

# Doc · u · ments

This is the first column on government documents to appear in *North Carolina Libraries*. Although a column as such might not appear in every issue of *NCL*, we hope to have an article, reviews, or news about documents in it. To do this, we need your help. We invite manuscripts from persons interested in documents, whether or not they are documents librarians. We want to bring information about documents to people unfamiliar with them just as much as we want to contribute to an exchange of information among documents librarians. A newsletter of the NCLA Documents section—the *Docket*—already exists for its members, but in this column, we hope to reach a wider audience. A goal of documents librarians is to bring the information in documents to whoever might use it—other librarians, students, homemakers, farmers, business people, teachers, or whatever occupation.

## What Is a Document?

In defining a “document,” we mean a publication of a governmental body—municipal, state, federal, or international—as distinct from manuscripts, which are “documents” in the dictionary sense: “a written or printed paper bearing the original, official, or legal form of something, and which can be used to furnish decisive evidence or information.” Documents librarians do, however, consider maps and microforms related to their work. Many government agencies also publish maps, and documents are increasingly becoming available in microform. Most of the content of this column will be concerned with state and federal documents, for these are the areas of greatest interest in the state.

Documents are published on virtually every topic of general as well as specialized interest: baby care, food, aging, business, zoning, mining, fishing, archaeology, space, and many others. They are produced from public money (our taxes) for the purpose of informing, instructing, or reporting the work of the legislators we elect, the civil servants who provide services for us, and the governor or president who heads our government. We have the right as taxpayers, the responsibility as citizens, and the obligation as librarians to learn what our government does and to bring this information to our readers.

## Depository Libraries

Many documents published by the Federal government are distributed to public and college or university libraries designated by the Superintendent of Documents as depository libraries. In the state of North Carolina, we have 32 depository libraries where anyone may read or borrow depository documents, including a regional depository—the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—which is responsible for collecting all depository

documents and acting as a back-up for the other depositories. (For a list of the depository libraries in the state, write to me at the J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27834.) A depository law—Chapter 19, Title 44, *United States Code*—is the present basis for authority for printing and binding and specifies depository distribution to libraries. This law is in the process of review, however, and hearings have been planned for the spring of 1979.

### North Carolina State Documents

Documents from N. C. state agencies present completely different problems: The state has a depository law, in N. C. *General statutes* 147-50, but it places the burden of obtaining a document upon the libraries, which must request depository copies from the separate agencies. But just learning that a particular document exists is difficult, for there is no current listing of state documents. By the time they are cataloged and listed in the checklist from the State Library, *North Carolina publications*, the immediate need for them has passed, and they might be out of print. There is no central office which distributes state documents; in most departments, each publication is available from the specific agency which published it, and it might even be unknown to another agency in the same department. Some departments maintain mailing lists, but this is an exception. The problem is compounded when new departments or agencies are organized or when new personnel begin to work in an agency, for they do not realize the importance of public access to documents.

In the 1979 session of the state legislature, House Bill 241 has been introduced to improve cataloging and distribution of documents by the State Library. The bill might be amended to provide for routine depository distribution to selected libraries in the state. The problem will be to convince legislators that this bill is needed and that it is in the public interest, not just for librarians, that this bill become law. By the time this column appears in *NCL*, we might already know the fate of this bill; let us hope it will have been passed. If it is still pending, we should urge our legislators to vote for it.

In the next issue, we hope to have a report on the workshop on state documents held at the State Library on March 23 and news from the *Docket* which will be sent to members of the Documents section in the interim.

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