book stack. The reserve book rooms soon became very much congested and necessitated the removal, from time to time, of more manuscripts to the stack. Moreover, the growing work of the American History Division precluded anything like undivided attention to the manuscripts, as to their proper arrangement and cataloguing; in fact, very little cataloguing had been done for a number of years, while accumulation of accessions awaited sorting and arrangement in cartons. It was evident that the overcrowded reserve book rooms should be relieved of the congestion and that the manuscripts could be more satisfactorily administered apart from printed books, from which they differed essentially in the method of use and treatment. In November, 1913, the trustees of the Library began to consider the desirability of creating a Manuscript Division and on January 14, 1914, determined upon it. Two rooms (nos. 319 and 226), on the third and second floors, the one above the other, were allotted for the use of the new division and arrangements were planned for their equipment and for connecting them by a staircase. At the same time Mr. Paltsits\* was appointed Keeper of Manuscripts, to begin in September, meanwhile co-operating in the preparation of the rooms for occupancy. In May, plans were drawn for the equipment of room 319 with fireproof metal construction cases, partly with roller shelves

\*Note by the Editor of Publications: Mr. Paltsits was connected with the Lenox Library from 1888 to 1907, serving as assistant librarian for fourteen years. He was New York State Historian from 1907 to 1911, and in that capacity edited three volumes of "Minutes of the Commissioners for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies," 1778-1781; and two volumes of "Minutes of the Executive Council of the Province of New York," 1668-1673. He has also edited "The Journal of Captain William Fote, Jr.," 1745-1747; Rev. John Miller's "New York Considered and Improved, 1693"; "Papers Relating to the Siege of Charleston, 1780," and other historical works. As bibliographical adviser he was on the editorial staff of Thwaites's "Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents." His bibliographical contributions include analytical descriptions of the "Lettres édifiantes"; the works of Philip Freneau; the voyages of Baron de Lahontan; the works of Father Louis Hennepin; the almanacs of Roger Sherman; etc.

for heavy volumes and large portfolios and more generally with bin shelves, all protected by steel roller curtains with Yale locks (see illustration). The equipment, built during the summer, was installed in the month of September. The removal of the manuscripts to the new division was begun on September 24. From that date until November 16, the manuscripts continued to be used in room 303 of the American History Division without the least inconvenience to students, as there was not a single instance where a manuscript could not be produced readily, notwithstanding the absence of a systematic arrangement incident to the process of concentration from five separate rooms and a far-removed stack.

On November 16, the Manuscript Division was opened, and on the same day Mr. Wilmer R. Leech, for over six years a member of the staff of the State Historian's office, at Albany, and for eight years prior thereto of the Division of Manuscripts of the Library of Congress, began service as assistant in the division.

Special rules for the administration of the division have been established by the trustees. Room 319 is the "Research Room" into which students are admitted by a ticket obtained from the Director of the Library. Room 226, at present with exposed shelves and a gallery, is used only for administration purposes and the storage of manuscripts. It is not open to the public. The special rules of the division are as follows:

1. The Manuscript Division has been established for purposes of reference and research. Exhibitions of manuscripts for the benefit of the public are also provided in the general exhibition on the main floor (Room 113).

2. Persons desiring a card of admission to the Manuscript Division (Room 319) should make a written application to the Director of the Library, specifying name, address, profession or occupation, and the purpose for which admission is desired. Such application should be made, if possible, at least two days in advance and must be accompanied by a written recommendation from some person of known position. In special cases, which do not admit of delay, the Keeper of Manuscripts may show a particular manuscript or small group of manuscripts to a person properly identified who has not yet obtained a card, especially a person who brings a written request from a donor to the collection.

3. A blank form for such application and recommendation may be obtained in the Manuscript Division or by written request to the Director of the Library.

4. A card of admission to the Manuscript Division is strictly personal and admits but one person.

5. The manuscript research room (319) is open to persons having cards of admission from 9 a. m. until 6 p. m. on every day, excepting Sundays, Independence Day, Christmas and New Year's day.

6. No person under eighteen years of age will be admitted to the manuscript research room.



7. No person will be admitted for the purpose of preparing for examination, of writing prize essays, or of competing for prizes, unless a special reason is given. The use of manuscripts for sensational exploitation is discouraged by the Library.

8. In applying for manuscripts, a *separate* ticket is to be clearly written and signed by the applicant for *each* piece or consecutive series desired, and a record thereof is to be kept in an official register. When the user returns the piece or series, it will be examined. If it is found in as good condition as when delivered, the ticket will be canceled and returned to the applicant. Persons are held responsible until their tickets have been returned.

9. Manuscripts of exceptional value or in fragile condition shall be produced singly, or subject to such conditions as the Keeper of Manuscripts shall, in the particular case, think requisite for their safety and integrity.

10. It is forbidden to write upon, or mark with pen or pencil, any manuscript. Those who use manuscripts are expected to handle them with care, not lean upon or place the hand on the page before them, or lay a manuscript or book or the paper on which they are writing, upon an open manuscript. As a general rule, manuscripts, while in use, are to be placed upon book-rests.

11. Pencils shall be used in copying or taking notes. Pen and ink may be used only in special cases and subject to special permission from the Keeper of Manuscripts.

12. Tracing is not allowed, unless by permission of the Keeper of Manuscripts. In no case can permission be given to trace from illuminations or paintings or artistic drawings.

13. Manuscripts, or other articles belonging to the Manuscript Division, shall not be removed from the division to other divisions or departments, unless by specific permission of the Keeper of Manuscripts, the Chief Reference Librarian, or the Director of the Library.

14. Permission to photograph, photostat or print certain manuscripts will be given by the Keeper of Manuscripts on the following conditions:

(a) That the Library be given a copy of the book or other publication in which the original appears; or, in special cases, a finished print of the photograph or other facsimile.

(b) That the Library in no wise surrenders its right to print or give permission to others to print any of the materials in its possession, or assumes responsibility of copyright violations.

A group list of the manuscripts in The New York Public Library prior to the summer of 1901, was printed in the Library's Bulletin of that year (Vol. V, p. 306-336). About fifty separates for official use were also issued without title-page. This list, entitled *Manuscript Collections in The New York Public Library*, contains all groups of manuscripts that have special historical or autographic interest, and also some individual manuscripts of importance. The arrangement is by periods and geographical, as follows: America in general; English-American colonies; American Revolution, causes and opening events, Declaration of Independence, military and political, German troops,

American loyalists, and peace negotiations; the United States since the Revolution; American states and countries, etc., in alphabetical order; European and Asiatic countries, etc., including England, Great Britain, Scotland, 16th to 19th centuries; and a miscellaneous group of oriental, biblical, liturgical, literary, musical and other manuscripts.

The Library has also a card catalogue in process; but not much has been added to it for a number of years. With the organization of the new division this phase of the work will be continued as opportunity is afforded; meanwhile, unsorted accumulations and accessions are being arranged in folders and cartons. A classification of the principal manuscripts has already been effected according to a modified plan of the scheme laid down in the group list of 1901. This process is working out very well; but it is merely a temporary expedient. Thousands of uncatalogued manuscripts of a miscellaneous nature are alphabeted in manila folders, properly endorsed, and form a series of "Miscellaneous Papers," filed in standard size cartons. These manuscripts are easily accessible to students.

Small calendars and descriptions of particular groups of manuscripts, such as the Jackson-Lewis correspondence and the Smyth of Nibley Papers, have appeared in the Library's Bulletin, from time to time. The principal calendar, however, which the Library has printed, is the *Calendar of the Emmet Collection of Manuscripts, etc., relating to American History. Presented to The New York Public Library by John S. Kennedy*. New York, 1900. 2 p.l., 563 p. 8°. The contents of this calendar, p. 1-267, first appeared in the Library's Bulletin, vols. I-III (1897-1899); but p. 268-563 have appeared only in the separate volume, of which an edition of one hundred copies was issued. The contents of this volume are as follows:

Albany Congress of 1754 (1-8); Stamp Act Congress of 1765 (9-16); Continental Congress of 1774 (17-28); Members of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789 (29-84); Presidents of Congress, and of the United States (85-94); Declaration of Independence (95-108); Signers to the Declaration of Independence (109-267); Articles of Confederation (268-270); Lossing's Field Book of the Revolution (271-363); Siege of Savannah, 1779 (364-365); Siege of Savannah—Lincoln Papers (365-370); Siege of Charleston—Lincoln Papers (371-378); Generals of the American Revolution (379-407); Washington and his Military Family (408-411); Annapolis Convention, 1786 (412-415); Federal Convention (416-421); First Federal Administration (422-430); Griswold's Republican Court (431-432); Booth's History of New York City (433-460); Francis's Old New York (461-464); Duer's Reminiscences of an Old Yorker (465); Irving's Life of Washington

(466-474); Boundary Line Controversy (Mason and Dixon's Line) (475-478); Howe's Virginia (479-482); Hunt's Life of Edward Livingston (483-484); James's Life of Francis Marion (485); Gen. Alexander Leslie's Letter Book (486-504); Miscellaneous Manuscripts (alphabetical) 505-528); Index (529-552); list of letters to Gen. Horatio Gates (553-554); list of uncalendared manuscripts (alphabetical) (555-561); errata (562-563).

The growth of the collection of manuscripts since 1901 has not been inconsiderable. Of historical manuscripts it is the largest and broadest of any institution of greater New York and it ranks as one of the best in the United States. It is believed to contain more valuable European illuminated manuscripts than any other public institution in America. The Library is also the depository of a vast aggregation of official records of the city of New York, bound or arranged in cartons, mainly the Mayors' Papers for a period of more than fifty years of the nineteenth century.

About two years ago the New York Library Club named a "Committee on Historical Manuscripts," of which Mr. Paltsits was chosen as chairman, to prepare a report on the historical manuscripts in institutions of greater New York. The members of this committee actually contributed the portions allotted to each; but the New York Library Club was unable at the time to print the composite results. Mr. Paltsits was not then connected with The New York Public Library; but enlisted the co-operation of Mr. Henry C. Strippel, Chief of the Division of Genealogy and Local History of the Library, as a member of his committee, to report additions, etc., not already printed in the Library's group list of 1901, and a list of historical texts that have been printed in the Library's Bulletin from the beginning. These two lists, now brought up to date, are presented at the end of this article and should prove to be acceptable to historical investigators.

The following general account of the manuscripts is designed to convey to interested students the nature of the materials that are available for historical research, and those that have value on account of their antiquity, illuminations, curiosity and literary contents.

The earliest records in the Library are baked clay tablets, cylinders, slabs, etc., in the Sumerian language, dating from the time of Naram-Sin, son of Sargon, about 2600 B. C.; Gimil-Sin, King of Ur, about 2200 B. C., and other reigns in Babylonia. There are also cuneiform inscriptions in the Assyrian language of the reign of Ashur-nasir-pal, King of Assyria, 885-860 B. C., and of Nebuchadrezzar II., King of Babylon, 604-561 B. C., in the Babylonian language. Egyptian hieroglyphic writing is represented by an inscription on black basalt of about the eighth or ninth century B. C., and there is also a small