

**MANUSCRIPTS COPYING SCHEME OF
THE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

by

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Since July 1968 the Library of New South Wales has engaged in a program of copying the manuscripts in the Mitchell and Dixson Libraries, with the aim of preserving originals by saving the wear and tear which results from frequent handling by readers and photographers.

For each manuscript copied the Library obtains a 35mm. negative microfilm and a Xerox copy produced by the Copyflo process. The originals, when copied, are retired from use. The Xerox copies, plastic bound, are issued to readers in place of the originals and are also used by the Photographic Section of the Library for further copying (by contact Xerox) to fulfil orders for Xerox copies. The microfilms are filed in a special series as master negatives and are used only to supply orders for positive microfilms of whole volumes.

The Xerox copies are printed on paper 13" deep, and are reproduced in facsimile or near-facsimile size, seldom being reduced by more than 10% and only occasionally being enlarged. Where manuscripts include illustrations and their importance warrants it, prints are made, usually 6" x 8", and bound into a separate volume which is shelved beside the copy of the manuscript. Sometimes a second print is made for filing in quick reference files. In addition, direct duplicating negatives are made and filed in aperture cards: from these, prints can be supplied to readers.

The illustrations are copied on special film which is then spliced to the end of the reel containing the manuscript they illustrate, with two feet of film separating the two parts, which can be unspliced and respliced if a positive film of either part is to be made.

Each volume prepared for copying is checked to make sure that every page is numbered. The page number provides a point of reference for those who use the volume, makes it easier to check the film for completeness, and ensures that the Xerox volume is bound in the right order. Title pages are prepared for each volume, showing title and dates of the volume, call number, reel number, date copied, name of the commercial firm responsible, and noting restrictions on further copying of the manuscript. A tag showing a scale in inches and centimetres and with brief identifying information is prepared and photographed on each frame of the film. When an illustration cannot be paged without defacing it, a caption showing its place in the volume is prepared and photographed with the illustration. Usually, one page occupies a frame, but small volumes may be

copied two pages to a frame and large pages sometimes are copied in sections. A frame number (composed from auctioneer's tickets) appears on each frame. Frequently, more than one manuscript volume is copied on one reel, and a collective title page showing contents and indicating the frame numbers containing them is photographed twice at the end of the reel; one copy is then spliced on to the beginning of the reel.

Pages which are blank in the original are not copied; a list of these is compiled and photographed after the title page. If relevant, a list of pages which consist of illustrations copied but shelved separately is also compiled and copied at this point.

Before the volumes are sent to the photographer it is necessary to ensure that they are in suitable condition for copying, that fragile or torn pages are repaired, and that volumes are not so tightly bound as to prevent completeness of copying. Occasionally volumes have to be completely remounted.

It may be deduced that the work of preparing volumes for copying is considerable. Further work is necessary when films and Xeroxes are returned from the photographer. The Xerox rolls are cut and trimmed and made into buckram covered plastic bound volumes in the bindery at the library. Xeroxes (and films, if necessary) are checked for completeness, and for clarity of reproduction. For odd pages which have not copied well it may be necessary to make a photographic print, and copy this by contact Xerox so that all pages in a volume are on the same type of paper and suitable for plastic binding.

The process of preparing the volumes and checking the copies is time consuming, and at a copying rate of about 1000 frames a week takes up three quarters of the time of a junior library assistant and a good deal of the time of the supervising Microfilms Officer. Other specialised staff are sometimes involved, for example, in making decisions about the copying of illustrations.

The 100 or so reels and approximately the same number of volumes so far produced represent only a small part of the Mitchell and Dixson collections; it is hoped eventually to have copies of all manuscripts. Naturally, the manuscripts chosen to be copied first are those considered particularly valuable or known to be most in demand. When the Library receives requests for Xerox copies or films of more than half a volume, these requests are placed on the scheme and the usual copies are made for the Library at the same time as the readers' requests are fulfilled.

Although expensive in terms of staff time, the scheme is a worthwhile investment. The originals are preserved. Readers are provided with a copy which is if anything easier to handle and read than the original, and which can be readily replaced when worn out. Runs of positive microfilm, properly referenced, can be produced quickly from the master negative and in time of emergency the films, which form a segregated series, could be quickly and easily removed to a place of safety.