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Yesterday's News Tomorrow: Preserving Mexican Newspapers, 1807-1929

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The University of Texas at Austin has regularly collected Mexican newspapers, especially since the Mexican Revolution that ended in 1917. The purchase of the formidable Genaro García Collection in 1921 brought to the University scores of what were already then, and are especially now, very rare nineteenth- and early twentieth-century newspapers. Other collections acquired by the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection¹ also contained Mexican newspapers. These acquisitions include the Alejandro Prieto Library, purchased in 1941, that is particularly rich in Tamaulipas newspapers, and the Miguel Bolaños Cacho Papers, acquired in 1986, containing newspapers from Oaxaca and Baja California. Several former students and faculty members of the University have contributed newspapers as well.

Benson Collection Microfilming Projects

The report that follows is based on extensive analysis of Mexican newspapers held by the Benson Latin American Collection as well as other United States libraries that participated in two microfilming projects funded in part by the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

¹ See <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/benson/about.html> for information about the Benson Collection, which is a specialized research library focusing on materials from and about Latin America, and on materials relating to Latinos in the United States. Today, it has about 900,000 books, periodicals, and pamphlets as well as extensive research materials in all other formats.

Both projects were conceived and administered by Benson Collection staff. The first project, which was carried out during 2000 through 2002, resulted in a microfilm publication entitled *Revolutionary Mexico in Newspapers, 1900-1929*. The second project is entitled *Independent Mexico in Newspapers, the 19th Century*; it began in 2002 and will terminate in March 2005. These projects were among the first to preserve and catalog foreign newspapers in the United States with National Endowment funding. This paper is a description of the process of preserving certain Mexican newspapers. It is not intended to be a discussion of the subject, content, or publishers of the various newspapers.

The two projects had three basic goals:

- preserving the original paper copies,
- microfilming the papers, and
- cataloging both the paper and microfilm copies of the papers.

In these three areas, best practices and latest standards were employed. All microfilm was produced according to the standards, procedures, and recommended practices specified in the American National Standards for Information and Image Management—Recommended Practice for Microfilming Printed Newspapers, ANSI/AIIM MS111—1994. In addition, the latest versions and updates of all standards (ANSI/AIIM, ANSI/PH, and ANSI/IT) were met in production, testing, and storage of project film. The microfilmer conducted quality checks and maintained records recommended in the *RLG Preservation Microfilming Handbook*.² New cataloging records followed the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*, 2nd edition (latest revision) for descriptive cataloging and all relevant CONSER (Cooperative Online Serials Program) standards for serial and microfilm cataloging. Names and subject headings matched authoritative forms found in OCLC Online Authority Files, and all bibliographic records were authenticated full MARC records.

Criteria used to select newspapers for the projects included the following:

1. All Mexican newspapers held by the Benson Collection were considered for the project.
2. Other libraries were asked to lend issues lacking from Benson Collection runs.
3. Other libraries were asked to lend titles based on Steven Charno's *Latin American Newspapers in United States Libraries: A Union List Compiled in the Serial Division, Library of Congress*.³ Once contacted, the libraries also offered other titles for consideration to be included in the projects.
4. Titles which had already been microfilmed according to contemporary microfilming standards were excluded. Thus some long-running titles like *El Universal* and *El Siglo Diez y Nueve* are not represented in these projects.
5. Titles were included as long as at least one whole issue could be cataloged.
6. Newspaper titles had to conform to a working definition of a newspaper (see appendices 1 and 2). These definitions allowed some flexibility so as to include satirical publications that commented on political events of the day and to include

² (Mountain View, CA: Research Libraries Group, 1992)

³ (Austin: Published for the Conference on Latin American History by the University of Texas Press, 1969).

publications that are forerunners to the newspaper format as it developed throughout the nineteenth century.

7. In the first project, issues for newspaper titles that began in the nineteenth-century and that continued into the twentieth-century or those that began after 1900 and continued beyond 1929 were also filmed.

The newspapers were grouped by place of publication—state and city, followed by those published within the federal district—then alphabetically by title thereunder. In preparation for filming, all newspapers were flattened and received minimal preservation cleaning and repair. After filming, all loose newspapers are stored in acid-free folders and archival boxes. Large format items and those composed of especially acidic, brittle paper are stored in a state-of-the-art long-term storage facility. Thereafter, users are encouraged to rely on the microfilm copy, unless there is a compelling research need to see the original.

The microfilm conforms to the most advanced standards for preservation microfilming, consisting of an original negative, a negative print master, and positive service copies as needed. Service copies are available through interlibrary loan and are available for purchase. As of this writing, complete sets of the 345 reels that comprise *Revolutionary Mexico in Newspapers* are available at research libraries in Boston, Chicago, Albuquerque, Mexico City, and Washington, DC in addition to Austin, Texas. A descriptive catalog of all microfilmed titles and their issues is available in print and online.⁴ A similar catalog will be created for the current nineteenth-century Mexican newspaper project.

The principal reason to undertake these reformatting projects was because time was seriously eroding the usability of many newspapers. This is particularly true of the newspapers published after about 1872, which were published on very acidic paper. Virtually all of the 560 titles in the first project, dated from 1900 through 1929, were printed on acidic paper. In addition, 152 titles (42.6%) of the 356 nineteenth century works which are included in the second microfilming project are on acidic paper. Moreover, improper housing, by today's preservation standards, had weakened bindings and exacerbated chemical changes from glues and cardboard covers.

In the late 1960s a comprehensive list of Latin American newspapers at the University of Texas at Austin was created. That information was incorporated into what became the standard bibliography of Latin American newspapers available in the United States: Steven Charno's *Latin American Newspapers in United States Libraries*. At that time, all University of Texas newspapers were held in a single collection. When the Latin American Collection moved to its present quarters in January 1971, Latin American titles were separated from the general collection and moved to the Benson Collection's new building. Since then, the growth of the Benson Latin American Collection, which more than doubled between 1980 and 2000, demanded that newspapers older than three years be housed off-site. Cataloged newspapers (a small minority of the total number) could be stored in an off-site storage facility with optimum environmental controls, while uncataloged newspapers were housed at another building used for

⁴ Adán Benavides and Agnes L. McAlester, comps. and eds., *Revolutionary Mexico in Newspapers, 1900-1929: Guide to the Microfilm Set* (Austin: Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, General Libraries, 2002) and <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/benson/revolutionarymexico/>.

infrequently used library materials. Exceptionally rare cataloged newspapers were retained in the Benson Collection and handled through its Rare Books unit.

By the late 1990s, an assessment of the Benson Collection newspapers revealed the following:

1. Approximately 1,000 Mexican titles existed, over half of which were dated from 1900 to 1929.
2. Approximately 1,000 non-Mexican Latin American titles existed.
3. The vast majority of all titles lacked cataloging
4. The 1960s list of Latin American newspapers was out of date and contained notations that some titles could not be found.
5. Environmental control varied considerably among the three buildings in which they were stored.
6. The materials most at risk were those printed on acidic paper, most dating from about 1872 forward.

A 1999 proposal to the Access and Preservation Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities successfully attained funding to catalog and microfilm approximately 550 Mexican newspapers held by the Benson Collection and whose runs included issues from 1900 to 1929. Thus, some newspapers, those which began in the late 1800s and continued past 1900, could be included in the project. The proposal and associated costs was based solely on Benson Collection materials. In the course of the two-year project (2000/02), an attempt was made to borrow as many newspapers as possible, especially to complete runs already held by the Benson Collection. While this proved successful, it also led to unexpected expenses. More newspaper issues meant more original filming. The more libraries that participated, the more service copies of selected reels had to be made and given to the lending libraries. Significant quantities of additional issues and new titles were lent by the Library of Congress (Washington, DC) and the Latin American Library of Tulane University (New Orleans, LA). The Harvard College Library not only lent issues but donated the paper originals to the Benson Collection for long-term storage, this in exchange for the microfilm version. The Boston Public Library also lent materials to the project.

In sum, the first project's success is demonstrated in table 1.

Table 1. *Revolutionary Mexico in Newspapers*, general statistics.

Titles			Pages	Reels
Federal District	States (60 cities in 28 states)	Total		
326 (58%)	234 (42%)	560 (100%)	227,930	345

Table 2 indicates unique titles contributed by the cooperating libraries and indicates the number of pages borrowed to expand Benson Collection runs.

Table 2. *Revolutionary Mexico in Newspapers*, titles and pages borrowed from participating libraries.

Titles	Benson Collection	Library of Congress	Tulane University	Harvard University	Boston Public Library	Total
Unique	489 (87%)	8	63	0	0	560
Complementary		21	13	1	2	37*
Pages						
Unique	209,959	3,145	3,035	0	0	216,139
Complementary		7,546	1,939	2,160	146	11,791
Page totals	209,959 (92%)	10,691 (5%)	4,974 (2%)	2,160 (1%)	146 (0+%)	227,930 (100%)

*Number of complementary titles included in total unique titles.

The interest generated in the course of filming the early twentieth-century papers, encouraged the Benson Collection staff to apply for a second grant from the National Endowment to catalog and film Mexican newspapers for the whole of the nineteenth-century. While the number of titles (350) in the Benson Collection was fewer than in the first project, extensive research and planning went into gaining cooperation from other libraries prior to submission of the grant in 2001. In addition to 125,000 pages estimated from its own holdings, Benson Collection staff estimated that at least 20,000 pages would be borrowed from other libraries. Eleven libraries are presently participating in the second project, which will end in March 2005, and have collectively loaned over 70,000 pages.

Table 3. *Independent Mexico in Newspapers*, general statistics.

Titles			Pages	Reels
Federal District	States (58 cities in 26 states)	Total		
284 (49%)	298 (51%)	582 (100%)	192,996	284

Table 4 indicates unique titles contributed by the cooperating libraries and indicates the number of pages borrowed to expand Benson Collection runs.

Table 4. *Independent Mexico in Newspapers*, titles and pages borrowed from participating libraries.

Titles	Benson Collection	Library of Congress	Yale University (Sterling)	Tulane University	University of Connecticut	Others*	Total
Unique	305 (52%)	91	43	51	52	40	582
Complementary		26	21	17	21	13	98 [†]
Pages							
Unique	119,972	20,043	7,270	1,758	5,672	3,619	158,334
Complementary		10,464	9,185	8,259	3,918	2,836	34,662
Page totals	119,972 (62%)	30,507 (16%)	16,455 (9%)	10,017 (5%)	9,590 (5%)	6,455 (3%)	192,996 (100%)

*Special Collections, University of Texas at Arlington Library; DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University; Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; Harvard College Library, Harvard University; Boston Public Library; New York Historical Society; and Boston Athenæum.

[†]Number of complementary titles is included in total unique titles.

Both of these projects resulted in rather impressive gains for the bibliographic universe as electronic bibliographic records were created for both the original paper and its reformatted microfilm copy. Combined statistics from both projects are given in table 5.

Table 5. Mexican newspaper projects, 1807-1929, combined statistics (629 reels).

	Benson Collection	Library of Congress	Yale University (Sterling)	Tulane University	University of Connecticut	Others	Total
Unique titles	794	99	43	114	52	40	1,142
Pages	329,931 (78%)	41,198 (10%)	16,455 (4%)	14,991 (4%)	9,590 (2%)	8,761 (2%)	420,926 (100%)

Additionally, the newspapers were rehoused and received minimal cleaning and preparation prior to cataloging and filming. At the time of cataloging, every attempt was made to flatten them and wrap them in acid-free folders. After filming, Benson Collection papers were boxed in acid-free containers, while borrowed newspapers were returned to their library flattened and in acid-free folders along with a copy of the OCLC record that had been created. After filming, the Benson Collection's large-format papers are generally stored in a state-of-the-art off-site storage facility with optimum environmental control. Most nineteenth-century newspapers, however, remain in the Rare Books unit of the Benson Collection.

Evaluation of the Microfilming Projects

Table 6 demonstrates a significant increase in the number of pages microfilmed as opposed to those projected in the proposals: a 23% increase in the first project (185,000 to 227,930 pages) and a 33% increase in the second project (145,000 to 192,996 pages).

Table 6. Mexican newspaper projects, 1807-1929, projections and outcomes.

Project	Projected			Completed		
	Benson Collection	Others	Total	Benson Collection	Others	Total
20th-Century: Unique Titles	551	?	?	489 (87%)	71 (13%)	560 (100%)
20th-Century: Pages	185,000	?	?	209,959 (92%)	17,971 (8%)	227,930 (100%)
19th-Century: Unique Titles	356	?	?	305 (52%)	277 (48%)	582 (100%)
19th-Century: Pages	125,000	20,000	145,000	119,972 (62%)	73,024 (38%)	192,996 (100%)

The first project, although finished as projected within two years, ran into cost over-runs which were absorbed by the General Libraries. The second project will finish as budgeted, in spite of finishing six months after its two-year projected length. This anomaly can be explained by several factors. First, the proposed budgets were based on the cost of filming one page per frame. In actuality, many newspapers could be filmed two pages per frame at no extra cost. This point is especially true for early nineteenth-century newspapers, many of which were printed in quarto sizes. Thus many thousands of pages beyond those projected in the second project could be added to it without additional cost. The first project, moreover, contained page estimates that were substantially in error. For example, one long-running newspaper was thought to contain eight-pages per issue when, in fact, it had sixteen. These kinds of mistakes were eliminated in the second proposal by an actual hands-on review of titles for which the Benson Collection had long runs. But the major factor in cost over-runs in the first project was that no provision had been made to include borrowed newspapers. The addition of nearly 18,000 pages from four libraries added substantially to the cost of the project. The Benson Collection staff, however, argued successfully that the borrowed newspapers would add significantly to the completeness of the project. Tulane University's Latin American Collection greatly enhanced the project with the addition of 63 newspaper titles from southern Mexico (Chiapas, Tabasco, and Yucatán mostly) while the Library of Congress lent many issues to existing Benson runs, especially for Mexico City publications.

Table 6 also demonstrates a significant shift in the number of Benson Collection titles and pages in the nineteenth-century project relative to that of the twentieth-century. This is true whether one looks at titles or pages contributed. Looking at titles, for example, 87% came from the Benson Collection in the first project, while 52% of the titles came from it in the second project. This is logical since a concerted effort was made to borrow more titles and issues from any library known to have newspapers that could be incorporated into the project.

The drop in projected Benson Collection titles as compared to the number included in the project needs to be explained. Projections for the microfilming proposals were made on serial titles thought to be newspapers using an early newspaper list made in the 1960s. At the time of cataloging, however, some titles were determined not be newspapers as defined for the project. Gazettes, that is, official government publications, were sometimes encountered; these were clearly not newspapers as defined for our purposes. Other publications were cataloged as periodicals, not newspapers. Perhaps more disturbing, however, were the number of unlocated newspapers. Twenty titles could not be located for the first project, and nineteen for the second. Most unlocated papers were single issues or very short runs, although one run was for several years.

The participation of eleven libraries in the second project was gratifying, particularly since it represented a variety of U.S. research libraries. Public and private university libraries and public and private research libraries all contributed. But mention should be made about who did not participate. Some university libraries could not participate because of restrictions in loaning materials for any reason: thus, two of the most significant U.S. libraries for Mexican materials, the Beinecke Library at Yale University and the Bancroft Library at the University of California—Berkeley, were unable to join our efforts. This observation is made to underscore the point that much more needs to be done to locate and preserve Mexican newspapers in U.S. research institutions. Additionally, mistakes were found to exist in the Charno guide. One library noted that they had never had the newspapers in question. Another library had dispossessed itself of its newspapers without good records of where the papers now existed. Yet another library had transferred all of its Latin American titles to a university library. Fortunately, we were able to trace many of those latter papers to the University of Connecticut whose library then loaned about one-third of the wanted newspapers to the Benson Collection project.⁵

It should also be mentioned that the National Endowment grants could only be used to support the preservation microfilming and cataloging of library materials that existed in and belonged to U.S. libraries. Thus, it is logical to ask how the Benson Collection's projects compare to existing collections in Mexico itself. No doubt, the single most important repository of Mexican newspapers is the Hemeroteca Nacional in Mexico City. Two research trips were undertaken in 2002 and 2004 to compare Benson project newspapers to catalog descriptions available at the Hemeroteca Nacional; no attempt was made to compare the holdings of other institutions in Mexico, however. These comparisons have not been tabulated, but general impressions can be presented at this time.⁶ First, there is overlap in holdings in both of the Benson Collection projects. The overlap appears to be more generally true for the nineteenth-century project than for the twentieth-century one. Nonetheless, the overlap does not exceed fifty percent of the material for either project. Indeed, for papers dated from 1900 to 1929, it probably does not exceed thirty percent. Moreover, little overlap occurs for newspapers published outside of the Federal District in either project. As one would expect, both of the Benson Collection projects reflect the preponderance of Mexico City publications just as do the holdings of the

⁵ Acknowledgement is here made to the Latin American Microform Project at the Center for Research Libraries, Chicago, IL, for having helped underwrite the cost of filming the large number of papers borrowed from the University of Connecticut Library, Storrs, CT.

⁶ Tabulation of the comparison of holdings will be available after the completion of the nineteenth-century project in March 2005.

Hemeroteca Nacional. It appears self-evident that collecting materials published outside of Mexico City is more difficult than collecting those from the metropolitan capital. The Hemeroteca Nacional and the Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México are to be praised for their continuing efforts to organize and describe Mexican serial publications.⁷ Vast numbers of serial titles, including newspapers, have been microfilmed and digitization attempts are being made to make them available via the World Wide Web.⁸

Newspaper collecting, cataloging, and preservation is challenging, demanding, and fraught with frustration. Handling the physical paper object whether by library stack personnel or the user frequently leads to mis-shelving and damaged items. Microfilm, a proven archival reformatting alternative, was the preferred medium for the Benson Collection projects given the exigencies of time and funds beginning as we did in 1999. While digitization of the material was considered in the early stages of the proposals, the expense was prohibitive relative to that of microfilm. Whatever difficulties were encountered in having newspapers sent to Austin, Texas, for processing were well worth their solving given the greater depth and breadth to both of the microfilming projects. But film offers little ease in adding missing issues to existing runs. Digitization and the creation of virtual newspaper runs is the wave of the future, but we must wait for continued technological advances and reduced costs in creating the images and making them widely available to users. The film produced in these two projects, however, is of very high quality and is organized with the potential for digitization at a later time.

It should be underscored that the cataloging of 1,142 newspapers in these projects will help in any attempt to create a union list of Mexican or Latin American newspapers in the United States. This is a goal that has long been wanted since the publication of Charno's guide—after more than three decades, still the definitive holdings list of Latin American newspapers in the United States. The number of newspapers cataloged by the Benson Collection Serials Unit represents nearly twenty percent of all Latin American titles reported by Charno. Even more importantly, these projects have cataloged almost all of the Mexican newspapers published through 1929 listed by Charno. The cataloging of over 1,100 Mexican newspapers resulting from these two projects is a bibliographical tour de force by the Benson Serials Unit.

Laudable as these efforts may be, we are left with a daunting task. How do we locate and preserve disintegrating newspapers, which must surely exist in private and regional collections, in Mexico as well as throughout Latin America? This is the challenge that remains for solution today and tomorrow.

⁷ See, for example, *Publicaciones periódicas mexicanas del siglo XIX, 1822-1855: Fondo Antigo de la Hemeroteca Nacional y Fondo Reservado de la Biblioteca Nacional de México (Colección Lafragua)* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000) and *Publicaciones periódicas mexicanas del siglo XIX, 1856-1876: Fondo Antigo de la Hemeroteca Nacional de México* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003).

⁸ *Listado general de registros existentes en la base de datos: Inventario de microfilmes ordenados alfabéticamente por título y cada título ordenado cronológicamente* (México: Sala de Lectoras de Microfilmes del Departamento de Servicios de Información de la Hemeroteca Nacional de México, 2001); Gabriela Lorena Gutiérrez Schott, "La Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México," paper read at SALALM XLIX, Ann Arbor, MI, 7 June 2004; "Inicia Hemeroteca Nacional Digitalización de su Acervo," Sistema Nacional e-México, http://www.e-mexico.gob.mx/wb2/eMex/eMex_Hemeroteca# [16 July 2004].

Appendix 1. Definition of a “newspaper,”
Revolutionary Mexico in Newspapers, 1900-1929 (1999 NEH proposal)

In selecting titles to be included in this project, the General Libraries follows the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) definition of a newspaper: a serial publication which contains news on current events of special or general interest, whose parts are listed chronologically or numerically and appear usually at least once a week. Newspapers usually appear without a cover, with a masthead, and are normally larger than approximately 12 by 17 inches in size. For present purposes, the definition is understood to include:

- General interest newspapers mainly reporting events that have occurred with the 24-hour period before going to press.
- Non-daily general interest newspapers (for example, local and neighborhood newspapers) that provide news covering a longer period of time, and also serve their readers as a primary source of general information due to their local origin.
- Newspapers that contain news of special interest, in addition to general information, targeted to clearly identified groups, such as ethnic or racial groups, labor unions, farming community, religious or political groups.

Appendix 2. Definition of a “newspaper,”
Independent Mexico in Newspapers, the 19th-Century (2001 NEH proposal)

In selecting titles to be included in this project, the General Libraries has followed the precedent set in the Charno guide: "it became evident that the basis of selection should be broadened beyond the somewhat rigid definition originally suggested, in order to provide more comprehensive historical coverage" (p. xi). As a basis, then, the following "rigid definition" follows the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) definition of a newspaper:

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- Newspapers that contain news of special interest, in addition to general information, targeted to clearly identified groups, such as ethnic or racial groups, labor unions, farming, community, religious or political groups.
- Publications "with the look and feel of newspapers," that is, printed on newsprint, formatted in a manner similar to dailies, and that comment, sometimes in a satirical way, on contemporaneous events.
- Publications that were forerunners of newspapers and display all the characteristics in the ISO definition save size.