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## Ainsworth Rand Spofford and His Contributions to the Library of Congress

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### Abstract

This paper will show the growth and expansion of the Library of Congress. Through the co-operation of Mr. Spofford and Congress, the Library is one of the finest in the world. In order to survive and grow, many obstacles had to be overcome. The two main ones were: The copyright law and the new classification system. However, more material had to be obtained as well as a new building constructed with a staff to distribute the materials. This paper will show that even though Mr. Spofford had many hardships he did not give up.

Ainsworth Rand Spofford  
and his Contributions  
to the Library of Congress

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Presented to the  
Faculty of the Library Science Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
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Master of Arts

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## Introduction

The following paper will show the contributions of Ainsworth Rand Spofford. Due to his foresight and knowledge, the Library of Congress expanded and grew to its place of fame in society. The changes set forth by Mr. Spofford were:

1. New Classification System.
2. Building of a new library which would not only house present materials, but which could reach a capacity of 4, 500, 000 volumes.
3. Increased the amount of books and materials to 10 times the amount when he took office.
4. Helped enact the copyright law in order that all copyrights must pass through and be kept at the Library of Congress.
5. Increased the staff from 7 to 185 with an additional 45 members in the copyright office.

## Purpose

This paper will show the growth and expansion of the Library of Congress. Through the co-operation of Mr. Spofford and Congress, the Library is one of the finest in the world. In order to survive and grow, many obstacles had to be overcome. The two main ones were: The copyright law and the new classification system. However, more material had to be obtained as well as a new building constructed with a staff to distribute the materials. This paper will show that even though Mr. Spofford had many hardships he did not give up.

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Ainsworth Rand Spofford was born at Gilmanton, New Hampshire, September 12, 1825. His early schooling was obtained by a private tutor. Thus, with such a good English and classical background his love for books and literature would later be directed to that of his career.

In 1844 he went to Cincinnati, Ohio where he became a bookseller and a publisher. In 1859 he became the assistant editor of the Cincinnati "Daily Commercial."

In 1861 Mr. Spofford moved to Washington, D. C. where he was appointed first assistant to the Library of Congress. On December 31, 1864 President Lincoln appointed Mr. Spofford to the post of Librarian of Congress. He held that post for the next 32 years. His program was to expand the services to Congress as well as the entire nation.

Besides being fond of books and literary work, Mr. Spofford had been a missionary in some of the western states where he founded many churches. He also published catalogues of the Library of Congress; "The American Almanac and Treasury of Facts, an annual compiled from official sources from 1878-1889; The Library of Choice Literature (ten volumes 1881-89); Library of Wit and Humor (1884); Manual of Parliamentary Rules 1884."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>National Cyclopedia of Biography, (New York: James T. White, c1892), Vol. XVI, pp. 477-8.

## 1. New Classification System.

The last general catalogue was printed in 1861. This work covered all the material up to the close of 1859. Four other catalogues has been issued prior to this one, covering the years of 1815, 1831, 1839, and 1849. After the last issue of the catalogue in 1861, approximately 20,000 volumes had been added to the Library of Congress along with five annual supplements to the main catalogue. Mr. Spofford's idea was to consolidate all these supplements into one catalogue and to help simplify the old method by one alphabetical arrangement.

Prior to Mr. Spofford being appointed the sixth Librarian to the Library of Congress, a classification system had been prepared by Thomas Jefferson and was based upon Lord Bacon's division of knowledge. This system was fine for a small library such as that of Jefferson's. However, it was totally unsuited to readers of a large library, mainly because it was not designed as a bibliographical system. In fact, it covered many areas of human knowledge in a scientific arrangement. There were some 179 titles in the last catalogue issued, arranged in an arbitrary sequence without an index. Therefore, the majority of the people did not study this system in detail and could not use it very effectively. This system was abandoned for one which would classify the works according to the names of the authors. Works that were anonymous were to be classified as to the subject they dealt with.



The anonymous works in many cases before had been entered under the first work of that work itself.

Thus, Mr. Spofford set up the following proposal:

"To complete the plan adopted, the present alphabetical catalogue of authors will soon be followed by an analytical catalogue of subjects, also arranged alphabetically, and covering the whole field which the works embraced in the present volume illustrate. Those consulting the Library will thus have before them the means of determining, by a single reference, whether it contains any book of which the subject is known."<sup>2</sup>

This was Mr. Spofford's first edition in an effort for a new catalogue which was to be followed by a second catalogue in 1869.

In a second catalogue a system was set up of cross reference by alphabetical arrangement. Though this system seemed to be difficult at first, people were able to find all the information on a given subject within a short period of time. Although many other systems could have been adopted, they would no doubt have confused the person rather than to clarify the situation. The whole idea of this system was to be able to find information on any given subject in the easiest way. No doubt prior to this, many hours had been spent looking for material.

Mr. Spofford realized that this system was not perfect as it would take people a long time to get acquainted with these new ideas.

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<sup>2</sup>William Dawson Johnston, History of the Library of Congress (New York: Kraus Reprint Corp., 1967), pp. 365-67.

He stated the problems that many would have with this new system in this way:

"The imperfections of the catalogue are many, and they represent not only the limitations of the Library which is here catalogued, but defects of a plan and arrangement which would have been obviated by more time devoted to the publication. But the printing of some kind of a catalogue of subjects with the least possible delay being deemed a necessity, these discrepancies and faults of execution could not wholly be avoided. The work is presented, therefore, as but an approximation to a thoroughly digested index of subjects which it is hoped to issue hereafter, incorporating the numerous valuable accessions to the Library which have been made while this work was passing through the press."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the Library of Congress was classified so that one uniform system was established.

The Library of Congress did not at this time have an elaborate card catalogue like some of the other libraries of that time. However, there was an author catalogue which had materials posted on each card describing the author. These had been clipped from order magazines and pasted on large cards. The reason Mr. Spofford did not have a more complex card catalogue at this time was due to the small staff and the problem of space. This system was not the best, but it was certainly better than nothing at all.

## 2. Building the new Library.

One of the problems that was soon to be discovered in the Library itself was that of space. In 1865 there were some

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<sup>3</sup>Johnston, Op. Cit., p. 366.

82,000 volumes and by 1870 there were 237,000 volumes. Several factors were responsible for this increase in materials. The two main reasons were: Any materials sent to the Library itself could be mailed free of postage; the Smithsonian Institute had also given the Library of Congress approximately 40,000 volumes. The materials had increased at a very fast rate. Mr. Spofford also concentrated on fully developing the collections to a peak by purchasing rare items and entire private collections. A great national library was in the making.

With all this additional material the Library was soon overflowing. In his report in 1872, Mr. Spofford complained: "There is no possible place for the arrangement or filing of the current periodicals, many of which, therefore, remain comparatively useless for reference until they are bound."<sup>4</sup> Because of the lack of space many of the materials were piled into every nook and corner. Thus, these books, magazines, and pamphlets did not have the fire protection that the rest of the Library afforded. Mr. Spofford was accused of doing this to impress the Congressmen in order that he might get more space for the Library.

Finally when Mr. Spofford was unable to obtain an additional amount of space, he proposed a new building just for the Library itself. This idea did not meet with approval so that he then proposed an addition on the west side of the Capitol.

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<sup>4</sup>Gene Gurney, The Library of Congress (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1966), pp. 12-14.

With space conditions being as bad as they were it was 15 years before Congress decided to appropriate money for a new building. However, after the money was appropriated it was still another 11 years before the actual construction began. Although this meant a hardship on Mr. Spofford and his staff, they carried on their work as best they could under these circumstances.

In 1886 Congress finally appropriated \$500,000 for the construction of the new library building. The building was to be in a setting just east of the Capitol itself. Without a question of doubt, the Library of Congress would not be in the capacity it is today had it not been for Mr. Spofford's careful planning. He did not plan a library for just the material present at that time, but had enough forethought to allow enough space for the years to come. The Library itself covered about 4 acres and was capable of holding nearly 3 million volumes. Not only was the building a fine piece of work, but the reading rooms were well lighted, the shelving was that of steel stacks, conveyor belts were used for more convenience along with inter-office speaking tubes. The Library was equipped with the finest facilities of its day.

When the time came for the Library of Congress to leave its old quarters the following materials were moved: 750,000 books; 18,000 volumes of newspapers and a great many magazines of which many were not bound; 200,000 musical scores and songs;

approximately 250,000 engravings, etchings, photographs, and other works; along with 40,000 charts and maps; and many types of manuscripts. All this material was moved during the summer and fall of 1897. The material was moved with wheel barrows to horse-drawn wagons from the Capitol to the new Library of Congress. Great care was taken during this operation to make sure that the books were kept in the exact order even though some of them had to be brushed free of dust. Workmen placed them on shelves or put them in storage. This was a big task as the material had to be removed from some 18 places in the old Library as well as three rooms and four storage rooms. Some of the material had been stored where the gas meters were in the sub-basement of the Capitol. After the move was completed in November of 1897, the Library that had once started out with 11 hair trunks and a map case was now estimated to be at some 800 tons of materials.

3. Where all the added materials came from.

When Mr. Spofford had first taken over the Library back in 1864, there were some 82,000 volumes. However, now the Library consisted of some 750,000 books along with many magazines, charts maps, etc. Where did all this material come from? The Smithsonian Institute in 1866 had transferred some 40,000 volumes to the Library.

"In 1867 the present system of international exchange was established; and Congress bought for \$100,000 the Peter Force collection of 60,000 volumes of Americana."<sup>5</sup>

Also there had been a program which had been handed down from the Smithsonian Institute. This program was the exchange of all kinds of publications and transactions from foreign nations. The books were transferred from the Smithsonian Institute as soon as the Library of Congress took over this program. Thus, a wealth of material came in this way. Today there are some 36,000 different volumes coming in from this program.

Still another source of material was from the copyright program of 1870. The registry of copyright was placed with the Library of Congress. Therefore, two copies of each book that was copyrighted in the United States had to be placed in the Library.

Another source that was a valuable asset to the Library itself was a law library. "The Law Library of James Petigru was obtained about the same time, (1867) along with the papers of some of the early Presidents, including Washington, Adams, and Jefferson."<sup>6</sup> This particular collection brought in some 24,000 separate volumes.

Thus, one can see that a lot of hard work and planning had gone into the building of this collection which had been

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<sup>5</sup>Arundell Esdaile, World's Greatest Libraries (London: Grafton & Co., 1934), p. 100.

<sup>6</sup>Elmer D. Johnson, A History of Libraries in the Western World (New York: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1965), p. 350.

slowly assembled. Had it not been for the foresight and knowledge of Mr. Spofford some of these valuable collections might have gone unnoticed. Mr. Spofford had increased the volumes of the Library to almost ten times as many as when he had taken office.

#### 4. The International Copyright Law.

In order to do things right Mr. Spofford realized that one of the most important items that he was to deal with in the Library of Congress was the copyright law. "When he found it, it was in a state of near paralysis, at the exhausted end of a long, confused, and disheartening struggle."<sup>7</sup> The situation was enough to make anyone throw up their hands in despair.

There had been some copyright legislation in these years; 1790, 1846, 1859, 1865, and 1867. During these years the place where all material was sent had been shifted from one agency to another, the methods of protecting the copyrighted materials themselves had changed from time to time, and what was to be copyrighted was amended many, many times. Compliance with these laws was done only by faith as failure to regard them was almost nonexistent. At the close of the Civil War the following situation existed:

"In order to get a work copyrighted, an author went to the nearest court district, filed a copy of the title page of his work, and gave the clerk a dollar."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Charles A. Goodrum, The Library of Congress (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

When the book had been published, the author sent a copy to the same clerk of the district court, who then sent it to the Patent Office in the Department of the Interior. Prior to this time the book itself had gone to the Department of the State, but the materials were taking up so much room that the law was changed so that it would read the Department of the Interior. The Patent Office was putting all this material in the basement in a simple storage fashion without any cataloging or classification of any kind. By the year 1870 there was thirty to forty thousand volumes just setting there in storage. The situation was simply at a standstill.

The clerks of the district courts were suppose to have sent the one dollar fee to the Patent Office, but most did not. Nothing was done about it as the Patent Office felt they should keep it for their trouble. Even in 1870 there were still no penalties being assesed, books were still being deposited, and the situation did not look very good. Everyone was very much upset by the way things were being taken care of, no one wanted to do anything about it except Mr. Spofford.

The great copyright law of 1870 read as follows: "All records and other things relating to copyrights and required by law to be preserved, shall be under the control of the Librarian of Congress, and that anyone claiming a copyright on any book, map chart, dramatic or musical composition, engraving cut, print, or photograph or negative thereof must



send two copies to the Librarian within ten days of its publication."<sup>9</sup> The penalties were now spelled out for those who did not comply and the Librarian was given full authority to demand the receipt of anything that carried the copyright statement, but which had not yet been filed.

Each piece of material would have to be acknowledged, recorded, and preserved. Although this would be quite a task for the Librarian, at least there was now one uniform system with which it was done. All the material which had been stored at the Department of the State and the Department of the Interior was also transferred to the Library of Congress. Both of these Departments were happy to help with the effort that was soon to give way to a great national library.

Thus, the copyright law which was approved March 3, 1891, and was to go into effect on July 1, 1891, was a measure of protection not only to writers and artists of the United States, but also of artists and authors of foreign citizenship. People of foreign lands were to be protected under this law as long as their books, photographs, chromos and lithographs were manufactured in the United States.

The copyright law as it existed saved the Library and the Librarian from embarrassment three separate ways:

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<sup>9</sup>Michael Harris, ed., Reader In American Library History (Washington, D.C.: Microcard Editions, 1971), p. 113.

1. It added materials to the Library itself not only in books, but in musical compositions and works of art.
2. It entailed foreign correspondence.
3. A weekly catalogue was kept of all publications.

One great problem that did arise even after this copyright law had been passed was the lack of new clerical help for the Librarian. A Register of Copyrights has been asked for, but to no avail. Thus, the responsibility was to fall on Mr. Spofford's shoulders.

#### 5. The changes in the staff of the Library.

Although there seems to be a conflict in the number of people Mr. Spofford started with in 1864, it is evident that the staff was not adequate. Some sources state that there were seven staff members while others insist that only 5 staff members were present at this time. The difference is no doubt that some sources did not count the two laborers as being on the Library staff. The seven persons consisted of the following: The Head Librarian, three library assistants, one messenger, and two laborers. Politics being somewhat the same as they are now it seems as though some of the professional staff had been dispersed because of the elections. Thus, only one professional member who was not disposed of because of the "Republican invasion" was C. H. W. Meehan. He continued to serve until 1872. However, he was on duty in the Law Library

downstairs which left only two regular librarians in the main reading room upstairs. Many times the Librarian was absent for many reasons, more especially those of an administrative type. The following is a summary of what these seven staff members received in the form of wages: "These seven men received in salaries the princely total of \$9,000, ranging from the absentee Librarian's \$2,160, through the assistants' \$1,800 and the messengers' 1140, to \$500 for the laborers who "did the chars."<sup>10</sup> At this time the Library's entire budget amounted to \$17,000 of which the remaining \$8,000 left was divided into the following areas: \$2,000 was set aside for the purchase of law books, \$5,000 for other books, and \$1,000 for contingent expenses. One can see that although this budget seems like a lot for this period of time much more would have to be funded in order to maintain a Library of any size. With a staff of only seven one cannot imagine how all the work could be accomplished. Had it not been that Mr. Spofford worked hard to convince Congress that not only would more money have to be appropriated, but also a much larger staff would have to be available to maintain such a collection the situation might have been a grave one.

John Russell Young was the 7th Librarian of Congress. He opened the new Library on November 1, 1897. The Library

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

which had been housed in the Capitol had been supported by Congress in 42 different positions. Congress now supported 108 positions in the new Library and Young decided to staff them by a plan submitted by Mr. Spofford. The personnel were to be divided into the following groups: central reading room, periodical department, the Law Library, and a copyright office. This copyright office was to later have a "Register." In addition to the above mentioned departments there was to be an art gallery, a music department, a manuscript department, a hall of charts and maps, and most important there was to be a cataloging department which would serve all units regardless of the purpose of the material or its format.

Mr. Young went into great detail when searching for people to staff this fine Library. He personally sought out some of the more famous librarians to staff his administrative positions. "His first appointment, to the continued distress of the profession, was Ainsworth Rand Spofford as Chief Assistant Librarian."<sup>11</sup> Mr. Spofford accepted this position without any regrets and worked very hard to make it a success. Some of the other positions were staffed by such people as James Christian Hanson from the University of Wisconsin to head the Cataloging Department, Arthur R. Kimball who had been the State Librarian of New Hampshire to head the Order Unit, Appleton P. C. Griffin from the Boston Public Library and Boston Atheneum to be Principal Assistant in the Reading Room, and

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<sup>11</sup> Goodrum, Op. Cit., pp. 33-4.

Dr. Herbert Friedenwald who was a specialist of records in the field of the Continental Congress and the Revolutionary War was to head the ~~Mam~~uscripts Department.

### Conclusion

When Mr. Spofford started out he had only a staff of 7 people which included himself. Although he himself was a part of the staff of the new Library, it had increased to almost 185 people with 45 people in the Copyright Office. The Materials had increased in the same fashion too.

The Library of Congress is one of the finest Libraries in the world. This Library was built up through the knowledge and careful planning of Mr. Ainsworth Rand Spofford. Although there must have been many disappointments and failures, the people of the United States have him to thank for such a wonderful service that is now available to all. He is only one man who has helped to make this United States a finer place to live. Yet without his contributions, libraries throughout this nation would no doubt be unable to give some of the services that are available today without this man's ideas and determination.

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