

Thousands of Early Copyright Records Newly Searchable

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Researchers can now access details about thousands of copyright registrations from the 1870s thanks to two interns who worked in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division this summer.

Meredith Doubleday and Synneva Elthon of the Library's Junior Fellows Program inventoried original applications and deposit copies submitted for copyright registration, including title pages of monographs, colorful graphic advertisements, political campaign literature, sheet music, and more.

Supervised by reference librarian Eric Frazier, the pair added to a searchable database the division started in 2006 to inventory the 1870–1897 Copyright Deposit Collection. Since then, 13 Junior Fellows have processed nearly 70,000 registrations and deposits, recording facts such as registration numbers, titles and descriptions of works, subject keywords, and the condition of deposits.

“The collection reflects a real cross-section of American creativity and publishing history,” says Rosemary Plakas, the division’s American history specialist, who supervised the project for six years.

In 2006, interns uncovered an 1871 submission from Daniel Chester French, who years later sculpted the Abraham Lincoln statue in the Lincoln Memorial. A 20-year-old French registered a statuette titled “Two Owls” and asked that his registration certificate be sent to his father’s Boston office.

Other discoveries include an 1872 application from Heinz and Noble, precursor of the famed Heinz food company, accompanied by two colorful condiment labels. In 1882, Susan B. Anthony penned and signed her own application letter to register the second volume of *History of Woman Suffrage*.



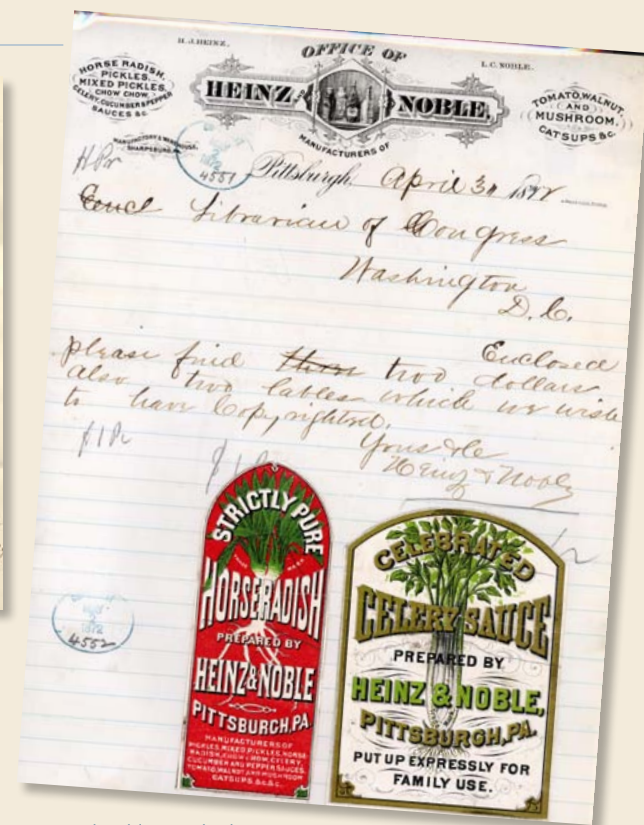
Sculptor Daniel Chester French submitted a photograph of his statuette “Two Owls” with his 1871 copyright application.

The collection’s period of focus—1870 to 1897—extends from when Congress enacted a law centralizing copyright administration in the Library to when the Copyright Office was organized into a separate department within the Library. A copyright application then consisted of a letter requesting registration, two copies of a creative work, and a \$1 registration fee.

“The letters and deposits were organized as well as possible and shoved into boxes for storage,” Plakas explains. “No itemized inventory was kept.”

The collection made its way to the Rare Book and Special Collections Division in the mid-1980s. With implementation of the 1976 Copyright Act, the Copyright Office saw an influx of new kinds of deposits, including cassette recordings, digital works, and, for the first time, unpublished literary materials. This influx soon strained storage facilities, leading to a decision to transfer collections of some deposits to other Library divisions.

This summer, Doubleday and Elthon inventoried registrations from 1873 and 1876. “We came across



Heinz and Noble attached condiment labels to its 1872 application.

photos, plays, poetry, patent medicine ads—anything and everything, including an amusing book registration for *Love-Making Secrets: The Art of Being Popular with the Ladies*,” says Doubleday.

Their most significant discovery was an 1876 registration of statues of Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln that Leonard Wells Volk sculpted for the Illinois State House, reports Elthon.

The Copyright Deposit Collection contains nearly 920,000 registrations and deposits. “It’s a slow process to inventory the collection, but a worthy project,” Plakas says. “It should be continued for many years to come.”

The database is accessible in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division. ©