

Copyright Lore

■ Frank Evina

Prior to the enactment of the second general revision of U.S. copyright law in 1870, the clerks of 44 judicial districts in the United States registered claims to copyright and issued certificates. A major reason for centralizing copyright registration and deposit in the Library of Congress was to ensure the creation in one location of complete and uniform records of copyright ownership. Unfortunately, many registration records maintained by district court clerks during the first 80 years of American copyright were inconsistent and fragmentary. Therefore, when the 1870 Act went into effect, it was imperative that an efficient numbering and record-keeping system be in place.

In anticipation of the large number of registration applications that would soon be sent to Washington, the Library printed handsome

leather-bound ledgers, lettered in gold and measuring approximately 12 by 18 inches, that provided space on each page for four separate copyright entries.

Each entry was hand-written and personally signed by Librarian of Congress Ainsworth Rand Spofford, who served as *de facto* Register of Copyrights until that position was created

in 1897. This new function had an immediate impact on the overall operations of the Library, which was still housed in crowded quarters in the west front of the Capitol Building and employed a total of twelve staffers. In his 1870 report to Congress, Spofford stated, "The fact that upward of 5,000 copyrights have been recorded in the office during less than 6 months' operation of the

law, with the great additional labor and responsibility involved, suggests the necessity of increased assistance being



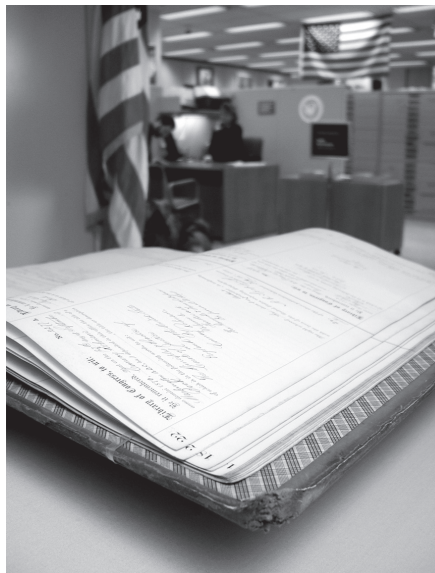
The Copyright Office and deposits as it appeared in 1898

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provided for the Librarian. I have been obliged to employ two of the library force constantly upon the business of recording copyrights and preparing certificates of the same, besides devoting more than half of my own time to the prompt dispatch of the business involved."

Spofford asked Congress for two additional assistants to be employed in the copyright department at salaries of \$1,800 and \$1,200 respectively.

By the end of 1870, a grand total of 5,600 copyright registrations were entered into several volumes of the copyright record books. The first registration made in the Library of Congress under the 1870 Act was for a book entitled *San Domingo*, by De Benneville Randolph Keim (1841–1914). Both deposit copies of this book are preserved in the Library's Rare Book and Special Collections Division. ©



An original ledger from 1870 containing records of copyright registrations is on display outside LM-401.

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Service Flag Draws Distinguished Visitor

Miss Nathalie Wells (right) examines the Copyright Office service flag honoring employees who served in World War II. The flag was the project of her father, David Wells, who retired in 1960 as head of the Miscellaneous Section (now the Visual Arts Section in the Examining Division). Miss Wells, whose visit was coordinated by Senior Public Information Specialist Frank Evina (left), also is a Library retiree. ©



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