Research Librarians in a Time of Crisis: 
WWII and the Making of the Postwar Research Library

Kathy Peiss
University of Pennsylvania

April 24, 2020
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Center for Research Libraries Conference, April 24, 2020
Information as warfare

Col. William J. (“Wild Bill”) Donovan, Coordinator of Information (later OSS), and Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish, 1941

photograph by John Phillips for Life/Getty Images
Prewar dreams of universal knowledge

Nationalism and ‘archival awakening’

The Mundaneum, n.d.
Recordak microphotography 1938
National Archives under construction 1934
Information on the Home Front

War Information Center in the Boston Public Library, 1942
Acquiring Open Sources in WWII Europe

Adele Kibre, head of the Anglo-American Microfilm Unit, Stockholm

Microfilm warning label and book stamp, Interdepartmental Committee for the Acquisition of Foreign Publications (IDC),

Images: Beinecke Library, Yale University; photo courtesy Chris Kibre
The Lisbon Operation

IDC agent Reuben Peiss on trip to Porto; Calling card of “Argus,” OSS Chief in Iberian peninsula, introducing Peiss to Allen Dulles, OSS Chief in Bern

Lisbon bookstore and news dealer
T-Forces and displaced libraries

Ransbach mine filled with books moved from German libraries

Photos: LOC Photographs & Prints
After Victory: Collecting, Competition, and Cooperation

Journalists Louis Lochner and Frank Mason in Berlin, 1945 (with jeep driver), on a collecting mission for the Hoover Library

CARE package: a means of separating people from their libraries

Photo: Herbert Hoover Presidential Library
Librarians in Trench Coats
Library of Congress Mission to Europe, 1946
(70-year-old Harry Lydenberg, former NYPL director, second from right)

Photo: LoC Prints and Photographs
Allied Council Orders Nazi Books Burned

BY HAL FOUST
[Chicago Tribune Press Service]

BERLIN, May 13—A book burning rivaling Nazi performances was ordered today by the four nation coordinating committee for the military governments of Germany. It was estimated that more than 1 billion books plus all German newspaper files for 1933 to 1945 were condemned to the torch under an order to confiscate all Nazi and militaristic propaganda.

Expanding the Mission

LCM agent Don Travis salvages Nazi collection in Bürgerbräu sub-basement (Nazi beer hall/HQ in Munich)

Operation “Tallyho,” to remove books with Nazi content from bookstores and publishers
American Libraries and the Restitution of Looted Books

Looted Jewish books in Hungen repository

Offenbach Archival Depot (1946)
Aperture card, OSS Central Information Division, ca. 1944

Vannevar Bush’s Memex, “As We May Think,” *Atlantic*, 1945

*Imagining postwar information*
Wartime pioneers of information science
Eugene Power, Jesse Shera and Frederick Kilgour
Two books with Nazi content, removed by the Library of Congress Mission and distributed to American research libraries

Looted, unidentified volume distributed by Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc.

Images: Kislak Center and Katz Center, UPenn