

**INVENTORY OF UNPUBLISHED  
MATERIAL FOR AMERICAN  
RELIGIOUS HISTORY IN  
PROTESTANT CHURCH ARCHIVES  
AND OTHER REPOSITORIES**

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Inventory of Unpublished Material for American Religious History in Protestant Church Archives and Other Repositories by William Henry Allison

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## INTRODUCTION.

How little has been done to make more widely known the manuscript sources for American religious history is very apparent to any one who will run through such attempts as have been made at the compilation of either general or specific bibliographies for the history of the religious organizations and movements in America. In the thirteen volumes which comprise the *American Church History Series*, some twenty separate bibliographies are given, but in only five is there any reference to manuscript material; here the data are for the most part general rather than detailed in the information they contain and as they total only about sixty printed lines it is obvious how meagre they are. In his monumental work entitled *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years as seen in its Literature*, Dr. Henry M. Dexter printed the results of his exhaustive bibliographical researches upon that subject, yet his list of over seven thousand titles contained only two somewhat closely printed pages devoted to the brief account of the manuscript sources for Congregational history. In some other individual works, especially in recent monographs, a few occasional notes are to be found referring to manuscript documents. Some of the more noteworthy manuscript collections have been printed, and as it has been natural to point to these published volumes, as more generally accessible and also more convenient for ordinary use, this may in part account for the relatively few references in print to the underlying sources.

The present Inventory does not profess to be more than a contribution to the knowledge of the manuscript materials for American religious history; it does not attempt to bring together in a systematic way the materials relating to the history of any particular denomination or religious movement. Manuscripts still in private possession have been passed by, but such as are deposited with any of the collections examined and are likely to remain permanently in their present locations, have been included, though they may still be the property of individual owners. The general scope of the Inventory might be shown more clearly if its title were expanded into the form, Inventory of the Unpublished Material for American Religious History to be Found in Various Repositories in the United States, Especially in the Archives of the Governing Bodies of the Various Protestant Churches and of their Missionary Societies and in the Libraries of their Theological Seminaries, Colleges, and Historical Societies. It is a list of material to be found in definite types of archives, libraries, and historical collections; its purpose is to show what may be found at the various places from which information has been obtained by

personal visitation or by the returns to a questionnaire; its usefulness may consist in part in indicating where historical material is not to be found, thus restraining some needless correspondence and travel on the part of investigators. Many of the collections are constantly growing, so that this negative service of the Inventory may be relied upon only with caution.

While the attempt has been made to gain definite information concerning all the collections which would fall within the general scope of the present enterprise, for all points south of Maryland and Kentucky and west of the Mississippi River a questionnaire has been employed. In addition to an introductory note, explaining the purpose of the Inventory, the following specific information was asked for:

1. Name and address of the Library, Historical Society, etc.
2. Has it any *special* collection of *manuscript* (unprinted) material relating to any portion of American religious history?
3. Can you furnish a brief statement of the history of any such collection?
4. Does your library contain, whether in a special collection or otherwise, manuscript material belonging to any of the following classes or in any way related to American religious history:
  - a. Records of churches or other local religious bodies?
  - b. Records of associations, conventions, synods, assemblies, etc.?
  - c. Records of ecclesiastical trials?
  - d. Records of Sunday Schools, Young People's Societies, etc.?
  - e. Statistics of churches or other religious bodies?
  - f. Historical sketches of churches, historical sermons and addresses?
  - g. Journals, diaries, note-books, and correspondence of ministers or other religious workers?
  - h. Biographical or autobiographical material concerning the same?
    - i. Sermons or sermon-notes?
    - j. Any other material bearing upon American religious history?

These questions were intended to cover all the kinds of material which had been found in the collections personally visited and they indicate definitely the nature of almost all the items listed in this Inventory.

The results gained from the questionnaire were not altogether satisfactory. For obvious reasons, the hearts of librarians and archivists do not warm up to the reception of a printed list of questions as they do to the living investigator in search of historical data. Some of the returns were detailed in the character of the information they contained; some were satisfactory for the purpose of the Inventory when a simple "No" was placed after some or even all of the questions. Quite different was it, however, when the only information vouchsafed was a simple "Yes", although in most cases it was probably warrantable to assume that such material as gave the basis for this simple affirmative answer was of local importance only.

The question which perhaps arose first in the mind of the compiler of this Inventory, as he began his task of examining the various collections of manuscripts, was, What is to be considered as material for American *religious*



history? To a very large extent, however, the nature of the collections themselves determined the practical answer to be given to the question. Certain types of material in printed works which suggested difficulties on the border line between the religious and the secular, as a matter of fact did not present themselves in the manuscript material actually examined. Perhaps the most serious form of the question arose in connection with biographical material and the writings of some individuals; but as a large part of the historical work in the field of American religious movements will probably be done by those who are following out biographical lines of investigation, it has seemed at least useful, if not scientifically consistent, to include some personal material not in itself of a religious character, but connected with some man or woman whose career will most likely be approached from an interest in his or her religious activities. The very fact that this material has come into collections of the types included in the scheme of the Inventory has some bearing upon the answer to the original question as to whether particular material was pertinent to this catalogue, and, after all, only a few items are included which could have their presence challenged even by a relatively narrow interpretation of the term "religious". All material which reveals the vital interest of the organized religious forces in social activities, such as education and philanthropy, has been, we believe, rightly included.

It will be observed that some public (non-ecclesiastical) libraries have been included, some of them having been visited, and questionnaires having been sent to those likely to have material relating to American religious history.

The nature of most of the material listed is such that it would be almost impossible to give any critical estimate of its intrinsic value for historical purposes. While these manuscripts have not been printed—for only in exceptional cases does the Inventory include any published material—some of them have been worked through by historical writers and perhaps the most important data utilized in biographical or historical works. Even in these cases, however, there will be some profitable gleanings, especially when the reworking is carried along by some other motive and in relation to some other point of interest than those maintained in the previous use of the same documents. On the whole the compiler has been somewhat surprised that the libraries and archives visited did not contain more systematic collections of such types as the Wheelock and Backus Collections and the Hawks Transcripts. Most of the collections are mere accumulations rather than the result of definite effort to secure and preserve the correspondence and other papers of the men whose careers have been closely interwoven with the religious history of America. So far as official records are concerned, in very few cases do we find anything like complete sets of the manuscripts which antedate the time when the printed copies of the official proceedings made the preservation of the original records less important. This is particularly true of those ecclesiastical bodies which are more loosely organized and which have left their records largely to the

private care of local clerks. Many of the books have perished in fires, while at least one listed herein served as a family scrap-book before it found its way into the archives where it really belonged.

While we regret that more of the records of the past have not been preserved, historical learning of all future time will owe a debt of gratitude to the many individuals, and especially the librarians and other custodians of the collections both large and small, who with almost no financial support have been the means of the preservation of a large part of that which has come down to us; and some of these faithful servants of History are still watching over her interests with a devotion which deserves the reward which most of all they themselves would ask for—a wider recognition of the importance of the work they are doing. This would lead, they believe, to a more adequate financial support of the historical collections and to their more general endowment.

The present safety of many of the manuscripts listed in this volume is decidedly questionable. The most imminent peril is from fire. One valuable collection is in a fire-proof vault, but the method of lighting the latter endangers its contents and perhaps even the life of any one who attempts to work within it. Over against this situation may be placed that of another vault, large, well lighted, probably absolutely fire-proof, planned especially for the preservation of historical records, but without a page of manuscript or other historical material within it. In this Inventory the fact is usually stated when the manuscript collections are given special protection against fire; in too many instances valuable collections are so exposed to danger from this arch-foe of historical material that one would hesitate to expose additional manuscripts to the same peril. The security of what is already possessed should be assured before making much effort to enlarge the collections themselves.

The compiler of the Inventory feels that a word of apology is due because of the lapse of time since he began the work. The task was assumed with the understanding that his regular duties in connection with his college position were to take precedence, and this has made it necessary to relegate most of the work, especially that of the examination of the collections themselves, to the vacation seasons. When most of the archives and libraries had been visited and the work of arranging the items for publication was well started, the compiler accepted a new position which involved labors that made it necessary to leave the Inventory practically untouched for an entire academic year. There have been some difficulties in gaining access to some of the collections, which would have delayed the undertaking beyond the first expectations; most of these delays came not from any lack of co-operation on the part of the various archivists and librarians, but quite to the contrary; they arose from a desire that the examination of the materials might be made with these experts at hand, so that the compiler of the Inventory might have the advantage of their wide and accurate learning. In spite of this co-opera-

tion, however, the compiler can not hope to have his work free from all inaccuracies. To a very large extent the materials listed have local bearings that make them extremely difficult to arrange without a full knowledge of local names, both of places and individuals. Doubtless, in spite of much care, some names have been confused and other inaccuracies may be found such as are almost inevitable unless one is thoroughly conversant with the local history and geography. Probably no single archivist or librarian would have handled the material of his own collection in just the way it is listed here, but it has seemed wise to adopt a general scheme, not to be followed slavishly where that would mean confusion, but likely to make the information in this Inventory more readily accessible to those who might wish to consult it in a search, in all the collections listed, for particular classes of material. While the local collection is the basis of the arrangement of the Inventory, the latter is intended to serve the historical worker at large rather than the local collection itself. The order is alphabetical, by state, town, and repository or institution.

The compiler wishes to extend his cordial thanks for the ready assistance and co-operation which have been so freely given during the last four years by those in charge of the various collections visited and to those who have so kindly replied to the questionnaire and to other inquiries made from time to time.