

INDIANA ARCHIVES

THE history of the public records of the state of Indiana doubtless parallels that of most state organizations in the generation following the War of 1812. The territorial and state records, almost down to the present, were the responsibility of the departments in which they originated or which were charged by law with their care.

The preservation of these records was jeopardized by not less than two changes of the seat of government and additional changes of the capitol buildings. The territorial capital, from 1800-1813, was Vincennes. There the mansion of William Henry Harrison, first territorial governor (1801-1813), was not erected until 1804-1806. Prior to that the governor lived in the house of Colonel Francis Vigo. The Legislative Hall (still standing after several movings) is thought to have been built about 1805. Prior to that, and at times afterward, the territorial assembly met in rented quarters.

When Corydon was made the territorial capital (1813) the Harrison County Courthouse, which was to be used as the capitol, was not completed. Upon its completion, it served this purpose until 1825. In that year the seat of state government was moved to Indianapolis, a site in the wilderness near the center of the state, chosen by a commission and donated by the United States. Here the various parts of the state government were "strays" until the completion of the first Indianapolis capitol in 1835. This building was replaced on the same site by the present monumental structure begun in 1878 and completed in 1888.

The old adage that three moves are equivalent to one fire is true in the case of Indiana's public records. It is certain, also, that various officers of the state at different times showed little appreciation of the importance of preserving public documents and little discrimination in their care. A few illustrations suffice as a bare hint of resultant gaps.

Of the journals of the territorial legislative assemblies, the state now has in its possession only the house journals of two sessions of one of the five assemblies. The journals of five of the ten sessions of the House of Representatives and of one of the same number of sessions of the Legislative Council were for long in a private collection but were recently given to a university library, which, it is hoped, will return them to their rightful custodian. As only part of the journals, and these incomplete, were printed (in the Vincennes *Western Sun*), there is no known existing record of a considerable

part of the proceedings of the territorial assemblies. The discovery of at least some of the missing journals seems remote in view of a report made by a committee of the House of Representatives in the first session after the state was admitted into the Union: appointed to examine the accounts of the auditor and the treasurer, it reported that it was disappointed, on examining the legislative papers which lay jumbled together in a trunk without a lock, to find that the journals of 1810 which contained the investigations of that subject by a committee appointed at that session, were missing.¹

One of the two enrolled copies of the state Constitution of 1816, apparently the one from which the first printed copies were made, was missing many years. When purchased recently from a private collection by the Indiana Historical Society, it was found that there were a number of deviations from the official copy in the office of the secretary of state. The greatest deviation, to which, however, too much significance must not be attached, is that the recovered copy omits the word "honesty," which the secretary of state's copy gives as one of the objects of legislation by the General Assembly.

Another sad commentary is the report of John B. Dillon, state librarian, in 1845: "It is, perhaps, proper to report, that confused masses of books and papers belonging to the State of Indiana, and consisting, principally, of manuscripts and printed documents, relating to the legislative and executive proceedings of the State Government, are lying in the garret of the large building on the lot known as the Governor's Circle."² A more recent gap in official state records is the absence of any record of a special session of the Senate held in 1927 to hear and act upon the impeachment of a judge of the Circuit Court.

The plan of concentrating official state records (not in active use) under the care of an office especially intrusted with this duty was broached in the report of the state librarian in 1903-1904. For the story of its development, I am indebted to Miss Esther U. McNitt, chief of the Indiana Division of the State Library. In that report an appeal was made for the establishment of a department of archives in the library.³ Without any provision to speak of by the legislature, the Library Board in 1906 appointed Professor Harlow Lindley, of Earlham College, on a part-time basis, to organize a department

¹ *House Journal*, 1816-1817, pp. 72-73.

² *Documentary Journal*, 1845-1846, part II, doc. no. 2, p. 14.

³ *Indiana State Library, Biennial Report*, 1903-1904, pp. 16-17.

of Indiana archives and history in the library, then in the State House. The intention was to collect historical material, including private manuscripts, as well as official records, and to list such material in the state departments and in private possession. In the summer of 1907, work was begun by an examination of the records in some of the departments in the State House. This eventuated in a "Report on the Archives of the State of Indiana," published in the eleventh "Report of the Public Archives Commission."⁴ This lists, briefly, the documents in the offices of the governor, the secretary of state, auditor of state, clerk of the Supreme Court, treasurer of state, state superintendent of public instruction, adjutant general, state charities board, and library.

The report of the state librarian, 1909-1910, contained the recommendation that a permanent place be provided for the records of the state no longer in active use.⁵ An act, approved March 6, 1913, established officially in the State Library a department of Indiana history and archives, and intrusted to it the care and custody of such archives as might come into the possession of the library. The act also authorized state, county, and other officials at their discretion to turn over to it any official tax records, documents, original papers, newspaper files, and printed books not in current use.⁶

The library before this had possession of some archives; many small additions were received from time to time as storage rooms in the State House basement were occupied for office space or for current records. Some material also was purchased from outside the state. Two large collections came to the library in the period of the World War. In 1918 over two hundred bound volumes and several thousand manuscripts relating to the Civil War were recovered from the office of the adjutant general. In 1919, and later, records of almost all the state and many local agencies engaged in work in connection with the World War, including the complete files of the office of the State Council of Defense, were added. In the latter collection the library was aided by the Indiana Historical Commission which had been created in 1915 (the state celebrated its centennial in 1916), and which, at the request of the governor, devoted itself largely to collecting and compiling material upon Indiana in the World War. By 1933 the library had accumulated about two thousand bound volumes

⁴ American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, 1910, pp. 315-330.

⁵ *Biennial Report*, 1909-1910, p. 16.

⁶ *Laws of Indiana* [also cited as *Acts*], 1913, pp. 303-304.

of archives and several hundred thousand manuscripts. The volumes were catalogued as was other library material, and the manuscripts were treated as were manuscripts from private sources; in some cases, however, they had necessarily been left in storage.

The desperate need for space and for the administration of archives was one of the most important factors in securing an appropriation, or rather, a tax levy for a library and historical building. The General Assembly finally passed an act, approved March 9, 1929, levying a tax for each of the years 1929 and 1930, of one-half of one cent, and for the year 1931, of one cent, on each one hundred dollars of tangible property in the state of Indiana. The act also appointed a commission to acquire land in Indianapolis, and to "erect thereon a state library and historical building which will be suitable and adequate to house the state library and the historical bureau and to house and care for the archives and other public records of the state."⁷ Approximately one million dollars (including payment to date on delinquent taxes for the years specified) has been raised from the tax levy. A quarter block was purchased west of the State House, at the southeast corner of Senate Avenue and Ohio Street, and plans for the building were adopted by architectural competition.

The State Library and Historical Building was dedicated December 5, 1934. The building had been occupied some months before the dedication, some parts as early as June, 1933. Under the law the dedication automatically terminated the building commission and put the building under the state Division of Buildings and Grounds. The building is approximately 172 feet wide and 168 feet deep. The exterior is finished in Indiana limestone and the interior woodwork in walnut. The outside portion consists of a basement and three floors. The core of the building is the main bookstack in seven tiers, to which four additional tiers can be added.

Though planned solely for the State Library, including the archives, and the Historical Bureau, as the building approached completion pressure for office space for both old and new departments of the state led to other offices being given space in the building. The Supreme and Appellate courts were the first claimants, but fortunately were persuaded to remain in the State House. The Department of Conservation was finally allotted by the governor a little more than half of the top floor, part of the second floor, and about a quarter of the basement, this last at the expense of the archives.

⁷ *Laws of Indiana*, 1929, p. 213. The act covers pp. 210-219.

The archives, at present, have an office and reading room on the ground floor 59 feet 9 inches by 31 feet; a stack room north of the main stacks 83 feet 10 inches by 29 feet, containing two levels; also on the ground floor a vault in the interior 44 feet 6 inches by 22 feet; and two sides of the basement, one approximately 170 feet long by 33 feet, the other 68 feet by 34 feet. Undoubtedly, within two or three years at the most, this space will be inadequate.

Prior to 1933 the staff of the State Library had been chosen by a Library and Historical Board. By the State Executive-Administrative Act, popularly known as the Reorganization Act, the governor was vested with the appointment and commissioning of "each and every officer, employee or servant of the executive including the administrative department." The act provided that with five exceptions "the tenure of office, employment or service of each and every officer, employee or servant of the executive including the administrative department shall continue at the pleasure and discretion of the governor." Under this act all state officers and employees outside of the legislative and judicial departments, with the exception of elective officers and one deputy each, are appointed directly by the governor. The governor was also authorized and empowered to assign, reassign, transfer and retransfer all administrative powers, duties, and functions to one or more of the eight departments (subsequently nine) into which the executive and administrative departments of the state were reorganized by the law and by executive orders.⁸ The State Library, including the archives, by executive order, was put into the Department of Education, of which the state superintendent of public instruction, an elected officer, is the chief administrative officer.

Shortly after the act was passed, two appointees were added successively and temporarily to the Division of Indiana History and Archives. Afterward, while the library was still in the State House, an "archivist" was appointed, Samuel J. Kagan. The collection of newspapers published after 1845 was also put in his care. Being without training for, or experience in, either library or archival work, the first "archivist" had to experiment in the placing of the archives in the Library and Historical Building. An assistant was appointed, and early in 1934 a large number of workers were assigned from the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to the archives. A large number of relief workers have been assigned to the archives under the subsequent relief adminis-

⁸ *Laws of Indiana*, 1933, pp. 7-17.

trations. At present (September, 1938) nineteen men and women are working on Works Progress Administration projects wholly in the archives, and a number of others are working in connection with the division.

In January, 1936, the archives were made a separate division of the State Library with Edward A. Chapman, assistant to the director of the library, as chief. Shortly thereafter the "archivist" became state director of the WPA Historical Records Survey, and H. Reid Nation was appointed assistant archivist under the chief. Meanwhile, one other member of the library staff was assigned to the archivist. In February of this year Mr. Chapman became library consultant in the professional or "white collar" division of the WPA at Washington and Mr. Nation became acting chief of the Division of Archives. Thus, at present, the administration is in the hands of an acting chief, an assistant, and a group of WPA workers.

The Division of Archives, as has been said, also has charge of the newspapers subsequent to 1845 and of newspapers currently received. For storage of these newspapers there is a large room fitted with roller shelves, which, however, is unfortunately situated over the building machinery and so far is inevitably superheated.

The receipt of archives from the various departments of state, including the judiciary and legislature, was until 1935 left entirely to the volition and discretion of the various departments and of the State Library. That year an act was passed, approved March 11, creating a Commission on Public Records. It consists ex officio of the governor, the secretary of state, the state examiner of the State Board of Accounts, the director of the State Library, and the director of the Historical Bureau, the director of the State Library being secretary. The commission has the sole authority to authorize and direct the transfer of public records to the Division of Archives, and the sole authority to authorize the destruction of public records, records which it decides have no apparent official or historical value. No records may be removed from any office until a period of at least three years shall have elapsed from the date on which such records were filed, nor after that time if records are in frequent use by the officer having charge of such office.⁹ The commission has given serious attention to its duties. On the whole, it has lessened the flow of papers into the Division of Archives. It has also prevented the destruction of

⁹ *Laws of Indiana*, 1935, pp. 1035-1037.

groups of records which were customarily discarded in times past. It has enabled several departments, however, to save space in their offices and storerooms and has saved space in the archives by authorizing the destruction of records of no value which conscientious officials had been preserving. The commission is an integral and necessary part of the archival system in Indiana.

The usage of the Division of Archives is to include in its custody printed matter in all cases in which that matter is an integral part of the office record. This is frequently stretched to include more or less fugitive matter for which there is no more appropriate place in the library.

No effort has been made to collect in the state Division of Archives records of counties and other local units of government. Indeed, the division has been compelled, both by lack of space and by its limited personnel, to discourage the offer of, and to decline to accept such material. A very few exceptions have been made to this rule and those only in cases where material of value would otherwise certainly be destroyed. However, the WPA Historical Records Survey, in 1935, secured authorization and funds for microfilming part of the county records in some of the older counties of the state. By contract with a firm doing this work, at an expense of two thousand dollars it secured films of two hundred thousand pages of early county records. These remain the property of the project until its termination, but are permanently deposited in the Division of Archives of the State Library.

An act of the legislature, approved March 9, 1937, authorizes the director of the State Library to make a copy by photography, or by any other way, "of any official book, record, document, original paper, newspaper, or printed book or material in any county, city, or other public office, for preservation in the state archives. County, city and other officials shall permit such copies to be made of the books, records, documents and papers in their respective offices."¹⁰ No appropriation has been made for that purpose, and additions are not at present being made to the films taken by the Historical Records Survey. The occasion for the passage of the act making it mandatory for county, city, and other officials to permit the State Library to make copies of their records was the refusal of the recorder in one of the county seats along the Ohio River to allow the Historical Records

¹⁰ *Laws of Indiana*, 1937, p. 878.

Survey to photograph even the early deed books of the county, on the specious contention that copies in the State Library would deprive local abstract companies of part of their business. As it happened, the Ohio River flood the following winter not only gave an enhanced appreciation of the value of the films made by the Survey, but also brought home the danger of not having copies of public records preserved separately from the records themselves.

The limited equipment of the division includes a microfilming camera and a projector for microfilms. The library extends to the Division of Archives the use of its photostat. A humidifier and home-made press about complete the list of apparatus now on hand.

The growth of the archives collections has been relatively rapid, and state officials have been more than willing to give such aid as they have been able toward the preservation of their records. Because of the frequency of changes in the collections, it has been found impossible to keep an accurate inventory of all items in the custody of the division. However, at present there are a little more than eleven thousand bound volumes of records deposited in the Division of Archives. According to their bulk, the classifications of records amount to following percentages.

Executive Department ¹¹	12%
Treasury Department	12%
Audit	36%
State Department	4%
Education	4%
Legislative Records	8%
Supreme and Appellate Courts	8%
All others	16%

The relatively high percentage of records from the Department of Audit and Control can be explained by the fact that the Insurance Division, a unit of that department, keeps very voluminous bound records. The percentage of Department of State records is low because very few records from that department have been turned over to the archives. The transfer in March of this year from the office of the adjutant general (in the Executive Department) to the Divi-

¹¹ The "Executive Department," as one of the eight departments of "the executive including the administrative department of the State of Indiana," includes not only the governor's office (the executive office), but a group of large and important offices, divisions, and commissions. The usage is frequently confusing.

sion of Archives of the military records of Indiana's soldiers involves one of the largest tasks recently assumed by the division. Besides the magnitude of the material, the custody of these records involves frequent making out of certified copies of service and the adjustment of cases in which service records are to be found.

The unbound records are kept in various types of containers but mostly in steel, legal size, vertical cases. There are more than two thousand of these containers which are filled with records in the following proportions.

Executive Records	20.8%
Treasury Department	9.8%
Audit	20.8%
State Department	10.8%
Education	18.8%
Legislative Records	3.3%
All others	15.7%

In addition to these there is a group of special files which holds twenty-three thousand transcripts of cases in the Supreme and Appellate courts. The stacks and files of the Division of Archives occupy about one-fifth or one-sixth of the storage space in the Indiana State Library and Historical Building. The arrangement of the filing cases on the floor space available leaves room for expansion as the collections grow. The Indiana state offices have shown a marked drift away from the bound types of records. With a few notable exceptions, bound volumes are no longer used for record preservation.

One of the many difficult problems before the Division of Archives is the preservation and use of copies of letters. In almost all state offices carbon copies of correspondence are made on cheap and fragile paper. The life of these copies is not much, if any, longer than that of the wood-pulp paper now used in newspapers. Efforts to secure the use of more permanent material for copies of letters sent from state offices thus far have not met with success. It seems probable that in the more or less distant future files of correspondence in the archives may consist of little useable material other than letters received.

The destruction of records, under the direction of the Commission on Public Records, is accomplished either by their sale as waste paper or by burning, as agreed upon by the commission and the office concerned. An incinerator in the State Library and Historical Building

is the only convenient place for burning papers. Its use, however, has caused protests from the other state offices and from other buildings in the neighborhood. The drift, therefore, is toward removal of discarded records by sale.

Much might be written on the question of the justification and the extent of the destruction of public records. The decision of the Commission on Public Records is based on considerations, some of which are indisputable, while others are a matter of difficult judgment. Limitations of space and staff make it utterly impossible to preserve all the papers from all the state offices. Even if it were possible, the care of valueless material would interfere with the care and the use of valuable material. It is obvious that some public records, such as duplicates of papers in the same or separate offices, temporary records which have been copied in permanent form, and extra blank forms, are of no value. The tendency of the commission thus far has been to preserve all correspondence of whatever nature, to preserve all records of financial transactions (the Board of Accounts requires the preservation of canceled checks), and in general to err on the side of preserving valueless material rather than of destroying anything of possible use. It has been very liberal in interpreting the phrase "of historical value" in the act creating it; it has given as much weight to historical as to official value.

While the establishment of the Division of Archives of the State Library with suitable space in a "fireproof" building and the work of the Commission on Public Records have made a great improvement in the preservation and care of records in the possession of the state, there is need of provision for a recovery of lost papers and for personal canvass of state offices which have not yet been reached by the archival movement. It will be noticed that the Division of Archives has remained essentially passive; as it is, it affords an opportunity for preserving records and making them available, but it has not had the means either to give intelligent direction except when called upon or to search for records whose whereabouts, if they have not been destroyed, is unknown. The creation of special commissions and offices of comparatively short life has been a frequent occurrence. Not a few of these have left no records in any public office. It is reasonable to expect that this will not be the case in the future. A diligent search ought to be made for such losses and other losses of state papers in the past.

The most important recovery of state papers came about through the activities of the Federal Archives Survey of another state. Under the direction of Dr. Russell H. Anderson, the project in Illinois unearthed—the phrase can be understood literally—in the United States courthouse building in Chicago, formerly the post office building also, a large collection of the papers of Oliver P. Morton, Indiana's Civil War governor, together with papers from a few earlier governors. The material is described in two articles by Harvey Wish in the *Indiana Magazine of History*, under the title "New Indiana Archival Documents."¹² In the course of time through the courtesy of the National Archives, the Works Progress Administration, and the clerk of the United States Circuit Court in Chicago, these papers were delivered to the Division of Archives and duly filed.

The organization of archival material is based first upon the division of the state government into three departments: executive including administrative, legislative, and judiciary; and second, upon the organization of the first of these departments in the State Executive-Administrative Act which became effective February 3, 1933. The act and ensuing executive order (April 15, 1933) put all the state offices, outside the legislative department and the judiciary, into eight groups, technically called departments. The offices, or units of administration, are technically called divisions, but many have the legal name of commission, board, or bureau, and some are called by the office alone, as the State Library and State Superintendent of Public Instruction. In the classification scheme, subdivisions of these divisions, etc., are called bureaus. However, as is apparent, no uniform usage is followed and there is considerable confusion in the use of each of the terms. There has even been occasional question as to what the legal title of some of the state offices now is.

The eight main departments in the State Executive-Administrative Act were: Executive Department, Department of State, Department of Audit and Control, Department of Treasury, Department of Law, Department of Education, and Department of Commerce and Industry. To these a ninth, under the name Department of Public Welfare, was added by the special session of the General Assembly in 1936.¹³ There have been a few changes in the allocation of offices to

¹² *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXII, no. 4 (December, 1936), 360-369; XXXIII, no. 1 (March, 1937), 62-74.

¹³ *Laws of Indiana* (special session), 1936, pp. 12-80.

these departments and details of organization each year are given in the *Year Book* of the state of Indiana. In such cases the Division of Archives in general adheres to the arrangement made in 1933¹⁴ in placing its archival material. Material originating in offices no longer in existence in 1933 and not continued in other offices is grouped, so far as possible, under the department which most closely embraces the functions of the discontinued offices. Records which cannot be thus placed are put in a separate group distinct from the nine departments.

In the organization of the archives, the division consulted and received invaluable assistance from Miss Margaret C. Norton, superintendent of the archives of the state of Illinois. Lack of experience in archival procedure on the part of those who organized the Indiana archives made the help which Miss Norton freely gave indispensable. It must be stated, however, that Miss Norton is not to be held responsible for any of the procedures followed across the state line.

The first system developed for locating records so as to make them available for call, was an inventory shelf list on loose sheets which describes the material and gives its location by stack level, range number, shelf number, or filing case. It is of course difficult to keep the inventory shelf list up-to-date in any rapidly growing collection, and it is cumbersome. The task of cataloguing the archives has been begun; for a number of reasons it has proceeded intermittently. Many of the records were in a deplorable condition when transferred to the Division of Archives. A large portion of them were bundled together with no attempt at an orderly arrangement. In many cases, instead of restoring the original file system or reconstructing it, new file systems had to be arranged, and expediency was necessarily the major point. That is, the system has been adopted which will enable the division to produce a record when it is needed even though the result in the files may appear illogical upon casual inspection. In adopting a system or systems of filing and cataloguing which seems to be dictated by the material involved rather than by following rules used in older and well-established archives, there was not only considerable risk, but decided tribulation. The staff has been agreeably surprised and even amazed in discovering that in basic and important items the Indiana catalogue to a considerable extent duplicates that being developed in the National Archives.

¹⁴ Archives of offices transferred from other departments to the Department of Public Welfare, when that was created, are continued in their earlier connection unless there is such a break of continuity in the types of records as to call for a new group of files.

The collection of records from the Department of Education is the only one which has been catalogued in its entirety. The call numbers adopted are not descriptive of the contents as in the usual library system, but are intended merely as "find numbers" and serve to aid in locating and refiling documents. The first line of any call number is an alphabetical abbreviation of the department in which the record originated. The second line indicates division within the department. The numbers after the decimal point show the general character of the records—whether correspondence, financial accounts, minutes, or other forms of records. The third line of any call number is the date of the earliest entry or the earliest sheet in the main body of the record. In the case of a series of volumes under the same title, there may be a fourth line which is a volume indication.

In December of 1936 the task of compiling an index to personal names appearing in state records prior to 1851 was begun. Because clerical assistance for this work has been supplied by the Works Progress Administration, it has been possible to carry it forward much more rapidly than was at first hoped. This index is now practically complete and will be made available for the use of the public this autumn. There are about 150 omissions of names due to the illegibility of the script. There are more than 120,000 individuals named in the index, and there are about 660,000 entries. Every effort has been made to prevent errors; although in any such task mistakes will find their way through the checking processes, it is believed that errors amount to less than three per thousand entries. Unlike other indexes compiled for the same purpose, this index gives no information concerning the individuals whose names appear save the record and page upon which their names occur. This type is easier to compile and presents fewer opportunities for mistakes than does the index which calendars the name references in documents. In addition, investigators always wish to see the original record, so that time and labor spent in calendaring is very nearly completely wasted.

Only the most elementary treatment of documents coming into the Division of Archives has been possible thus far. The humidifying machine purchased from the Parks-Cramer Company has proved satisfactory. The machine is run at a rate that produces a relatively small quantity of extremely fine mist; this can be so controlled that documents left in the vault for as long as thirty-six hours show no trace of water spots or blurring of inks. The extremely heavy paper with thickly calendered surface used in court records requires ex-

posure to moist air before becoming properly limp and pliable.

At a cost of a little less than twenty dollars, six presses were built which used common screw-type automobile jacks as the means of compression. The presses can exert a pressure of approximately two tons and have been perfectly satisfactory. It was found in this method of moistening and flattening documents that the blotters between which they are pressed absorb a great deal of dust and grime which cannot be removed by other methods, for the blotters have an enormous capacity for doing this, time after time.

No equipment for gas fumigation has been available. At the suggestion of the state entomologist, records suspected of being infested with any insects or vermin are placed in humidifying vaults and the vaporizer set at 50 per cent relative humidity. By means of a high resistance electrical heater the temperature is raised to 124° F. and kept at that point for 148 hours. The humidity prevents any parching effects, and the heat kills all insects, eggs, and larvae.

Calls for the use of documents in the archives are increasing rapidly. Accurate figures on the use of the archives for the year July, 1935-June, 1936, are not available, but there were, in that period, about 20 calls for records, both from officials and from the general public. For the year 1936-1937 there were 89 calls for records and over one hundred reference questions answered. In the year 1937-1938 the division handled 370 calls for records and 169 reference questions.

Since the deposit of the military service records in this division by the office of the adjutant general in March, 1938, the division has filled 717 calls for service records, 252 for Civil War veterans, 33 for Spanish-American War veterans, and 432 for World War veterans. There have been occasional requests for service records for veterans of the Mexican War and the War of 1812.

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