

Interpreting American Ethnic Experiences: The Development of the Balch Library Collections

ABSTRACT: The Balch Institute was a library and museum dedicated to immigration and ethnic history, based in Philadelphia. This article analyzes the development of its print and manuscript collections, from its first accessions in 1971 to its merger with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 2001. It focuses on its dual scholarly and educational mission and on the factors that shaped its collection development policies and practices over time. The article argues that the content of the collections, but also what was not included in them, was determined by the institutional and broader political, social, and scholarly context in which the Balch operated. The Balch's contribution to the historical record illustrates the importance of historicizing the archives so that historians have deeper knowledge of the role played by the professionals who acquire and manage the sources they use.

IN 1976, IN THE MIDST of the American Revolution Bicentennial celebrations, the Balch Institute opened its doors to the public in a brand new building located near Independence Mall in Philadelphia. It introduced itself as “a library, museum and educational facility which interprets the immigrant experience and contributions of ethnic groups to our national heritage.”¹ The institute's first director, Howard Applegate, and its staff had been working since 1971 to develop the infrastructure, collections, and exhibits for the new institution. The Balch Institute would grow into a large library and archives, research center, and museum devoted to the history of immigration and ethnicity until its merger with

¹ *The American Kaleidoscope*, flyer, 1976, record group 2, ser. 6, box 113, folder “Exhibits—The American Kaleidoscope,” The Historical Society of Pennsylvania with the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. All primary sources used in the paper are from this collection, unless otherwise indicated.

the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 2001. In the span of those twenty-five years as an independent institution, the Balch, as it was called, developed some of the largest collections on ethnic and immigrant history in North America. Nevertheless, the Balch strained to identify its mission and constituency throughout its life.²

This article examines the development of the Balch collections in light of this institutional framework and the larger political, social, and ideological context of the region and nation since the 1970s. That these contextual factors affected Balch librarians and archivists, and therefore the scope and content of the collections, is undeniable. Yet there is a long tradition among historians to consider archivists as neutral guardians of the historical record whose role is to transmit it from its original owners to its future users.³ Historians are keenly aware that historical materials reflect the biases of their creators, but they are more prone to neglect the biases of their curators. This tradition has, until fairly recently, been encouraged by archivists themselves. Librarians, for their part, have also been viewed as impartial custodians of knowledge.⁴ The challenge to the “neutral guardian” approach that developed in archival science scholarship in the 1990s, and in library science more recently, has brought to light the important role played by archivists and librarians as mediators, including, as Brien Brothman notes, “in the historiographical process.”⁵ As Terry Cook reminds us, “as archivists appraise records, they are doing nothing less than determining what the future will know about its past.”⁶

Archival and library collections, therefore, are shaped by decisions made by the human beings who manage them, who are themselves influenced by a broad range of economic, political, social, and cultural forces. The Balch Institute provides an example of the development and curation of large multiethnic and multilingual collections of print and manuscript materials beginning in the 1970s—a time when historians of immigration

² Dana Dorman, “Searching for Vision: The Beginning and End of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies” (master’s thesis, Temple University, 2009).

³ Terry Cook, “The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape,” *Canadian Historical Review* 90 (2009): 505.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 514; James Elmborg, “Literacies Large and Small: The Case of Information Literacy,” *International Journal of Learning* 11 (2004): 1235–39.

⁵ Brien Brothman, “The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution,” *Archivaria* 36 (1993): 215. See also Tom Nesmith, “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” *American Archivist* 65 (2002): 24–41; and Cushla Kapitzke, “Information Literacy: A Positivist Epistemology and a Politics of Outformation,” *Educational Theory* 53 (2003): 37–53.

⁶ Cook, “The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country,” 504.

were inspired by social history to study life and work in immigrant neighborhoods and when ethnic groups asserted hyphenated identities.⁷ The numerous practical issues faced by Balch librarians and archivists when acquiring ethnic materials were inseparable from strategic and theoretical questions regarding the scope and parameters of their collections. While working to address these issues, Balch staff made decisions that determined the kind of ethnic groups and materials they included and, therefore, the representations of ethnicity and immigration that would emerge from their collections.

"Serving the Scholar and Layman": The Balch's Institutional Development

One issue that affected the Balch through its history was the tension between two visions for the institution—a research library and a public cultural center. This manifested itself in the Balch's efforts to establish itself as a scholarly and popular institution with a library and a museum, to identify its constituencies, and to ascertain its commitment to cultural pluralism.

The Balch Institute's unusual origins account in part for the way its founders first articulated its mission. It was the product of a wealthy Philadelphia family's legacy—particularly that of Emily Swift Balch, who in 1916 bequeathed her fortune to establish a library in Pennsylvania. Her sons gave additional instructions about what they named "the Balch Institute," adding their own money to the bequest. Thus, the Balch Institute was not initially designed as an institution specializing in immigration and ethnic history. Nor was it set up by librarians or other professionals from the cultural heritage sector. The trustee, the Fidelity Trust Company, managed the funds and slowly took steps to fulfill the Balches'

⁷ See, for example, Rudolph J. Vecoli, "European Americans: From Immigrants to Ethnic," *International Migration Review* 6 (1972): 403–34; Vecoli, "The Resurgence of American Immigration History," *American Studies International* 17, no. 2 (1979): 46–66; Vecoli, "From the Uprooted to the Transplanted: The Writing of American Immigration History, 1951–1989," in *From "Melting Pot" to Multiculturalism: The Evolution of Ethnic Relations in the United States and Canada*, ed. Valeria Gennaro Lerda (Rome, 1990), 25–54; Jon Gjerde, "New Growth on Old Vines—The State of the Field: The Social History of Immigration to and Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18, no. 4 (1999): 40–65; Thomas J. Archdeacon, "Problems and Possibilities in the Study of American Immigration and Ethnic History," *International Migration Review* 19 (1985): 112–34; Ewa Morawska, "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration," in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York, 1990), 187–238.

⁸ Dorman, "Searching for Vision," 5–12.

wishes.⁸ In 1960, with the approval of Philadelphia's Orphans' Court, it set up "a special committee of high-level executives to oversee the library's creation and work with the court's appointed liaison."⁹ Forty-three years had passed since Emily Balch's death, and philanthropic support to libraries had become less significant as Pennsylvania developed a state public library system. For this reason, the trustee decided the Balch should be a special library.¹⁰ Its special committee entertained several theme proposals, including a focus on Philadelphia history and on liberty, which eventually carried the most weight among stakeholders. The theme of ethnicity was mentioned in writing for the first time in January 1968 at a meeting between the trustee, the amicus curiae, and Judge Klein from the Orphans' Court: "It was suggested that the Balch not only stress general principles of freedom and liberty but also emphasize the role of minorities in our society by serving as a research and resource center for the subject of minorities."¹¹ According to witnesses, Judge Klein strongly supported this approach.¹²

Since the Philadelphia location provided a compelling argument for the theme of liberty, the sudden interest for ethnic history may seem surprising. But the ethnic history approach had the advantage of alleviating accusations of duplication, as other Philadelphia institutions already had collections dedicated to the history of liberty.¹³ Furthermore, having "a research and resource center about and for all minority groups" would help "make the library more relevant and meaningful to present-day events," the amicus curiae reported.¹⁴ A focus on ethnicity would emphasize the role played by "ethnic groups" in the evolution of liberty in the United States and ensure that the new library would not remain an "unused monument."¹⁵ It is possible that Judge Klein pushed for this approach because of his negative view of libraries. Klein preferred "an institute that was a lively place, that had lots of

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12. The Orphans' Court manages trusts and estates in the Philadelphia court system.

¹⁰ Report of Amicus Curiae No 6 (1967), pp. 5–6, record group 2, ser. 1, box 1, folder "Orphan's Court Report of Amicus Curiae No 6, 1967."

¹¹ Report of Amicus Curiae No 7 (1968), p. 12, record group 2, ser. 1, box 1, folder "Orphan's Court, Report of Amicus Curiae No 7, 1968."

¹² Dorman, "Searching for Vision," 22.

¹³ Edgar Richardson, a member of the board of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, expressed this concern (Summary of June 29, 1970, meeting re Balch Institute, record group 2, ser. 1, box 2, folder "Records of meetings held re: establishment of Balch, 1960–1971").

¹⁴ Report of Amicus Curiae No 7 (1968), p. 13, record group 2, ser. 1, box 1, folder "Orphan's Court, Report of Amicus Curiae No 7, 1968."

¹⁵ Report of Amicus Curiae No 8 (1970), pp. 25, 30, record group 2, ser. 1, box 1, folder "Orphan's Court, Report of Amicus Curiae No 8, 1970."

¹⁶ Mark Stolarik, who headed the Balch Institute from 1977 to 1991, later recalled that Judge Klein was "prejudiced against libraries" (Dorman, "Searching for Vision," 14).

visitors, lots of activity” to the initial vision of a research center.¹⁶

Thus the founding of the Balch was marked by a tension between two distinct conceptions of a special library: one that emphasized the preservation of knowledge in support of historical scholarship, and another that favored public education and entertainment based on access to historical materials. The Balch would provide interpretations of the past and therefore embrace its role in the making of public memory. Historian John Bodnar has noted that the main focus of the collective process of memory making “is not the past . . . but serious matters in the present such as the nature of power and the question of loyalty to both official and vernacular cultures.”¹⁷ In this perspective, the Balch Institute would perform an active educational role of promoting such values as tolerance and unity in diversity—values that Philadelphians and Americans were invited to celebrate at the nation’s two-hundredth anniversary.¹⁸ As Applegate noted in 1971, “the American political and culturally pluralistic heritage is the substance of our collective memory of the past. The Balch Institute recognizes this heritage as a valuable resource that should be preserved and *extended*.”¹⁹

The Balch’s founders liked the theme of ethnic history because it seemed to resolve the underlying tension between the new library’s scholarly and popular missions. They made it clear that the library should “serve two publics, the scholar and layman.”²⁰ This would be made easier by the growing popularity of ethnicity in the late 1960s and 1970s as a research topic for scholars and as an issue widely embraced by elected officials, sociocultural organizations, and the general public in the United States. The location of the Balch in Philadelphia, a city endowed with many symbols of American history and a diverse immigrant population, would also help. In 1972 the new assistant librarian for collections, Philip Mooney, described the Balch’s scholarly and popular missions as helping each other. Through exhibits at the Balch, tourists would be made aware of “the variety of cultural values which American immigrants have brought to this country”; thus “stimulated,” they

¹⁷ John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 1991), 15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁹ Executive Report of the Balch Institute for Apr. 1, 1971, to Dec. 31, 1972, p. 3, in Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Nov. 13, 1973, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 1, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1971–1974, emphasis mine.

²⁰ Report of Amicus Curiae No 7 (1968), p. 14, record group 2, ser. 1, box 1, folder “Orphan Court, Report of Amicus Curiae No 7, 1968.”

²¹ Philip Mooney, “The Balch Institute: A New Library Searches for Resources,” paper presented at the RBMS Preconference at the 1972 ALA meeting, June 24, 1972, record group 2, ser. 6, box 13, folder “Memos, Mooney, Philip F., The Balch Institute—A New Library Searches for Resources.”

might then find an interest in the institute's research collections.²¹

On June 23, 1970, the court issued a decree directing the trustee to establish the Balch Institute as a library with an accompanying museum "devoted to the principles of liberty, independence and freedom, with emphasis upon the history and contributions of ethnic and minority groups."²² The library collections first developed around those two themes. Two years later, Applegate reported:

The library acquisitions policy is clearly defined; we are building book, periodical, serial, microform and manuscript collections relating to all aspects of immigration to North America and the subsequent history of ethnic and racial groups and the theme of American political history with special emphasis on the founding fathers, political theory and the executive branch of the federal government. The museum acquisition policy is much less defined, but it is clear that materials to be collected and preserved for exhibitions will consist primarily of advertising items, postcards, prints, posters, broadsides, photographs, sheet music, motion picture memorabilia, maps and paintings.²³

The early development of the Balch occurred during the preparations for the Bicentennial celebrations, and its staff spent the first few years planning for the official opening in 1976. The celebrations, which were fifteen years in the making, were for the city of Philadelphia an opportunity for revitalization.²⁴ But the event also had national significance. It came after more than a decade of social and racial unrest across the country, and for elected officials and cultural leaders it was an occasion "to reaffirm the existence of national unity and citizen loyalty."²⁵ At the federal level, the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission and its successor, the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, considered Philadelphia's events a focal point.²⁶ The political history focus of the Balch was a good match for the Bicentennial, but so was its specialization in ethnic and immigration history, as federal bicentennial programs

²²"History of the Balch," in Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Nov. 13, 1973, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 1, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1971–1974.

²³Executive Report of the Balch Institute for Apr. 1, 1971, to Dec. 31, 1972, p. 5, in Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Nov. 13, 1973, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 1, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1971–1974; Dorman, "Searching for Vision," 24.

²⁴Dorman, "Searching for Vision," 19.

²⁵Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 228.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 230–31.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 237.

included strong support for the ethnic component of the celebrations.²⁷ The ethnic focus again served to differentiate the Balch from numerous other cultural institutions preparing events to celebrate the founding of the United States. Rather than just celebrate the past, the Balch aimed to document the “living heritage of Americans and make it more meaningful to even the most recent arrivals.”²⁸

By 1976, when its inaugural exhibition opened, the Balch defined itself solely as an ethnic institution. The bylaws were changed that year to eliminate the term “political” and to define the Balch as an institution “about immigration to America, the contributions of ethnic groups to the national heritage and experience and the role of ethnicity in a pluralistic society.”²⁹ The phrase “for ethnic studies” was added to the name “Balch Institute” in 1977.³⁰ Of course, the Balch was not alone in promoting the history of immigration and ethnic groups. In fact, for the Bicentennial, ethnic celebrations were organized in states and cities nationwide.³¹ But Balch representatives denied they were just following a trend:

There have in the past been faddish ethnic projects either to placate ethnic hostilities or to vacuum clean charitable sources interested in this area. The Balch Institute is the best example of a solid approach to what could be a quicksand of emotionalism and opportunism. The concept is meaningful, especially in light of the new historical interpretation methods of re-understanding history and delineating some of the overlooked forces that created historical happenings.³²

In other words, the Balch collections and events might have popular appeal, but they would not be populist. They would be grounded in the latest scholarship, which sought to explain the past and contemporary roles played by immigrants in the nation’s history. Balch leaders repeatedly affirmed the benefits of serving both a scholarly and popular audience and of having a mission of preservation, research, and education.³³

²⁸ “Balch Institute Exhibition and Educational Programs, 1976–1978,” in Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Nov. 19, 1974, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 2, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1974–1978.

²⁹ Executive Committee Meeting, Dec. 16, 1975, in Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Feb. 17, 1976, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 2, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1974–1978.

³⁰ John Tenhula, “What is the Balch Institute? Past and Present,” draft, Jan. 1995, record group 2, ser. 6, box 108, folder “Administrative—Strategic planning, 1994–1997.”

³¹ Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 238–43.

³² Report of Amicus Curiae No 10 (1975), p. 38, record group 2, ser. 1, box 1, folder “Orphan’s Court.”

³³ “Statement of Purpose and Programs of the Balch Institute,” in Barnes and Roche, *Confidential Report on an Implementation Study for the Balch Institute*, p. xi, in Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Nov. 13, 1973, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 1, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1971–1974.

The joint creation of a library and museum was designed to fulfill this mission most effectively, but throughout its life the Balch constantly had to reevaluate the relative importance of its distinct components. In the years leading to the Bicentennial, the Balch administrators devoted increasing resources to the museum in the hopes of capitalizing on the celebrations to raise money and attract public attention. This trend worried the scholars who supported the library, such as Edward Hutchinson, a well-known professor of sociology and chair of the Balch Library Committee, and historian Dennis Clark.³⁴ Thanks to their influence and the appointment of Mark Stolarik, a prominent scholar of Slovak immigration, as president in 1977, the trend was stopped. During Stolarik's tenure as Balch president (1977 to 1991) and R. Joseph Anderson's term as library director (1981 to 1993), the library received significantly more resources.³⁵ As a result, it experienced fifteen years of expansion, during which it acquired numerous and diverse print and manuscript collections on American ethnic and immigration history.

The dual nature of the Balch—scholarly and popular—also manifested itself in its complex relations with ethnic communities and organizations. As Dana Dorman observes, the institute was originally shaped by “bank executives and court officials overseeing the Balch family trust, not by the ethnic communities it purported to celebrate and document.”³⁶ Contemporary newspaper articles and Balch correspondence with ethnic leaders confirm that it was often perceived as unrepresentative in the early years.³⁷ To remedy this perception, the trustees formed an advisory council in 1975 with a view to distributing membership “widely among persons of diverse ethnic backgrounds.”³⁸ But ensuring fair representa-

³⁴ Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Mar. 18, 1976, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 2, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1974–1978; Dennis Clark to Howard Applegate, Apr. 21, 1976, record group 2, ser. 2, box 7, folder “Clark, Dennis”; Dolores Swann to Board of Trustees, memo, Oct. 11, 1976, record group 2, ser. 1, box 3, folder “Planning meeting minutes, reports, correspondence, 1976 (1).”

³⁵ For the board's decision to emphasize the library, see also Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Mar. 15, 1977, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 2, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1974–1978. Mark Stolarik recalls his experience at the Balch in “Building Ethnic Archives in the U.S.A. and Canada since the 1960s,” in *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the US and Canada*, eds. Dominique Daniel and Amalie Levi (Sacramento, CA, 2014), 59–68.

³⁶ Dorman, “Searching for Vision,” 45–46.

³⁷ Chuck Stone, “WASPs and Ethnic Hustles,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 2, 1974, p. 10. See also Robyn I. Stone, memo, July 12, 1974, record group 2, ser. 6, box 117, folder “Planning Retreat, 1974, 4:4.”

³⁸ Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Sept. 16, 1975, appendix, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 2, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1974–1978.

tion of ethnic groups is always challenging, and complaints continued.³⁹ In 1980, ethnic community leaders interviewed for a Balch study stated that they considered the Balch an “elitist” institution. One leader of a major ethnic organization stressed the dangers of allowing “the academic emphasis to overshadow the community participation, so that scholars end up talking to themselves with no direct benefit to the community.” At the same time, other interviewees considered the museum as lacking substance in its exhibit offerings.⁴⁰ True or false, such perceptions were due to the Balch’s difficulty in identifying its constituencies—from the donors that would provide financial support or collections to the public that would attend its events.⁴¹ From the beginning, it strove to be a multiethnic center that did not favor any specific ethnic group. But the rich and complicated ethnic landscape of Philadelphia in the 1970s was hard to penetrate, and the multiethnic focus proved to be a handicap with ethnic communities.⁴² Many members of ethnic groups were more interested in supporting their own ethnic organizations than an institution open to all groups.⁴³

In addition, a small staff and the lack of a permanent physical facility before 1976 prevented the Balch from conducting extensive field work. Although they did reach out to local ethnic communities early on, authors of the institute’s 1974 acquisitions report admitted, “Our form letters have too often been directed to individuals and organizations with only a peripheral relationship to the Institute’s goals.”⁴⁴ Thanks to the hiring of field representative Robyn Stone in 1973, the library was able to expand community outreach.⁴⁵ Stone contacted individuals, toured neighborhoods, and followed up on leads.⁴⁶

³⁹ In 1976 there were strong protests from the Sons of Italy deploring the fact that there were no Balch Institute board members of Italian American heritage (Executive Committee Meeting, Apr. 2, 1976, in Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Mar. 18, 1976, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 2, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1974–1978).

⁴⁰ Funderburke and Associates, *Feasibility Study Report to the Board of Directors of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies*, Jun. 1980, pp. 11, 13, record group 2, ser. 6, box 12, folder “Feasibility Study, 1980.”

⁴¹ Dorman, “Searching for Vision,” 45.

⁴² For more on the ethnic history of Philadelphia, see John E. Bodnar, ed., *The Ethnic Experience in Pennsylvania* (Lewisburg, PA, 1973).

⁴³ Robyn Stone, memo, July 18, 1975, record group 2, ser. 6, box 94, folder “Ossip Walinsky Papers”; Funderburke and Associates, *Feasibility Study*.

⁴⁴ Robyn I. Stone and Philip F. Mooney, Acquisitions Report, Sept. 25, 1974, record group 2, ser. 6, box 117, folder “Policies, Acquisition policy 2:2.”

⁴⁵ For example, correspondence in the first half of the 1970s (record group 2, ser. 6, box 11) includes letters of inquiry to ethnic churches, ethnic newspapers, and other ethnic institutions. See also Annual Report of Assistant Librarian for Collections, 1973, record group 2, ser. 6, box 125, folder “Library Committee, Assorted correspondence and memos, 1977.”

⁴⁶ Robyn Stone, memo, Aug. 13, 1975, record group 2, ser. 6, box 70, folder “Polish.”

Results, however, were hampered by the breadth of the effort (outreach was national) and siphoning of resources into Bicentennial preparations. Fieldwork would not be systematically pursued until the 1980s, when major collection development initiatives were launched.

With funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Balch library started a project in late 1983 to survey and collect materials on immigrant and ethnic life in the anthracite coal region, a 480-square-mile area in northeastern Pennsylvania. The project relied on extensive field work that only outside funding could make possible.⁴⁷ The Anthracite Region Ethnic Archives (AREA), which ran until the summer of 1986, resulted in “the library’s largest and most important archival acquisitions since the early 1970s,” according to the library’s annual report.⁴⁸ While the annual report for 1983 reflected that it was difficult at first to penetrate “the relative insularity of ethnic groups in the area,” the Balch succeeded in establishing a network of contacts among local ethnic and cultural heritage organizations that could be relied on for future collection development.⁴⁹ At the same time, library director Joe Anderson recalls that “a public relations program around the theme of ‘the Search’—for archival and library materials and museum artifacts”—helped the library develop its contacts within the ethnic communities of Philadelphia.⁵⁰ Grants also made possible the Delaware Valley Regional Ethnic Archives Project (DelREAP), funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts from 1990 to 1993. This project—the Balch’s most extensive, in-depth effort to develop its collection of records of ethnic organizations in the Philadelphia area—also relied extensively on outreach to local communities and active work with ethnic organizations to identify and preserve their history.⁵¹

Anderson was well aware of the challenge of developing and maintaining positive relations with ethnic communities, especially for an

⁴⁷ R. Joseph Anderson, “Managing Change and Chance: Collecting Policies in Social History Archives,” *American Archivist* 48 (1985): 301–2.

⁴⁸ 1986 Annual Report of the Library, record group 2, ser. 6, box 121, folder “Reports, Annual Reports, 1986.”

⁴⁹ 1983 Annual Report of the Library, record group 2, ser. 6, box 121, folder “Reports, Annual Reports, 1983.”

⁵⁰ Anderson, “Managing Change,” 302.

⁵¹ 1989 Annual Report of the Library, record group 2, ser. 6, box 121, folder “Reports, Annual Reports, 1989”; R. Joseph Anderson to Marian A. Godfrey, Pew Charitable Trust, Aug. 19, 1991, record group 2, ser. 6, box 3, folder “Correspondence 1991 Aug–Oct”; Margo Szabunia, archivist at the Balch, described those efforts at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference in 1993 (see “Session Abstract: Rara Avis in the Flock,” *Mid-Atlantic Archivist* 22, no. 1 [1993]: 23).

institution dedicated to multicultural collections. The approach often favored by ethnic organizations to focus on their own group's history did not fit well with the Balch Library's multiethnic and scholarly mission.⁵² Furthermore, sustaining relations with donors and ethnic communities over the years required significant resources and staffing levels. In spite of such challenges, the Balch's outreach efforts, such as the AREA and DelREAP projects, show that strong relations with ethnic communities were essential to the development of collections with high research value.

Underlying the Balch's scholarly and community mission was a lasting commitment to cultural pluralism. The "role of ethnicity in a pluralistic society" was an integral part of its mission from the beginning.⁵³ The title of the Balch's inaugural exhibit, *The American Kaleidoscope*, also made clear the institute's public commitment to cultural diversity. The language of pluralism placed the new organization in line with the growing academic and political challenge to the "melting pot" interpretation of American immigration history. At the heart of the pluralism perspective was the idea that the "ethnics"—European immigrants and their descendants—were "unmeltable," as Michael Novak famously put it, and that ethnic diversity was a positive force in what the media and politicians also called the mosaic of contemporary American society.⁵⁴

Balch leaders undoubtedly knew about the latest developments of scholarship. Prominent academics, such as historian of immigration John Higham, served on the board of trustees. In a 1972 presentation, Balch librarian Phil Mooney cited recent scholarly challenges to the melting pot paradigm.⁵⁵ He distinguished the Balch from the American Museum of Immigration in New York, which had been criticized by scholars for its populism and its excessive emphasis on success stories and the contributions of early white immigrant groups. By contrast, the Balch would provide a more nuanced view of immigration, based on the latest scholarship, that would include successes as well as hardships and would "involve community people in presenting their own stories in their own words."⁵⁶ In the same vein, Stone stated in 1974 that

⁵² R. Joseph Anderson, telephone interview by author, Aug. 6, 2012.

⁵³ Executive Committee Meeting, Dec. 16, 1975, in Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Feb. 17, 1976, record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 2, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1974–1978.

⁵⁴ Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies* (New York, 1972).

⁵⁵ Mooney, "The Balch Institute."

⁵⁶ Philip Mooney to Katharine Newman, Dec. 20, 1973, record group 2, ser. 6, box 15, folder "Correspondence outgoing 1973, 1:6."

“the theme of cultural pluralism must become the dominating force in our acquisitions policy.”⁵⁷ In a 1975 letter to *Newsweek*, Applegate noted that ethnicity was not just a legacy but a dynamic, contemporary phenomenon to be studied and promoted.⁵⁸ Ethnic identities were no longer seen as imports from the “old country” but as new identities constructed out of the experiences of adjusting and integrating into the host society.⁵⁹ Talking about the 1976 inaugural exhibit, a staff member explained: “We hope to illustrate that America is essentially a process, not a product, constantly influenced by ethnicity.”⁶⁰

Despite its farsightedness, this approach had its own pitfalls. Members of the ethnic groups involved sometimes complained about the negative image portrayed by the Balch’s exhibits. Typical is the reaction of one visitor to the *We Italian Americans* exhibit in 1979, who acknowledged that the “blood, sweat and tears,” of Italian immigrants needed to be shown but complained that the exhibit put too much emphasis on the negative aspect of their history and failed to present Italian immigrants’ accomplishments. As she put it, “we must not lose sight of the fact . . . that eventually American society made it possible and created the opportunity for the immigrants to pull themselves up ever so loftily by their bootstraps.”⁶¹ This ambivalence was not limited to exhibits. A consultants’ 1973 study of ethnic leaders found that interviewees were divided over the “melting pot” or “mosaic” approach to viewing ethnicity in American history and over different interpretations of the Balch’s statement of purpose: “to preserve and protect ethnic identity.” Several among the interviewees worried about the polarization that would result from too much emphasis on diversity promotion.⁶²

In fact, the Balch had to deal with the same tensions that pervaded American society in the 1970s regarding the meaning of ethnicity and the

⁵⁷ Robyn Stone, memo, July 12, 1974, record group 2, ser. 6, box 117, folder “Planning Retreat, 1974, 4:4.”

⁵⁸ Howard Applegate to *Newsweek* editor, Apr. 2, 1975, record group 2, ser. 3, box 6, folder N.

⁵⁹ For more on evolving conceptions of ethnicity and their relations to ethnic archives, see Dominique Daniel, “Archival Representations of Immigration and Ethnicity in North American History: From the Ethnicization of Archives to the Archivization of Ethnicity,” *Archival Science* 14 (2014): 169–203.

⁶⁰ Ann King to Doris Sadar, Oct. 1, 1975, record group 2, ser. 6, box 70, folder “Assorted Correspondents 1:3.”

⁶¹ Theresa F. Bucchierrri to Mark Stolarik, May 21, 1979, record group 2, ser. 3, box 11, folder “Correspondence, 1979 (2).”

⁶² Barnes and Roche, *Confidential Report*, 6, 14.

role of ethnic identities in American history. For the Balch, these tensions hung, in part, on the dilemma characterizing its scholarly and popular missions. Its stated goal of preserving ethnic identities took on different meanings for those who strove to build a research library and those who developed popular exhibits and community programs. To potential donors, the Balch was sometimes presented as promoting the study and documentation “of the ethnic diversity and plurality that is America.”⁶³ At other times, especially for its exhibits and public events, the Balch’s mission was to interpret “the immigrant experience and contributions of ethnic groups to our national heritage.”⁶⁴ The use of the singular “experience” and the celebratory word “contribution” belie the more nuanced, complex, and diverse conception of ethnicity and immigration history based on scholarship.

In 1987 a new mission statement attempted to bring the popular and scholarly missions together by focusing on the concept of intergroup understanding:

The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies promotes greater inter-group understanding and a stronger, more tolerant and cohesive society by documenting and interpreting America’s multicultural heritage. It does so by means of its unique library, museum, and education program. The Institute is concerned with all materials, books, documents, and artifacts related to the over one hundred different ethnic groups who have come together to form a new society in the New Land.⁶⁵

This statement reflected new trends in scholarship and in American society as a whole. As sources of immigration to the United States increasingly shifted to Asia, Latin America, and Africa, the growing presence of non-European and non-Western minority populations became more visible, triggering new questions about economic integration, the social fabric, and national identity among the American public. Fears of fragmentation caused a backlash against pluralism, even as Americans’ fascination with, and celebration of, their ethnic and racial origins continued to thrive. In the 1990s a new generation of immigration scholars would place race at

⁶³ Robyn Stone to Mrs. Charles A. Vertanes, Apr. 2, 1975, record group 2, ser. 6, box 68, folder “Armenians [large]”; See also Goals and Objectives, Mar. 19, 1975, record group 2, ser. 6, box 12, folder “Library development, general information.”

⁶⁴ *The American Kaleidoscope*, flyer, 1976, record group 2, ser. 6, box 113, folder “Exhibits.”

⁶⁵ “Mission, Objectives and Goals” (adopted by the Board of Trustees May 11, 1987), record group 2, ser. 6, box 115, folder “General Information, Assorted fact sheets.”

the center of the experiences of non-European immigrants, challenging previous generations for neglecting its role. Racial prejudice, as well as the political and economic oppression of racial minorities, became priorities in the study of immigration and ethnic identity. In addition, the development of transnational and diaspora studies led to a growing focus on global movements and populations at the expense of interest in distinct local ethnic neighborhoods. Thus, the Balch's 1987 mission statement responded to growing interest in ethno-racial groups' relations with each other and with the broader social and economic framework.⁶⁶

The new mission statement also illustrates the persisting tensions between the melting pot and kaleidoscope paradigms. The term "New Land" and its capitalization contrasted with the more nuanced approach of multiculturalism, and a 1992 Balch library evaluation pointed out how Eurocentric this formulation was. Undertaken by experts, the 1992 evaluation noted that the Balch had been a pioneer in examining stereotyping in popular culture but that some references to the (singular) "story of immigration" and "the immigrant and ethnic experience" persisted in the official goals of the institution, which did not reflect "the point of the collections—that there is no single story or experience."⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the Balch through its history stood out for the determination of its leaders and staff to rely on the more nuanced, more complex approach to multiculturalism and intergroup relations, at the expense of the popular melting pot myth. In the 1990s, as political and public interest for ethnic studies was increasingly shaped by new "complex issues of ethnic and racial intolerance," the Balch's commitment seemed all the more remarkable.⁶⁸

*Identifying the Ethnic:
The Balch's Collection Development Policies and Practices*

The dual nature of the Balch as a scholarly and popular institution had an impact on the way its library and archival collections grew and were organized. Although the Balch adopted a collection development policy early on, it did not define ethnicity. This policy, approved by the trustees

⁶⁶ Daniel, "Archival Representations," 184–85.

⁶⁷ "Library Evaluation, 1992," record group 2, ser. 6, box 108, folder "Balch Museum and Education Self-Study and Evaluation, 1992–93."

⁶⁸ John Tenhula, "What is the Balch Institute? Past and Present," 1995, record group 2, ser. 6, box 108, folder "Administrative—Strategic Planning 1994–1997."

in September 1975, only stated that the Balch should acquire materials that had “a direct relationship to the immigrant and ethnic experience in North America” and that fit the scope of the Balch’s mission and objectives.⁶⁹ The only specific mandate was the explicit exclusion of the political history component that had been central to the Balch’s early days—a decision that resulted in the sale of its political history microfilms.⁷⁰

Yet members of the library staff undoubtedly had more precise ideas about the meaning of “the immigrant and ethnic experience” for the purpose of collection development. In 1974 Robyn Stone, the library’s field representative, who was responsible for identifying possible materials and making contact with donors, warned about the lack of focus and the need to define the Balch in relation to other existing ethnic institutions: “It seems in many respects that the schedule was followed in reverse; that is, the acquisitions policy was enacted before the planning was done.”⁷¹ To address that problem, in November 1974 a task force produced a report with specific collection development guidelines.⁷² With increased emphasis on the Bicentennial, however, these plans fell by the wayside. In 1977 Mooney reported that no progress had been made regarding acquisitions.⁷³ The years between 1976 and 1979 were a period of stagnation in which no significant acquisitions were made and staff turnover was high.⁷⁴ Mark Stolarik later mentioned that, when he was appointed as its head in 1977, the Balch was “practically dead.”⁷⁵ Nevertheless, during the Stolarik-Anderson years, the library initiated a “systematic . . . collecting effort.”⁷⁶ That effort was largely successful, and by the end of the 1980s the library

⁶⁹“Collection Acquisition Policy,” in Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Sept. 16, 1975, in record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 2, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1974–1978.

⁷⁰Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, Nov. 18, 1975, in record group 2, ser. 2, vol. 2, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, 1974–1978.

⁷¹Robyn Stone, memo, Jul. 12, 1974, record group 2, ser. 6, box 117, folder “Planning Retreat, 1974, 4:4.”

⁷²Task Force Final Report, Nov. 8, 1974, record group 2, ser. 6, box 117, folder “Policies, Acquisition policy 1:2.”

⁷³Philip Mooney to Members of Library Committee, memo, n.d., record group 2, ser. 6, box 125, folder “Library Committee, Assorted correspondence and memos, 1977.”

⁷⁴R. Joseph Anderson, “The Balch Institute and the Anthracite Region Newspaper Project,” unpublished paper, p. 2, Ninth Conference of Scholars on Polish National Catholic Church, Nov. 5, 1988, record group 2, ser. 6, box 14, folder “Talks, General.”

⁷⁵Mark Stolarik to Donald Cohan, Sep. 26, 1990, record group 2, ser. 2, box 7, folder “Cohan, Donald.”

⁷⁶Roy Tryon to Larry J. Hackman, Oct. 10, 1980, record group 2, ser. 6, box 1, folder “Correspondence, 1980.”

and archives had become, in Anderson's own terms, "the largest multi-ethnic collection in the country."⁷⁷

The dramatic expansion of the collections in the 1980s was in part driven by the 1974 task force report. As Anderson recalled:

The [1974] task force's major recommendation was that in addition to personal papers the library concentrate on archival and print materials which document the three classic institutions of the immigrant and ethnic community: the church, the ethnic press and fraternal and mutual benefit societies. These three institutions appeared in almost every immigrant community shortly after settlement. Their records provide immediate and authentic documentation of the processes of uprooting, resettlement, and acculturation.⁷⁸

This recommendation was grounded in recent historical scholarship and was in keeping with best practices in ethnic archiving, as pioneered by the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) in Minneapolis.⁷⁹

In 1983 a new collecting policy embraced the need to acquire materials on all ethnic groups in the United States.⁸⁰ This broad approach was intended to set the Balch apart from other immigration and ethnic archives—especially the Immigration History Research Center, which had identified southern European, eastern European, and Middle Eastern groups as its areas of focus.⁸¹ Indeed, Balch supporters consistently praised the unique breadth of the Balch collections for making cross-cultural studies possible.⁸² Anderson also stressed that the Balch's expansive scope allowed it to include material on smaller ethnic groups that had not been well documented by other libraries and archives.⁸³ As Anderson recognized, however, there may not have been much of a choice: "because we

⁷⁷ R. Joseph Anderson, "Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies," in *Invisible Philadelphia: Community Through Voluntary Organizations*, ed. Jean Barth Toll and Mildred S. Gillam (Philadelphia, 1995), 909–10. Cited in Dorman, "Searching for Vision," 32.

⁷⁸ Anderson, "The Balch Institute and the Anthracite Region Newspaper Project," 2.

⁷⁹ Dominique Daniel, "Documenting the Immigrant and Ethnic Experience in American Archives," *American Archivist* 73 (2010): 82–104.

⁸⁰ Planning Model for the Library of the Balch Institute, revised draft, Sept. 1983, record group 2, ser. 6, box 108, folder "Administrative, Strategic Planning, 1993–1994."

⁸¹ Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Immigration Studies Collection of the University of Minnesota," *American Archivist* 32 (1969): 143.

⁸² Robert Harney to Mark Stolarik, Feb. 1, 1980; James Bergquist, "Report on the Library of the Balch Institute," Feb. 8, 1980; John Higham to Mark Stolarik, Jan. 18, 1980, record group 2, ser. 6, box 113, folder "Evaluations, 1970s."

⁸³ R. Joseph Anderson to Sarah Fusfeld, Apr. 12, 1982, record group 2, ser. 6, box 1, folder "Correspondence 1982, Jan.–Jul."

already had significant print and archival holdings for a number of unrelated groups, we could not and did not want to limit collecting to specific ethnic groups.⁸⁴ Instead, the new policy limited collecting in time (it excluded the colonial period) and space, as it required collecting archival materials regionally in eastern Pennsylvania and print materials nationally. The Balch library committee also decided to stop collecting materials on blacks before 1865 and on Native Americans, except for materials documenting “their contemporary involvement in the ethnic revival and urban movement.”⁸⁵ New collecting strategies were adopted: “grant-funded regional projects, collecting coordinated with museum exhibits, and cooperating with independent collecting projects within ethnic communities.”⁸⁶ Still, the library recognized the challenges caused by this all-encompassing approach, especially the uneven coverage of ethnic groups: the Balch had, as one 1983 planning document admitted, “some large collections (e.g. Blacks, Jews, Germans, Irish, and Italians) but none comprehensive.” Some small ethnic groups were well covered, like the Chinese, Greeks, Japanese, Lithuanians, Poles, Slovaks, Swedes, and Ukrainians, while others were not.⁸⁷

It was under the new policy that the Balch library and archives saw its greatest development. Priority was given to local ethnic history. The three-year AREA project led to the acquisition of large archival collections, especially the records of fraternal organizations among such eastern and southern European communities as the Slovak, Polish, Italian, and Ukrainian communities.⁸⁸ The DelREAP project brought in 154 manuscript collections in 1991 and 142 in 1992, documenting the history of early immigrants from western Europe, such as the Scotch-Irish, Welsh, Irish, and Germans, as well as the history of eastern and southern Europeans and Asians. Records of more recent immigrant groups were also included, such as those of Hispanic organizations.⁸⁹ As a result, the strengths of the collections became the

⁸⁴ Anderson, “The Balch Institute and the Anthracite Region Newspaper Project,” 2.

⁸⁵ Library Committee Meeting Minutes, June 6, 1983, record group 2, ser. 6, box 115, folder “General information, planning model for Balch.”

⁸⁶ Library Committee Meeting Minutes, Mar. 23, 1987, record group 2, ser. 6, box 17, folder “Library, 1988”; Library Committee Meeting Minutes, Apr. 20, 1994, record group 2, ser. 6, box 126, folder “Library Committee, Apr. 1994.” For a detailed analysis of the collection development process at the Balch in the early 1980s, see Anderson, “Managing Change.”

⁸⁷ Planning Model for the Library of the Balch Institute, revised draft, September 1983, record group 2, ser. 6, box 108, folder “Administrative, strategic planning.”

⁸⁸ 1986 Annual Report of the Library, record group 2, ser. 6, box 121, folder “Reports, Annual Reports, 1986.”

⁸⁹ 1991 Annual Report of the Library, record group 2, ser. 6, box 121, folder “Reports, Annual Reports, 1991”; 1992 Annual Report of the Library, record group 2, ser. 6, box 121, folder “Reports, Annual Reports, 1992.”

records of fraternal organizations, ethnic media, and church materials such as histories and jubilee books. Regarding individual papers, the Balch had the greatest success with ethnic scholars such as educator Leonard Covello and historian Amandus Johnson, who helped create Italian and Swedish American cultural organizations, respectively.⁹⁰

In the mid-1990s, the Balch Library chose to focus on “those groups that are the most significant and hold the greatest potential for building unique, nationally important collections.”⁹¹ Of particular interest were new immigrants—those who had started arriving in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the elimination of the national origins quotas and the introduction of a new colorblind admission system in 1965—as well as political refugees brought to the United States by international crises. Such interest was not new for Balch librarians and archivists. In 1974 Stone argued: “With the upsurge in interest in cultural pluralism, it is imperative that we begin to trace the rich tradition of the newer immigrants to this country.”⁹² She and other Balch staff expressed interest in Vietnamese and Cuban refugees, Koreans, and other new arrivals from Asia and Latin America.⁹³ After the completion of the DelREAP project, those immigrant groups became priorities. In 1995, the Balch Library started significant projects regarding Southeast Asian refugees and South Asian immigrants.⁹⁴ Those projects aimed not only to collect those communities’ records but also to use them for publications, exhibitions, and other outreach and educational endeavors. Oral histories were included.⁹⁵ Eventually, what came to be called the New Immigrants Initiative encompassed a variety of collecting projects about Indian, Arab, African, Latino, and Korean populations.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Anderson to Roland Baumann, July 8, 1987, record group 2, ser. 6, box 2, folder “Correspondence, 1987, Jul.–Dec.”

⁹¹ Collection Policy of the Library of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, Sept. 18, 1995, record group 2, ser. 6, box 125, folder “Library Committee, 1997.”

⁹² Robyn Stone to Marta Perez, Sociedad Pro-Arte Grately, Dec. 10, 1974, record group 2, ser. 6, box 68, folder “Cubans.”

⁹³ See, for example, a letter from field archivist Robyn Stone to General Henderson, at the Indian Town Gap Refugee Settlement Center, expressing the Balch’s interest in Vietnamese refugees’ history (Stone to Henderson, Aug. 19, 1975, record group 2, ser. 6, box 70, folder “Assorted Correspondents 1:3”). On Korean Americans, see also Anderson to Li, Feb. 4, 1983, record group 2, ser. 6, box 1, folder “Correspondence, 1983, January–February.”

⁹⁴ Strategy for Building the Balch Institute Library, draft, Sept. 5, 1995, record group 2, ser. 6, box 125, folder “Library Committee, 1995.”

⁹⁵ South Asians in America Project: Preliminary Planning Document, Sept. 7, 1995, record group 2, ser. 6, box 125, folder “Library Committee, 1995.”

⁹⁶ New Immigrants Initiative Collection (Collection 3442), Historical Society of Pennsylvania (finding aid available online at <http://www2.hsp.org/collections/manuscripts/n/NewImmigrants3442.html>). The Korean American project was not completed.

In 1992, while DelREAP was still underway, library reviewers recognized the remarkable breadth of the Balch collections as a result of these successful projects. They noted, however, that the library was unable to document all existing groups that were officially part of its collecting scope and that this gap had the unwanted effect of delegitimizing some ethnic groups. Reviewers were also concerned that “the concept of ethnic has not been thought through clearly, there seems rather to be an ‘I know it when I see it’ approach.”⁹⁷ Indeed, while the Balch had sought to define and limit ethnicity for collection development purposes, it was consistently faced with the ambiguity and fluidity of the concept.

To determine what was not ethnic, the Balch first eliminated materials relating to life in the home country that was not somehow connected to emigration.⁹⁸ After 1974 it gave priority to immigrant or first-generation status and to ethnic institutions—churches, fraternal organizations, the press—that appeared within first-generation immigrant communities and could be observed for all immigration waves since the American Revolution.⁹⁹ In some way, immigration status was an easier marker of ethnicity—and, therefore, inclusion in the Balch collections—than the ethnicity of the second generation and beyond.

Nevertheless, not all immigrants were considered “ethnic” for collection development purposes. Thus the 1974 task force considered three categories of relevant materials:

- 1) the papers and memorabilia of the common man who personally immigrated to the North American continent and left an oral or written record of his experiences; 2) the papers of those immigrants who have made substantial contributions to their respective ethnic communities or who have distinguished themselves on the national ethnic scene; 3) the papers of those non-immigrants who belong or relate to a definable ethnic group and who work for the concerns of ethnics.¹⁰⁰

The task force thought they should exclude immigrants who distinguished themselves in areas “that extend beyond ethnic lines,” such as professionals

⁹⁷ Library Evaluation, 1992, p. 2, record group 2, ser. 6, box 108, folder “Balch Museum and Education Self-Study and Evaluation, 1992–93.” On the challenges of identifying ethnic materials, see Daniel, “Archival Representations.”

⁹⁸ Roy Tryon to Robert Scheuermann, Feb. 24, 1981, record group 2, ser. 6, box 1, folder “Correspondence, 1981.”

⁹⁹ Anderson, “The Balch Institute and the Anthracite Region Newspaper Project,” 2.

¹⁰⁰ Task Force Final Report, Nov. 8, 1974, p. 10, record group 2, ser. 6, box 117, folder “Policies, Acquisition policy 1:2.”

with mainstream careers, and consider only people who had some “association or concern for a particular ethnic group” or “participation in ethnic affairs.” The task force report went on to identify what they considered “ethnic” materials for all areas of interest. For example, for artists, they recommended that the Balch collect only the papers of those who clearly related to ethnic communities and whose work “incorporate[d] his ethnic experiences.”¹⁰¹

The task force, therefore, proposed a specialized conception of ethnicity that emphasized cultural retention and activism, rather than integration and relations between immigrants and the broader society. This conception clearly underlay the development of collections in the 1980s, as the Balch focused its efforts on actively “ethnic” organizations to the detriment of materials that could document other aspects of ethnic history. In 1987 Anderson admitted, “One problem in describing our collections in a broader social history context is that we avoid materials that were not created by ethnic organizations (e.g., labor and general social service records). While they have obvious ethnic content, we have our plate full collecting ethnic records per se.”¹⁰² This approach was by no means unique to the Balch in the 1980s; it corresponded to the research interests of historians who adopted an inward-looking perspective to the study of ethnic neighborhoods, focusing primarily on the experiences of families and organizations inside specific ethnic communities and less so on their relations with other communities or society at large.¹⁰³

The Balch attempted to adjust its understanding of ethnicity over time as it discussed the desirability of adding certain national or cultural groups. English-speaking American groups were excluded at first, as academic and public attention focused primarily on non-English-speaking white ethnics who were reasserting their heritage against Anglo-Americans. Later on, English-speaking groups were progressively taken into consideration. Whereas in 1979 the Balch reported collecting “all groups but Anglo-American,” ten years later, responding to new scholarly interest, it did document Welsh American history.¹⁰⁴ At a time when knowledge of the

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² R. Joseph Anderson to Roland Baumann, Jul. 8, 1987, record group 2, ser. 6, box 2, folder “Correspondence, 1987, Jul.–Dec.”

¹⁰³ Daniel, “Archival Representations,” 182; Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Thomas and Znaniecki and the Historiography of American Immigration,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 1 (1996): 21.

¹⁰⁴ “Survey of Ethnic Museums, Libraries and Archives,” record group 2, ser. 6, box 1, folder “Correspondence, 1979”; Randall Miller to R. Joseph Anderson, May 2, 1990, record group 2, ser. 6, box 3, folder “Correspondence 1990, Feb.–Jul.”; R. Joseph Anderson, “Preserving the Welsh-American Heritage,” *Roundtable Newsletter* 3, no. 1 (March 1991): 1, record group 2, ser. 6, box 3, folder “Correspondence 1991, January–March.”

language of the country of origin was declining in European American populations issued from earlier immigration waves, the Balch shifted toward a conception of ethnicity that deemphasized language and gave more weight to cultural self-awareness. Regarding Native Americans, the decision to include only activists confirmed the Balch's emphasis on both ethnic awareness and active involvement in organizations promoting ethnic heritage and minority rights. In 1992, when the Balch published a guide to the collections, the interest in identity awareness was made explicit. As the authors explained in the introduction: "The institute does not assign ethnic labels or identity, and we have traditionally accepted the identity chosen by the individuals and organizations whose papers and records we collect."¹⁰⁵

Not only did the Balch collecting efforts require identifying groups that qualified as "ethnic," but they also entailed selecting appropriate individuals within these groups. Yet individuals, who lead multifaceted lives in which ethnic activism or self-awareness may be only one component, rarely fall neatly into a clear "ethnic" or "non-ethnic" category. The 1974 task force had been aware of the mixed nature of individual papers, and its recommendation to prioritize organizational records sprang in part from the consideration that such records contained a larger proportion of materials on immigration and ethnicity than did personal papers.¹⁰⁶ So what made individuals "ethnic" enough that their papers were of interest to the Balch? The Balch acquired the papers of intellectuals and leaders who studied ethnic phenomena or who were involved in ethnic organizations, such as Henry Lucas, a historian of Dutch settlement in the United States, or Leonard Covello, an Italian American community leader and educator. Also of interest was Abraham Hurshman, a Jewish lawyer of Latvian origin who was involved in Democratic politics and "reasonably active" in the Jewish community.¹⁰⁷

Conversely, the Balch shied away from individuals of immigrant origin with no ethnic involvement. Alphonsus Romeika, a Lithuanian American attorney, was approached by Mooney because he handled estate planning

¹⁰⁵ Monique Bourque and R. Joseph Anderson, "Introduction," in *A Guide to Manuscript and Microfilm Collections of the Research Library of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies* (Philadelphia, 1992), iii–ix. Available online at http://www2.hsp.org/collections/Balch%20manuscript_guide/html/contents.html.

¹⁰⁶ Cathy Stover, Acquisitions Memo, Oct. 9, 1974, record group 2, ser. 6, box 117, folder "Policies, Acquisition policy 2.2."

¹⁰⁷ Robyn Stone, re: Abraham Hurshman, memo, May 28, 1974, record group 2, ser. 6, box 94, folder "Abraham Hurshman Collection, 1974."

for Lithuanian Americans and was willing to help the Balch acquire materials. However, Mooney reported that he had been “involved to a limited degree in community affairs,” and he did not “appear to be terribly informative regarding local issues of consequence to the community.” Mooney even noted that the attorney had “pretty much removed himself from his Lithuanian roots and downplays his heritage. He obviously represents an American success story and would just as soon forget about his origin.”¹⁰⁸ Another case is that of Michael Musmanno, an Italian American who had been a defense attorney in the Sacco and Vanzetti case and a Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice. When inquiring about his papers, Mooney was told by a fellow judge:

Although the Justice was naturally more interested in Italian-American affairs, I don't believe he wrote to any extent on the problems. His book 'Italians in America' is probably his only major writing in that field. However if we uncover any material which I feel would be appropriate to ethnic research and study, I certainly will be in touch with you.¹⁰⁹

What the writer meant by “appropriate to ethnic research and study” remains to be seen.

Thus, immigrant success stories and stories of assimilation are less likely to have been included in the Balch collections than ethnic activists' stories. Immigrants who placed equal or more importance on aspects of their lives other than ethnicity did not fall clearly within the scope of the Balch. Their cases presented practical challenges—individuals were reluctant to donate materials to an institution that would mark them as ethnic—and raised theoretical questions. Could individuals be ethnic if they did not want to be labeled as such? Yet their records were important for a balanced analysis of immigration history. They had the potential to complicate the new social history of immigration and ethnicity that challenged the assimilatory model and saw ethnicity as a dynamic phenomenon triggered by the immigration experience itself.

Balch staff members also removed “non-ethnic” material from donated manuscript and print collections, as evidenced in the institution's records. For example, a cataloging worksheet for the Zygmunt Nagorski papers

¹⁰⁸ Philip Mooney, re: Alphonsus Romeika, memo, Apr. 3, 1975, record group 2, ser. 6, box 20, folder “Inquiries and Solicitations, Re–Ru.”

¹⁰⁹ William F. Cercone to Philip Mooney, July 28, 1972, record group 2, ser. 6, box 69, folder “Italians 1:2.”

indicates staff removed personal memorabilia “of no consequence to ethnicity.”¹¹⁰ Staff labeled some isolated printed ephemera produced by ethnic organizations whose records were not held at the Balch as “not ethnic in and of themselves.”¹¹¹ In some cases, the Balch acquired only part of the materials produced by an individual. Thus, the papers of Amandus Johnson, a historian of early Swedish settlements in Delaware area but also professor of Scandinavian languages and author of a Kimbundu-English-Portuguese dictionary, were divided between the University of Pennsylvania Museum, which held his linguistic research in Angola, and the Balch Institute.¹¹²

The difficulty of collecting ethnic history was compounded by the fact that ethnic identities change over the life of an individual and over generations, making their recognition more difficult. Stolarik once noted that the Balch intended to document cultural change over time but that beyond the first and second generation it became difficult to distinguish between ethnic and popular cultural material.¹¹³ Indeed, with the passage of time, ethnic traits connected to immigration fade or evolve as connections with the host society multiply, blending into what could be called popular culture. The librarians who evaluated the Balch in 1992 recognized this problem for collection development. They pointed out that most Americans were “ethnic,” given that their ancestors had been immigrants, and that in that sense ethnic history was American history:

If the Institute is concerned with all materials . . . related to the over 100 different ethnic groups who have come together . . . then the focus comprises all of American history—unless particular immigrant groups are to be de-legitimized. Or is the point being made that beyond a certain number of generations, people cease to be ethnic?¹¹⁴

But if all Americans were ethnic, how could ethnicity be identified for the purpose of collection development? In the 1990s and early 2000s the

¹¹⁰ Cataloging worksheet, record group 2, ser. 6, box 96, folder “Processing notes for Covello Papers, AFSC case files, Nagorski Papers, and Hoving, ca 1970s.”

¹¹¹ Notes, Discussion of SPC, Jan. 15, 1992, record group 2, ser. 6, box 112, folder “Cataloging.”

¹¹² Mary Elizabeth Ruwell to Judith Felsten, May 14, 1984, record group 2, ser. 6, box 94, folder “Amandus Johnson Papers.”

¹¹³ Mark Stolarik to Suzy Coleman, Nov. 20, 1984, record group 2, ser. 3, box 12, folder “Correspondence 1984.”

¹¹⁴ Library Evaluation, 1992, p. 2, record group 2, ser. 6, box 108, folder “Balch Museum and Education Self-Study and Evaluation, 1992–93.”

Balch prioritized new immigrants over the difficult question of documenting ethnicity beyond the second generation.

Collecting ethnic history also required special cataloging and archival arrangement and description skills. From its early days, the Balch library sought to organize its collections to meet the specialized needs of its scholarly patrons. It maintained an in-depth classification system that relied on ethnic and topical categories. At first it based ethnic coding on broad geographic and linguistic criteria, but in 1974 the task force decided to use identifiable groups. For example, until then the practice had been to use a “French” category that included French Canadians and Creoles as well as immigrants from France. Most task force members supported an alternative approach of relying on the groups’ self-conception rather than language and nationality, using the name used by the group. With this approach, French speakers from Canada would be labeled French Canadians rather than French, and Mennonites would be distinguished from Germans. The task force made plans for a complex system with main headings and subheadings that would support research into well-defined ethnic groups and subgroups.¹¹⁵

However, the Balch’s difficulties in the second half of the 1970s—high staff turnover and few acquisitions—halted this ambitious plan, and many of the collections remained unprocessed or uncatalogued until the next decade.¹¹⁶ In 1980–82 an archives processing project funded by the NEH allowed the Balch to eliminate this backlog. In 1980 the Balch library also started using the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) system. Use of Library of Congress copy cataloging required not only abandoning idiosyncratic practices but also reflecting on the need to update and build on existing Library of Congress subject headings to fit Balch patrons’ needs. In 1982 the Balch library embarked on a six-year retrospective cataloging project, funded by the Pew Memorial Trust and led by head cataloger Sheila Walker.¹¹⁷

The Balch welcomed subject heading changes made by the Library of Congress, such as changing “Negro” to “African American,” or using

¹¹⁵ “Ethnic File,” record group 2, ser. 6, box 117, folder “Policies, Acquisition policy 2.2.”

¹¹⁶ John Higham to Mark Stolarik, Jan. 18, 1980, record group 2, ser. 6, box 113, folder “Evaluations, 1970s.”

¹¹⁷ 1985 Annual Report of the Library, record group 2, ser. 3, box 16, folder “Library, 1985”; Planning Model for the Library of the Balch Institute—revised draft, Sept. 1983, record group 2, ser. 6, box 108, folder “Administrative, Strategic Planning, 1993–1994;” 1988 Annual Report of the Library, record group 2, ser. 6, box 121, folder “Reports, Annual Reports, 1988.”

“Italian American” instead of “Italians in the United States.”¹¹⁸ But it faced many cataloging challenges due to the ambiguous and shifting nature of ethnic identities and to the continued perceived need to provide a specialized classification scheme that would go beyond the Library of Congress subject headings. Staff used subject heading subdivisions and cross-references heavily to provide more access points and a more refined classification. Furthermore, they decided to use the categories of the newly published *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, which they presumed more closely reflected scholarly usage, to complement the Library of Congress subject headings.¹¹⁹ A staff manual noted that “the Harvard Encyclopedia is the authority for what constitutes an ethnic group and what is the accepted name for the group. The library has made very few exceptions to the encyclopedia’s usage.”¹²⁰ Occasionally, the two systems differed. For example, the Library of Congress used “Ruthenians,” whereas the Harvard encyclopedia referred to “Carpatho-Rusyns,” the term then favored by the group itself. In such cases, the Balch relied on Library of Congress headings but added a cross-reference based on the Harvard Encyclopedia classification.¹²¹

Nevertheless, cataloging, which relies on clear-cut categories and standardized naming conventions, could hardly do justice to the fluidity and ambiguity of ethnic labels and identities. As the case of the Ruthenian/Carpatho-Rusyns category illustrates, the name ascribed to a group did not always correspond to self-perception. The Balch staff strove to accommodate both: “Our guiding principle has been the self-identity of the individual or group that is being described, as well as the identity generally ascribed to them by others in the community. In the few cases when there has been a difference between the two, we have tried to accommodate both.”¹²² It also proved difficult to catalog the collection of individuals with multiple ethnic affiliations, such as Samuel Sturgis, a physician who had Swedish, Huguenot, and German origins. Sturgis wrote books on Swedish American history but was also an officer in the Huguenot

¹¹⁸ Nina Walls, “Cataloging Analysis,” Apr. 1981, record group 2, ser. 6, box 111, folder “Cataloging Palinet/OCLC, Agreement and other related papers.”

¹¹⁹ Stephan Thernstrom, Ann Orlov, and Oscar Handlin, eds., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, MA, 1980).

¹²⁰ Balch Archives Procedures Manual, Nov. 1984, revised Nov. 1989, record group 2, ser. 6, box 118, folder “Reference, Archives Procedures, 1989.”

¹²¹ Nina Walls, “Cataloging Analysis,” Apr. 1981, record group 2, ser. 6, box 111, folder “Cataloging Palinet/OCLC, Agreement and other related papers.”

¹²² Bourque and Anderson, “Introduction.”

Society of Pennsylvania and the National Huguenot Society.¹²³ In the 1992 guide to the collections, the Sturgis papers are part of the French collections, because most of the material obtained by the Balch documented his involvement in Huguenot history. Another difficulty was that both the Library of Congress and Harvard Encyclopedia classifications did not cover all existing self-identified ethnic groups. As many scholars noted upon its publication, the *Harvard Encyclopedia* broke down certain groups—such as Carpatho-Rusyns—in small components, while others—such as Native Americans—were lumped together in large blocks.¹²⁴ The Balch classification suffered from similar issues, with Chinese as a single group alongside small groups like Scotch-Irish.

In the end, the Balch's elaborate classification scheme was difficult to sustain. It required numerous highly skilled staff to implement the grant-funded cataloging projects and to continue those efforts after the projects' completion. During the heyday of grant funding, foreign language speakers were recruited to help process and catalog the large foreign language collections.¹²⁵ The visual catalog, implemented in 1983, included cross-references by subject, ethnic group, and donor.¹²⁶ This detailed classification scheme was an impressive attempt to map out ethnic America in ways that would benefit scholarly use of the collections. The lines it drew around and between ethnic groups and subgroups reflected the state of ethnic studies in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1992 guide to the collections represents the culmination of the Balch's effort to acquire intellectual control over their rapidly growing collections and demonstrates the library's commitment to serving the advanced needs of the scholarship of immigration and ethnicity. At the same time, the system relied on ethnic distinctions rather than relations—an approach that is inherent in cataloging but that would increasingly run counter to new scholarly trends.

¹²³ Robyn Stone, re: Dr. Samuel Sturgis, memo, Dec. 11, 1973, record group 2, ser. 6, box 15, folder "Correspondence—Outgoing, 1973"; Samuel Sturgis Papers, in Bourque and Anderson, *Guide to Manuscript and Microfilm Collections*, 17.

¹²⁴ David A. Gerber, "Review of Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups by Stephan Thernstrom; Ann Orlov; Oscar Handlin," *Journal of American History* 68 (1981): 94–95; David M. Reimers, "Review of Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups by Stephan Thernstrom," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 907–9.

¹²⁵ Balch Institute Library Quarterly Report, Sept. 15–Nov. 15, 1984, record group 2, ser. 6, box 121, folder "Reports, Quarterly Reports, Sep. 1983–Mar 1984."

¹²⁶ R. Joseph Anderson to Deidra A. Lyngard, Feb. 5, 1984, record group 2, ser. 6, box 2, folder "Correspondence 1988 Jan.–June."

As public interest shifted in the 1990s toward intergroup relations and scholarship expanded into new areas of racial relations and transnational population flows, John Higham wrote to the Balch Library Committee that the library needed to move away from its “group-specific” strategy. He noted that “ethnic scholarship is becoming increasingly comparative, and therefore increasingly concerned with interactions between ethnic groups and with their partial incorporation into the host society.”¹²⁷ Because of the breadth of its collections, the Balch was uniquely placed to accomplish this shift. The museum and educational programs responded to such changes by focusing on concepts such as racial prejudice and conflict as well as intergroup understanding.¹²⁸ But the institute’s financial and institutional woes in the 1990s hindered its ability to adapt to contextual changes. Collections continued to grow, albeit more slowly, but the ethnic classification system remained the organizing principle of the print and manuscript collections.

Conclusion

In the second half of the 1990s, lack of funding and inadequate staffing prevented the library from continuing to develop its collections at the same pace as that of the previous fifteen years. The Balch administration objected to the high cost of serving what they saw as a relatively low number of researchers using the library. A 1994 consultant’s report noted that in spite of its overall strengths (staff expertise, service orientation, unique collections, and regional visibility) the library had difficulty understanding where it fit in the Balch because its major constituencies were far different from those served by other departments; it did not collect material that directly served the research and production needs of educational programming and exhibitions; and its intrinsic worth was consistently questioned due to its low potential for generating income for the institute.¹²⁹ For John Tenhula, the Balch’s president after 1991, positioning the Balch on the cutting edge of scholarship was of lower priority than supporting the educational programs that would give the institution more visibility and

¹²⁷ John Higham, memo, June 12, 1994, record group 2, ser. 6, box 125, folder “Library Committee 1994.”

¹²⁸ Jim Duncan, *Consultant’s Report on the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies Library and Archives* (Apr. 1994), 4–7, record group 2, ser. 6, box 122, folder “Reports, Consultant’s Report, 1994.”

¹²⁹ Duncan, *Consultant’s Report*, 4–7.

therefore facilitate fundraising.¹³⁰ By then, public funding opportunities for ethnic history had dwindled, and ethnic heritage celebration was no longer at the forefront of the public's attention. Maintaining a cutting-edge, specialized scholarly research collection was a heavy financial burden that the new Balch leadership was reluctant to embrace. Financial instability became so severe that it jeopardized grant applications and threatened the very future of the Balch, ultimately leading to the decision to merge with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).¹³¹

The Balch library did have major achievements in the second half of the 1990s, as demonstrated by the New Immigrants Initiative. Furthermore, President Tenhula and the board eventually decided to go back to emphasizing the Balch's library as the institute's "greatest asset."¹³² A revised and simplified mission statement announced in 2000 reflected that new strategy, although it remained grounded in the Balch's tradition: "The Balch Institute documents and interprets the ethnic and immigrant experience in the United States."¹³³ Ironically, the library and archives gained institutional priority again in 2000, as the Balch's leaders started to prepare for the institute's merger with HSP.¹³⁴ The print and manuscript collections of the Balch Institute would greatly enhance the historical society's own collections. However, the HSP had disposed of its own artifactual collection a few years before, and the society sold off the Balch's museum collection soon after the merger.¹³⁵

As this article has shown, collection development and management at the Balch were influenced by evolving conceptions and uses of ethnicity in historical research as well as by changing local and national public debates that were initially triggered by the ethnic revival of the 1970s. In the last three decades of the twentieth century, historians of immigration produced large amounts of scholarship—from the social history of white ethnic neighborhoods to the interdisciplinary study of intergroup relations, diasporic phenomena, and racial prejudice. In the public eye, the ethnic revival of the 1970s was replaced by debates on affirmative action, the ethno-racial fragmentation of American society, and the integration of new immigrants and refugees.

¹³⁰ Dorman, "Searching for Vision," 35; Draft—Library Committee Meeting Minutes, Apr. 20, 1994, record group 2, ser. 6, box 126, folder "Library Committee, 1994."

¹³¹ Dorman, "Searching for Vision," 38.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40–43.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 41; Stolarik, "Building Ethnic Archives," 65.

The growing sophistication of scholarly production and the persisting complexity of political and social ethnic reality provided unique opportunities to build solid and original collections but also raised serious challenges that hampered collection development efforts. The Balch library found effective ways to deal with these challenges. But with limited funding and continuing uncertainties about the institute's mission, they could not resolve tensions between competing needs, especially between scholarly and popular publics, the library and museum missions, and different perspectives on the American melting pot or kaleidoscope. The answers they gave to the practical and theoretical questions they encountered were shaped by the evolving scholarly and popular conceptions of ethnicity, but they also contributed to shaping those conceptions. All in all, the ethnicity that was represented in the Balch collections covered a global geographic and cultural range; included both white ethnics issued from European immigration and recent arrivals to the United States from around the world; encompassed both positive and negative aspects of immigrant life; relied on a vision of juxtaposed and self-contained homogeneous cultural groups; and most often took the form of "self-aware" or "active" ethnicity, namely ethnicity characterized by active interest in ethnic history, politics, or social life.

Like all library and archives collections, ethnic collections are always incomplete and therefore biased. The Balch could never provide a comprehensive coverage of ethnic life in the United States, nor was it desirable that it should. Nevertheless, understanding what aspects of ethnicity were left aside as Balch leaders and staff worked to build their collections can tell us as much about the past as the materials they actually accessioned. The Balch's example thus illustrates the need for a more thorough and critical evaluation of the historian's primary sources, or for what historian Antoinette Burton has called the "historicization" of the archives.¹³⁶ By viewing the Balch's archival and library collections as products of history, scholars can better understand how those collections can and cannot be used to produce new narratives in ethnic and immigration history.

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¹³⁶ Antoinette M. Burton, "Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories," in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette M. Burton (Durham, NC, 2005), 9.