Promoting a Regional Foreign Copying Program: The Historic New Orleans Collection Experience

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The Historic New Orleans Collection, as a museum and research center, seeks to document the developing profile of New Orleans. A walk through the fabled cemeteries or “Cities of the Dead” in New Orleans reveals the French and Spanish colonial demography. While the German, Irish, French, and Italian immigrants received the most attention during the nineteenth century, there were also Belgian, Hungarian, Yugoslav, and Dutch immigrants. The 1850 census indicates that Louisiana had a significant foreign-born population even then. Immigrants accounted for 26 percent of the population in Louisiana, far greater than that of neighboring states. During the twentieth century, Louisiana opened its arms to immigrants—especially Vietnamese, and Hispanics primarily from Central America.¹

The founders of The Historic New Orleans Collection (THNOC), General and Mrs. L. Kemper Williams, traveled extensively in foreign countries. General Williams, in particular, became deeply involved in the city’s international affairs, serving as an honorary consul-general and working to establish the International Trade Mart.\footnote{General Williams served as Honorary Consul of Monaco and was an active member of the International Trade Mart in New Orleans. See obituary in \textit{Times Picayune}, 18 November 1971 (Section 1, page 1, column 4), and the \textit{New Orleans States-Item}, 18 November 1971, (Section 1, page 4, column 7).} As a collector, General Williams acquired material documenting the region’s European heritage through maps, books, and manuscripts. He also did something unusual for a gentleman collector of the 1950s and 1960s—he collected microfilm from foreign repositories.\footnote{Francisco Bouligny, “Memoria,” from the Biblioteca Nacional de España.}

In keeping with the founders’ interests, an international component appropriately continues in both THNOC’s museum and Williams Research Center today. A major program focuses on the efforts to document the French and Spanish role in the development of the region through microfilming programs and to promote these resources to prospective users. The work in both France and Spain rests firmly upon the shoulders of other institutions and archivists who began the documentation task. For French heritage documentation, microfilm comes from the Centre des Archives Outre-Mer of the Archives Nationales of France, the Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, and the Archives of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères of France; and for Spanish heritage, primarily the Archivo General de Indias and the Archivo Nacional de Cuba. The presence of these microfilms from the archives of France, Spain, and Cuba make an incredible wealth of information on colonial and nineteenth-century Louisiana available to scholars.
THNOC became involved in international microfilming projects during 1983, and the "marketing" of those collections began shortly thereafter. This article presents an overview of the marketing and outreach programs that THNOC has developed to ensure the promotion and use of its microfilmed foreign documentary resources. It examines the lessons learned in the decade the public programs evolved at THNOC's Williams Research Center and evaluates to a small extent the success of the programs. As a preliminary, it will review the efforts in France and in Spain, which began many decades ago to document the activities of those two empires in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

**French Heritage Documentation**

In the case of France, the fundamental work is the *Calendar of Manuscripts in Paris Archives and Libraries Relating to the History of the Mississippi Valley to 1803* edited by N. M. Miller Surrey.\(^4\) In a monumental effort, Surrey listed and presented a brief English summary of every eighteenth-century document concerning the Mississippi Valley in the archives and libraries of Paris. The origins of the volume dated to 1907, when various historical societies and state agencies of the Mississippi Valley began planning to explore the archives and libraries of Paris. In an effort to avoid unnecessary duplication, the American Historical Association formed a committee to coordinate the effort. The chairman of the committee was Dunbar Rowland, director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.\(^5\)

As evidenced in the Surrey *Calendar*, the primary series of correspondence in the Archives Nationales of France dealing with *La Louisiane* is the *Correspondance arrivée de la Louisiane*. It is commonly referred to as the "C13"


\(^5\) Ibid., iii.
series and includes correspondence sent from Louisiana to France. In 1970, the Foreign Copying Program of the Library of Congress undertook the microfilming of that critical series. Fortunately, the microfilm is now available at several U.S. institutions, including THNOC, and can be purchased directly from the French National Archives. In the 1980s, Marie-Antoinette Menier, Etienne Tailimite, and Gilbert de Forges published a two-volume guide specifically to the C13 series.

While the Surrey Calendar has stood the test of time, there are challenges facing archivists and researchers today. In the course of the 1980s, at the direction of the Ministry of Culture, the Archives de France reorganized its dependency, the Archives Nationales. For years, much of its material concerning the French overseas possessions resided either in the Section Outre Mer (commonly referred to as Rue Oudinot) or in the national archives main complex on Rue Francs Bourgeois. Authorities decided to consolidate all materials in the national archives relating to the French overseas possessions and to locate them in a new archival facility in Aix-en-Provence, known as the Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer (CAOM). While there is an advantage to such a dedicated facility, Aix-en-Provence is distant from Paris, and not having a direct train link between the two complicates travel.

Although materials such as the Atlas de Moreau de St-Mery and relevant maps and plans from the Depot des Fortifications et Colonies had been obtained on microfilm from the “old” Section Outre-Mer, THNOC decided it should strengthen its efforts to obtain microfilm of other portions of the French National Archives related to Louisiana transferred from Paris to the CAOM. To that end, THNOC em-

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6 See introduction to reel 1 of the microfilm of the C13 series, Archives de France.

ployed a graduate student in 1999 to conduct a pilot project to double-check the entries of the Surrey Calendar for material transferred from the National Archives in Paris to the new facility in Aix-en-Provence. The pilot project resulted in the acquisition of microfilm of the D series, important for military records, and the G series, important for census records. THNOC currently is developing a pilot project to enter the Surrey Calendar into a database that will contain any corrections found, give revised locations for documents, indicate microfilmed materials, and note the availability of microfilmed materials in the United States.

THNOC also is becoming more familiar with the portion of the French National Archives known as archives privées, which are personal papers of families and individuals deposited in that institution. An excellent example of this is the Archive de Famille Duparc. During the nineteenth century, the family enjoyed close ties to Louisiana and, in particular, Laura Plantation.

Beginning in 1994, THNOC turned its attention to the records relating to Louisiana maintained in the archives of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, which is separate from the Archives Nationales. Documentation is divided between the Archives Historiques of the Ministry located in Paris and the Centre d’Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN). Basically, the difference between the two repositories is that the Parisian archives contains material


9 Ibid., 81–87.

10 Ibid., 518–28.


12 For an introduction to the organization of these archives see Paul M. Pitman, A Short Guide to the Archives of the Quai d’Orsay (Paris: Association des Amis des Archives Diplomatiques, 1993).
generated primarily in Paris, and the CADN houses documents generated by the various overseas offices of the ministry. The CADN houses the archives of the Consulate General of France in New Orleans. The purpose of this THNOC microfilming project was to make accessible for research in the United States the archives of the New Orleans-based Consul General of France from 1804 to 1918.

These records document France's continuing interest not only in New Orleans but also the entire region for which the French consulate was responsible during that period: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. The 631 bundles of correspondence and thematic dossiers document many areas of social, political, economic, and cultural history. A vast, unexplored scholarly resource about regional history is now available. Students of diplomatic history can also study the changes in the functioning of such consulates from the Napoleonic period, the Bourbon Restoration, the U.S. Civil War, and World War I. A descriptive catalogue of the archives by Elizabeth de Grimoïard is currently at press. A second portion of the archives of the Consulate General of France in New Orleans is the personal dossiers, which document the activity of thirty-five thousand French citizens resident in the region during the same time period.

SPANISH HERITAGE DOCUMENTATION

The work accomplished in Spain rests upon the pioneering efforts of Roscoe Hill and his *Descriptive Catalogue of the Documents Relating to the History of the United States in the Papeles Procedentes de Cuba deposited in the*  

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14 CADN has prepared a database to this particular resource. Efforts are currently underway to make the database available via the Internet. THNOC is preparing to microfilm this portion of the archives.
Archivo General de Indias. Documentation concerning Louisiana is found in a wide variety of archives. The most important of these is the Archivo General de Indias, which dates from 1777. Historian Juan Bautista Muñoz, who had been commissioned to write a history of the Spanish colonies, was challenged by documents being cared for in a variety of castles and institutions. He realized that it would be highly useful to gather the necessary documents in one place. Upon his recommendation, Carlos III united the vast majority of documents relating to the colonial empire in the Archivo General de Indias.

Fortunately for Louisiana, in the 1950s, civic leaders urged Loyola University of New Orleans to microfilm Louisiana records in the Archivo General de Indias. In 1961 representatives of Loyola University met with representatives of the Spanish archives to discuss such a project. The Spaniards wisely stipulated that the documents had to be catalogued before being microfilmed. The two major collections of documents were the Santo Domingo papers and the Cuban papers, so called because of their provenance. Roscoe Hill already had described the Cuban papers in his now classic Descriptive Catalogue. The project would begin with the Santo Domingo papers, and therefore, a published guide to those papers was a precondition to microfilming the actual documents. Thus, José de la Peña y Camara; Ernest J. Burrus, S.J.; Charles Edwards O'Neill, S.J.; and María Theresa García Fernández prepared a two-

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volume guide, entitled *Catálogo de Documentos del Archivo General de Indias, Sección V, Gobierno, Audiencia de Santo Domingo sobre la Luisiana.*\(^{18}\) The Loyola project, under the direction of Charles E. O’Neill, had enormous implications for the scholarly world. Prior to the Loyola project, the policy of Spanish archives toward the copying of documents was highly restrictive. Permission was normally granted to copy or film a few selected items from a bundle of documents, but never an entire bundle of documents. The Loyola project resulted in not only an entire bundle of documents being microfilmed but also an entire section of an archive. The Loyola initiative led to a new and progressive attitude. Clearly, a small, regional institution can change, in a most positive fashion, the long established policies of a major institution.\(^{19}\)

With the completion of the Santo Domingo papers, Loyola embarked upon the microfilming of the Cuban records. They worked in association with Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, represented by Paul Hoffman. Eventually, Loyola withdrew, and The Historic New Orleans Collection staff replaced them. The microfilming of these two important sources for Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley history was a massive project. The success of these cooperating institutions demonstrates the importance of regional cooperative ventures.\(^{20}\)

\(^{18}\) (Madrid and New Orleans: Dirección General de Archivos y Bibliotecas and Loyola University, 1968).

\(^{19}\) An indication of the impact of the Loyola initiative can be gained through Cristina Uson and Juan Ramón Romero, *Inventario General de Fondos en Microfilm y Microficha* (1952–1992), (Madrid: Servicio de Reproducción de Documentos y Dirección de Archivos Estatales, 1993).

In addition to the documents THNOC obtained on microfilm from the Archivo General de Indias, it independently pursued the microfilming of materials from a variety of other Spanish archival institutions. Principal among these were the Archivo General de Simancas, the Archivo Histórico Nacional, the Biblioteca Nacional, the Real Academia de Historia, the Biblioteca del Palacio Real, the Museo Naval, the Servicio Histórico Militar, the Servicio Geográfico del Ejercito, and the Archivo Histórico of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the end, THNOC acquired more than eleven hundred reels of microfilm documenting Spanish Louisiana. These materials cover almost every imaginable topic.

With the completion of work in Spain, responding to requests from scholars, THNOC undertook the microfilming of Louisiana documents in the Archivo Nacional de Cuba. The long-term efforts of U.S. scholars and citizens to have access to these documents can be traced to the nineteenth century and, in the twentieth century, to 1914 when the Texas State Library began a project to prepare type-scripts of a limited number of selected documents. Fortunately, THNOC was able to secure a microfilm copy of the *Fondo Floridas*, the primary source in that archives for the history of the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico. In subsequent microfilming, staff secured copies of other portions of the Cuban National Archives that relate to Louisiana but had escaped the attention of bibliographers previ-

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ously. Today, THNOC's work with the Cuban National Archives benefits other U.S. institutions, such as Johns Hopkins University, the Northeast Document Conservation Center, and the University of Florida, that are establishing microfilm projects and other joint ventures. A particular advantage, in these and all other new microfilming projects, is the production of a security copy, permitting other institutions to obtain a microfilm copy of these unique resources at a reduced cost.

**PROMOTING USE OF THE MICROFILMED RESOURCES**

Once these important resources were available on microfilm, THNOC began to address the need to market and promote their use. First, the acquired materials appeared in a special issue of *Manuscripts Division Update*, published by THNOC between 1982 and 1995. THNOC also participated in surveys of such material, most notably the survey conducted by the Library of Congress as part of its quincentenary program celebrating the discovery of the New World. The resulting publication by Guadalupe Jiménez Codinach is a basic research tool for an individual wanting to do research in the United States on Spanish history. Staff presentations at all kinds of events further advertised the availability of these resources. In addition,

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25 Jiménez Codinach, *The Hispanic World*.

articles in a variety of journals were critical to the dissemination of information on these projects.  

The evolution of the Williams Research Center (WRC) itself provided additional opportunities to market these resources. In 1999 THNOC established a program entitled, Third Saturday at the WRC. Held every month from February through October, this ongoing program promotes the use of the WRC’s book, manuscript, and pictorial resources. Each session focuses on how THNOC staff members care for and make material accessible to the public, but each has a specific theme. THNOC has routinely included specific Third Saturday sessions to train researchers on the use of microfilm obtained from foreign archives. The sessions are open to the public free of charge, but to limit the number of participants, reservations are required. The sessions are announced in THNOC’s newsletter, and postcards and press releases are sent to appropriate university departments and the print media. Staff members also market each session to a “targeted” audience, which would have a vested interest in the topic. Videos of these Third Saturday training programs are available in the WRC reading room. They are popular with researchers coming to use a specific resource for the first time and as a training tool for new staff members.

The materials gathered through the foreign microfilming program attract not only serious scholars but also genealogists. In 1999, THNOC staff, recognizing the potential value of the genealogist as an ally, decided to launch an annual genealogical lecture. The lecture focuses on a specific topic and introduces genealogists to the world of research with material from foreign archives. The first workshop featured France, serving as an introduction to the

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The workshop leader also focused on the internal structure of actual documents, which is critical to being able to understand the content. The second workshop was to train non-Spanish-reading researchers how to read Spanish sacramental records. Again, through an analysis of the structure of documents, researchers learned how to locate the information they needed with only a minimal reading knowledge of Spanish.  

Another way THNOC cultivates the use of these materials is through the annual Williams Research Center symposium. Held each January, THNOC presented the first symposium on the occasion of the opening of the center in 1996. Beginning with the third symposium, they have had a definite international component. In 1997 THNOC was fortunate to acquire the archives of Arsène Lacarrière Latour, who recorded events of the Battle of New Orleans in his *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814–15*. The 1998 symposium gathered a group of scholars from the United States and France to examine the distinctive contribution of Lacarrière Latour to the historiography of the Battle of New Orleans.  

In the following year, the symposium was “The Pearl of the Antilles and the Crescent City: Historical Connections between Havana & New Orleans.” Designed to commemorate THNOC’s completion of the microfilming of the

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*Fondo Floridas* of the Cuban National Archives, it presented scholars from the United States and Cuba. A featured peer institution abroad, in this case the National Archives of Cuba in Havana, repeated the symposium. Based on the success of that particular program, the 2000 symposium, “France and Louisiana: Journée d’Etude,” highlighted cultural relations between France and the United States. The cornerstone of this symposium was the completion of the micro-filming of the previously mentioned *dossiers nominatifs* of the Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes. In partnership, the Musée de Art Americain in Giverny repeated the program in France.

Another new feature that year was the addition of a study tour to France in association with the repetition of the symposium. Concentrating on historical ties between Louisiana and France, it included a Louisiana history tour of Paris and a visit to the last residence of Bienville, founder of the city of New Orleans. Curators of Louisiana documents helped arrange special tours for the Treaty Room of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, the U.S. Ambassador’s residence (built by the Baroness Pontalba of New Orleans), and the Musée Carnavalet, the museum of

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32 Among the documents displayed in the Treaty Room on that visit were several critical treaties involving Louisiana, including “Acte de cession par le roi de France de la Louisiane à l’Espagne, signé à Fontainebleau le 3 novembre 1762,” “Traité d’amitié et e commerce entre la France et les Etats-Unis, signé à Paris le 6 février 1778,” “Traité entre le roi d’Espagne et la République français concernant l’agrandissement du duché de Parme et la rétrocession de la Louisiane à la France, signé à Saint-Ildefonse le 1 octobre 1800,” and “Ratification du traité de cession de la Louisiane du 30 avril 1803 par Thomas Jefferson, Washington le 21 octobre 1803.”

the city of Paris. A high point of the tour was a visit to the Institut de France and its famed Bibliotéque Mazarin.

The symposium for 2001, “Bourbon Louisiana: Reflections of the Spanish Enlightenment,” showcased holdings of THNOC—specifically the paintings of Salazar, a Spanish portrait painter active in colonial Louisiana, and the textual resources available at the WRC for the study of Spanish Louisiana. Building upon the success of earlier years, the organizers scheduled a repetition at the Universidad de Alcalá. A study tour focused on the institutions of Bourbon Spain, such as the Archivo General de Indias, the Real Academia de Bellas Artes, and palaces associated with Louisiana history, such as La Granja, where the treaties transferring Louisiana from Spain to France were signed.

ASSESSMENT

THNOC staff members have discovered that creating microfilm of Louisiana’s colonial records was only the first step in making them available for scholars. Efforts at marketing these materials to both the scholarly and general audiences through a variety of promotional programming require comprehensive teamwork. THNOC continually draws upon the talents of the staff in the publications department and the public relations office and of the institution’s program officer and seeks the full support and leadership of the director and board of directors.

The complicated history of the provenance of the records made international cooperation a necessity not only for scholars but also for archivists in both the parent country and the former colony. Just as THNOC developed ex-


tensive programs to expose researchers to the new materials and to train them in their use, it also has been necessary to train the reference archivists to service the material.\(^{36}\)

Linguistic skills, exposure to both diplomatics and paleography, and a working knowledge of colonial administrative and archival procedures are essential requirements for the reference staff. At the same time, staff has adapted existing finding aids to the microfilm editions to make usage of the material as simple as possible. Indeed, the goal has been to make them self-explanatory.

For scholars, the results of THNOC’s multi-faceted approach in developing and promoting the regional foreign copying program stand as evidence of the value of such an integrated approach. Monographs including Morris S. Arnold’s *Colonial Arkansas 1686–1804: A Social and Cultural History*\(^{37}\) and his *The Rumble of the Distant Drum: The Quapaws and Old World Newcomers, 1673–1804*,\(^{38}\) Carl J. Ekbert’s *French Roots in the Illinois Country, The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times*,\(^{39}\) Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of

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\(^{37}\) (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 1991).

\(^{38}\) (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000).

\(^{39}\) (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1998).
Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century,\textsuperscript{40} Thomas Ingersoll’s Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans,\textsuperscript{41} and Daniel H. Usner, Jr.’s Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783 are but a few samples of publications from work in these microfilmed resources.\textsuperscript{42}

While the symposia were created to bring scholars together, the general public’s response has been most favorable. The WRC reading room (which was converted for a day into an auditorium) hosted the first symposium. The second and third symposia moved to nearby facilities. However, in an effort to emphasize the WRC, staff members determined in 1999 that it was better to return to its reading room. The advance registration in 1999 indicated that approximately 200 people would attend. With seating for 250 arranged, 340 participants arrived on the day of the actual symposium. The fifth symposium, therefore, moved to a larger venue—the ballroom of a nearby hotel. Again, the number of participants (500) on the day of the event exceeded that of the pre-registrations (410). A key factor in the success of the symposia is that it is always held at the same time of year, either the third or fourth Saturday of January.

The first five symposia were free and open to the public by reservation. As they grew in size and scope, it became necessary to place modest controls on further growth via a pre-registration fee of $25 and a registration fee of $30 on the day of the event. Registrants are aware that fees do not cover programming costs but assist with refreshments, a reception, and educational materials contained in the registration packets. Symposia funding comes from a wide variety of sponsors, in addition to THNOC.

\textsuperscript{40} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

\textsuperscript{41} (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{42} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990).
In an effort to improve the content of the symposia, THNOC successfully added several features. A bookshop sells books authored by the various speakers, as well as other appropriate books. Participants receive a list of readings recommended by the speakers. As designed, the symposia videotapes are accessible only to researchers in the WRC reading room. Beginning with the 2001 symposium, however, the tapes are available for sale, and regional, public access cable television will air them.

While the first six symposia had a sharply focused, accompanying exhibition in the WRC, the 2002 symposium—“The French Empire in North America: From Canada to Louisiana, A Shared History”—had an exhibition (“This Vast Country of Louisiana: The Founding Years”) in THNOC’s main exhibition gallery. To underscore the relation of Louisiana with Canada, the accompanying exhibition traced the history of the Acadian immigration from Canada to Louisiana.

Related symposium activities foster interchange between speakers and staff. These include a small “get acquainted” reception for staff and speakers on the Friday afternoon prior to the symposium, and a light lunch for both on the day of the symposium. While a seemingly small “thank you” for weeks of exceptional work, THNOC staff members enjoy these opportunities for educational exchange and association. Whether scholarly endeavor or public programming, THNOC’s overall investment in its international ventures has already yielded success in engaging its patrons and archivists in a global community.

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