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The Vicissitudes of Solo Editing

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Higginbotham, Don, "The Vicissitudes of Solo Editing" (1979). *Documentary Editing: Journal of the Association for Documentary Editing (1979-2011)*. Paper 86.

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THE VICISSITUDES OF SOLO EDITING

By Don Higginbotham
University of North Carolina

To be the chief cook and bottle-washer for a project in historical editing -- literally, a one-person enterprise -- invariably results in problems and circumstances quite foreign to many of you. This editor is surely a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. He cannot assign to others specific responsibilities for periods of time or types of letters. It means, as is the case with the Iredell Papers, that the lone editor does it all -- searches for manuscripts, transcribes, edits, and so on. Indeed, during the initial years of the undertaking, I taught at Louisiana State University, which was far removed from the Iredell materials in the state of North Carolina.

This is not to say that I was totally without assistance. Modest NHPRC grants lightened my teaching responsibilities at crucial times and provided funds for microfilm and photostats. Moreover, secretaries in the History Department at the University of North Carolina and in the Division of Archives and History in Raleigh -- the sponsoring institution -- transcribed perhaps a third of the documents. Even so, I performed most of the labor at every level of the enterprise, and I did so in my own faculty office since there was no extra space available.

It was, and is, a valuable experience, even though the system has its price. It meant trying to train departmental secretaries who had little time (and cared less) about mastering the mysteries of eighteenth-century spelling and penmanship. It meant there was no one but me to proofread the bulk of the Iredell letters, which I myself had usually transcribed! It meant, in the absence of assistant editors, making all the decisions about collateral correspondence, identifications, and headnotes. Many (if not most) of you have not only staffs but advisory boards as well. The opportunity for outside consultation may be even more important to the editor who lacks a staff.

Whatever the deficiencies of the Iredell Papers and similar ventures, they are still worth doing. It is hardly realistic to expect that sizable funding will be available for projects that anticipate only a very few volumes and are devoted to so-called secondary figures. The work goes slowly, but the rewards can be great, particularly, as is true of the Iredell project, when the initial volumes cast significant light on North Carolina during the years of imperial controversy and independence. In fact, there are extant only three really major manuscript collections for the half-century of North Carolina history after 1750; and there is not yet a first-rate monograph on the American Revolution in that state. Consequently, I hope that the publication of the first installment of the Iredell Papers will help stimulate more serious study of a neglected area of Revolutionary history.

MICRO-EDITIONS FOR DUBOIS, JOHN PAUL JONES

The complete correspondence of the Negro scholar W. E. B. DuBois housed at the University of Massachusetts is being placed on microfilm and will be available sometime in 1979, according to Robert W. McDonnell. A selection from the papers is now available in a letterpress edition edited by Herbert Aptheker. The third volume, containing a selection of DuBois's correspondence between 1944 and 1963, can be purchased from the University of Massachusetts Press (\$22.50).

James C. Bradford has been named editor of the Papers of John Paul Jones, an editorial project jointly sponsored by the U. S. Naval Academy and the NHPRC. A single volume of selected letters will supplement the complete collection, which is being placed on microform. Bradford is anxious to learn the whereabouts of Jones materials and asks that information on letters to and from Jones be sent to him at the Department of History, U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md. 21402.