The Archival Program of Pennsylvania[1]

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IN the Sand Hill region around Southern Pines, there flourished years ago a jug industry. Basic and essential chemical products peculiar to this region occurred in liquid form, and the local market for jugs was firm. Being practical and ingenious, the jug makers discovered after a time that a large jug, its neck plugged with a wad of clay, when incised with an appropriate inscription before being fired, served well as a headstone. At one time, we are told, jug headstones were rather common in the cemeteries of Moore County.

The legends inscribed on those jugs by pious Tar Heels tended toward standardization: "Gone to Rest," "Til We Meet," "Safe with Jesus," phrases expressive of the best Christian tradition. Once, however, there came the death of a neighbor definitely simple-minded and who had never joined any church; the potter found some difficulty in framing a suitable epitaph, but produced what some regard as a masterpiece: "She Done the Best She Knowed How."

For me, in my present situation, that epitaph takes particular meaning. We are meeting in North Carolina, where I have so very recently been in charge of public records, and I am here to report to you as the archivist of Pennsylvania. Hardy perennials who have attended these conventions regularly understand this situation, but for those less well established in archival circles, I must post a reminder that for only five months have I been residing in the Keystone State, that my archival experience has been gained elsewhere. You will agree that my time in Pennsylvania has been somewhat inadequate for gaining complete understanding of a complex situation involved with over a century of the intimate history of an old and populous state. All that I can promise, therefore, is to do the best that I know how.

[1] Paper read at the twelfth annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Raleigh, N. C., October 29, 1948.

Every archivist present realizes that here in North Carolina, although Dr. Crittenden and his immediate predecessors have been very able men, the high standards of the State Department of Archives & History derive directly from the solid base of twenty years of fine, scholarly leadership by Dr. R. D. W. Connor. We can recall other states, but need not stop to name them, where the situation has been similar, for when we find a strong archival agency we find as well a commanding figure who shaped the mold. Pennsylvania is no contradiction to this general truth, but unfortunately she is an illustration in reverse! In North Carolina and in a few other fortunate states, an inspired and inspiring combination, substantial scholarship and devotion to the care of records, both joined with marked executive ability, has left as monuments strong records agencies. In the Keystone State that combination has never yet occurred, and as a result Pennsylvania, so properly proud of her historical heritage and of her many and great contributions to the development of the nation, is only now coming to realize that for lack of an adequate and continuing program to control her wealth of official records she has drifted for a century, dispensing from time to time very considerable appropriations without achieving any very commendable or enduring results.

It is more pleasant and tactful to point with envy at excellence achieved than it would be to point with recrimination at lethargy continued, but we are all fully aware that in her present plight Pennsylvania is not alone, and in making so candid a statement of our present status we find solace in the certain knowledge that many of our sister states have lacked, and still lack, effective programs for the care of their records. With no malice whatever, we can make the observation that persons here present may well recognize in the story of Pennsylvania's struggle to protect her records episodes and trends very similar to those which have marked the history of their own archives. In fact it appears probable that the most significant feature of the tale of records care in Pennsylvania is its representative character, the circumstance that it has followed a pattern common to the Northeastern states. It merits consideration by this group chiefly because in so many of its aspects it illustrates general trends.

The states of our region have many similarities. For example, there is to be found in almost every one of the older states of the North a long-established and powerful state historical society. We are proud to have the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, an organization which has been active in Philadelphia since 1824. Its

rich collections and excellent publications are widely known. To a degree this Society, while enjoying rather slight official status, has taken on functions which, under circumstances prevailing in the South and West, have been assumed by state archival agencies. Occasionally we hear rumors of friction, in other states, between such private societies and the official archival agency, but fortunately in Pennsylvania there has been no clash. The Historical Society has repeatedly demonstrated itself to be a very good friend to the official records of the Commonwealth.

For the most part the Society has exerted its influence indirectly and without display, but such well-bred modesty fails to weaken the obvious fact that at a variety of crucial periods the benign strength of the Philadelphia group has been employed in behalf of the state's records. The first and best-known of these occasions came in 1836 when the Society, together with the even older but closely related American Philosophical Society, launched a campaign which resulted in the publication of Pennsylvania's series of *Colonial Records*, and ultimately of the long series of *Pennsylvania Archives*. Less apparent was the aid given during the 1850's when Samuel Hazard, Pennsylvania's first and greatest editor of source materials, a Philadelphia businessman turned historian, came to the employ of the state. Previously Hazard had spent much time at the Historical Society, and he returned to spend his last active years as librarian there. His early and intelligent editing was a contribution of undoubted value, and one for which the Society deserves credit. Again, in 1903, Samuel W. Pennypacker, an historically minded judge who for sixteen years was president of the Society, while serving as governor of the Commonwealth pushed through legislation establishing the archives division in the State Library. Furthermore, he placed in charge Thomas Lynch Montgomery, his brother Philadelphian and Society member, and as state librarian the competent Montgomery guided Pennsylvania's archival program until in 1921 he also returned to Philadelphia as librarian for the Historical Society. It would be easy to prove that the best years for the state's records have been those during which the intimate but unobtrusive influence of the Society has been exerted through personnel trained at the Philadelphia institution.

Since we are following a particular state in terms of general trends, it may prove helpful to recall that in America archival development has come in waves, and that the course of those waves can be found registered in a fashion whose relatively definite demarcations remind us of the familiar charts of geology. Stemming

from the example set by Europeans in publishing ponderous series of their official papers, there began in the second quarter of the last century an eruption of multi-volume series printing original source materials. Half a century later came a rash of published muster rolls, ship lists, tax lists, and such, books listing interminably the names of individual service men, immigrants, or taxables. These publications were inspired, of course, by the demands of members or would-be members of the then recently organized patriotic societies, each searcher eager for genealogical data regarding her particular line. Then, exactly at the turn of the century, came the splendid work of the Public Archives Commission of the American Historical Association. The thorough and scholarly investigations of the local "adjunct members" of that Commission into the nature, volume, and state of preservation of the records existing in state and local units of government resulted in a series of published reports which in turn stimulated in many states the founding of official archival and historical units. Then, only yesterday as it seems to most of us, came the nation-wide activity of the various historical, bibliographical, and research projects of the Works Progress Administration, particularly notable among these being the Historical Records Survey. These projects aroused a spreading tide of interest and action in the field of records and history, a tide from which we still profit but which cannot be evaluated properly at our present over-short range.

In Pennsylvania each of these waves of archival activity can be illustrated. The printed duplication of source materials began in 1838 and ran a course of almost exactly a century, coming to total ten more or less distinct series and one hundred and thirty-eight volumes. In quality the editing is extremely uneven. During the final quarter of the last century editorial quality struck a particularly low ebb, apparently for the reason that the task was placed on a piece-work basis at a price of four or five hundred dollars for gathering and preparing the material necessary to produce one volume of eight hundred pages, octavo. The deputy secretary of state or the state librarian came to use historical editing as a means for securing supplemental income, and for a time, filling pages appears to have been the prime consideration. Even before the Legislature of 1909 banned this unscholarly financial arrangement, the clamor of the genealogists had become irresistible with the result that the later series, while better edited, are devoted beyond reason to the cause of printing and indexing the names of individuals. It is startling to observe that, while indexes to the names printed in the

volumes exist both on cards and in print, no usable and comprehensive index to the wealth of highly significant documents contained in the ten series has ever appeared. Thus one discovers that while the entry on a muster roll containing the name of a given drummer boy can be found readily, locating the plans for the frontier fort where he served and the official report of his commander as to its defense requires thumbing through many volumes, consulting tables of contents one by one. While the first two archival waves hit the Keystone State hard, the volumes which record their passage leave much to be desired.

It is somewhat customary for state capitols to burn, and Pennsylvania had her capitol fire in 1897. While the building was totally destroyed, fortunately at the time it was in use almost exclusively by the legislature, the executive departments with their records being housed in the adjacent and then recently constructed building which is now known as the State Museum. Apparently only a limited volume of relatively unimportant legislative files were lost.[2] We do still have the excuse of the capitol fire, however, to explain readily any failure to locate a needed document.

The work in Pennsylvania of the Public Archives Commission of the American Historical Association was of enduring value. The "adjunct member" for the Commonwealth was Dr. Herman V. Ames, of the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, a Harvard Ph.D., with advanced study at German universities. Later he was to serve as chairman of the Public Archives Commission and to become dean of the graduate school at the University. He was assisted by a resident of Harrisburg, Dr. Lewis S. Shimmell. The report published by Dr. Ames in the second part of the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1900* is still extremely helpful and even yet enjoys the distinction of being the only report ever to be published disclosing any sizable and organized body of information as to the nature and volume of the Pennsylvania records which then survived. It appears to have been both inclusive and accurate, with minor exceptions no doubt, and will serve as the basis for much of our investigation when a survey of the older records becomes possible.

Dr. Ames could not approve the conditions for records maintenance which his investigation disclosed. He quoted, from a some-

[2] Ames, Herman V., "Report on the Public Archives of Pennsylvania," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1900*, 2:284. The Harrisburg *Telegraph*, Feb. 2, 1897, stated "Most of the valuable documents had been transferred to the new building upon the latter's completion."

what similar report made in 1851, words unfortunately familiar to all of us:

> Many of the papers thus stored were of great historical value; they were, however, not only practically inaccessible and liable to destruction by fire, but were also exposed to the ravages of rats, dampness and dirt, or to mutilation and theft by unscrupulous persons . . .

Dr. Ames found that a half century had brought very slight improvement in conditions, in fact rumors as to the theft of documents had become even more ugly:

> Further, it is generally believed that much of the manuscript material relating to the history of Pennsylvania, the autographs of its founder and its distinguished citizens, now in the possession of libraries, especially in New York and Boston, belonged originally to the collections of the State.[3]

Already during the late 1890's appropriations totalling several thousand dollars had been made to the department heads for the better arrangement of their older files.[4] The Ames report was, therefore, but one markedly intelligent and literate episode in a more general awakening of interest in records, and certainly prime credit for the establishment of the state archives at Harrisburg must go to Governor Samuel W. Pennypacker.[5] The report and the personal intervention of Dr. Ames undoubtedly helped the cause,[6] but far more influential in guiding events than the pressuring of even so highly intelligent a college professor, was the keen and long established interest of a governor who had authored a series of substantial historical studies and who, for many years, had been an enthusiastic member and high officer of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In part, too, success at this particular moment resulted from the fortuitous circumstance that the erection of the present huge Capitol Building, following the destruction of the original and much smaller Capitol, created new and ample space for the executive offices and left available in the former Executive Building room for the expansion of the State Library to include both an archives and a museum.[7] Many threads became woven in-

[3] Ames, H. V., *op. cit.*, 2:283. The 1851 report is to be found in *Pennsylvania Archives*, First Series, 1:3-13.

[4] *Laws of Pennsylvania*, 1895, pp. 548-49 (State Department, $2,000; Auditor General, $800); 1897, pp. 472-74 (State Department, $2,000; Auditor General, $1,000); 1899, pp. 365-67 (State Department, $3,000; Auditor General, $3,000).

[5] See Carson, H. L., "Life and Services of Samuel Whitaker Pennypacker," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography*, 41:1-94, and same author's two-volume *History of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, especially Vol. 2, Chap. 11.

[6] Pennsylvania, State Library, *Report*, 1903, p. 14.

[7] See *Laws of Pennsylvania*, 1905, p. 61.

to the story at this point, including, apparently, a personal friendship already mentioned, that of the governor for Thomas Lynch Montgomery, whom he brought to Harrisburg and installed as state librarian.

The administration of Governor Pennypacker was marked by storms, but behind the roar of greater battles he succeeded in accomplishing astonishing things for Pennsylvania history. For the building fund of the Historical Society at Philadelphia he secured appropriations which totalled $150,000.[8] He provided for the establishment of both the State Museum and the Division of Public Records in the State Library, with an annual salary of $1,500 for the Custodian of Public Records, and with an annual $7,500 for collecting and caring for the records.[9] Under the new statute the departments of state government were required to deposit in the archives all papers "beginning with the earliest records, to the year one thousand seven hundred and fifty, which are not needed by the departments for business purposes."

On June 1, 1903, Luther R. Kelker of Harrisburg took office as custodian of public records. After brief visits to Albany, Washington, Philadelphia, and New York City to observe the best current practice with record materials, he recruited eight "young ladies" who began "briskly" arranging papers in chronological order in one hundred and twenty-four divisions and sub-divisions.[10] A modern archivist would have proceeded differently, but decades of neglect and disorder, further complicated by the sorting done in the respective departments during the 1890's, had no doubt already destroyed the organic unity of the files. At present, unfortunately, that organic unity appears to be lost beyond recall.

The story of the Pennsylvania archives from 1903 to the present has been chiefly that of projecting those early activities. Archivists have come and gone: Kelker died in 1915 to be followed by Dr. Hiram H. Shenk, 1916 to 1933; Dr. Curtis W. Garrison, 1933 to 1936; and Col. Henry W. Shoemaker, 1937 to 1948. There have been several highly confusing shifts in the administrative arrangements: a rather slight one in 1907; another, more important, in 1919; a major change in 1923, when reorganization under the new Administrative Code put the State Library, muse-

[8] *Laws of Pennsylvania*, 1903, p. 443; 1905, pp. 444-45. See also Carson's *History of the Pennsylvania Historical Society*, 2:177-187.

[9] *Laws of Pennsylvania*, 1903, pp. 177-78; 510; 545-46. For the museum, see 1905, p. 61 and p. 552.

[10] "Report of the Division of Public Records," *Report of the State Archivist of Pennsylvania*, 1903, 18-25.

um, archives, and all, under the Department of Public Instruction; and the latest and most revolutionary of all in 1945, when the former Historical Commission, which had come to control several historical properties along with its program for marking historic sites and with its general duties of promoting historical activities, was combined with the State Museum and the State Archives to form the present Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.[11] As operating, this Commission consists of eight appointed members and one *ex officio* member. These meet at Harrisburg every month, except during the summer, work hard, are entirely unpaid. In charge under the Commission is a salaried Executive Director, and under him are lined up the heads of divisions, one of these being the State Archivist.

The evolution of the Historical and Museum Commission came during a protracted period marked by uneasy dissatisfaction on the part of historically-minded Pennsylvanians. College professors and scholars, as well as local historians and leaders in the county historical societies, became aware of shortcomings, of a lack of proper coördination among the state's historical and archival agencies. During the early forties there appeared from such diverse groups as the Pennsylvania Library Association, the Pennsylvania Historical Association (primarily academic), the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies a series of independent resolutions urging an improved organization. This groundswell of agitation inevitably assumed political significance, and undoubtedly, as highly political considerations became involved, a variety of motives entered to influence the outcome.

One factor promoting change was the increasing burden of executive labor which came to be required of the members of the Historical Commission. During the thirties projects had abounded in Pennsylvania for restoring ancient and historic buildings, and local groups had transferred with enthusiasm their shrines to state ownership so as to make them more readily eligible for development by one or another of the alphabetical relief agencies. The acquisition of such properties, several of them involving extensive real estate, so expanded the scope of the old Historical Commission, merely an appointed board, unsalaried, and with but a tiny clerical staff, that maintenance and inspection became too much for such executive time and talent as were available.

[11] *Laws of Pennsylvania*, 1907, p. 468; 1919, pp. 242-52; 1923, p. 559; 1945, pp. 1398-1411.

At this same period, the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies came to desire professional direction for its growing statewide program, and this need, combined with the obvious necessity for official guidance on the state level for the historical, research, and records projects of the Works Progress Administration, led to the creation, under the Historical Commission, of the office of State Historian. Following the appointment in 1937 of Dr. S. K. Stevens, this office grew rapidly in prestige, assumed increasingly varied and important functions, and shortly required the addition of professional assistants and a small clerical staff.

Meantime, in Pennsylvania as in so many other states, the activities of the research and records projects of the Works Progress Administration had drawn attention to the urgency of the problem involved in the care of public records, and the burgeoning of all these elements, closely related and in the general field of history and records administration, created pressures which could not be contained within the confines of the Department of Public Instruction. In 1945 these pressures combined to push through a statute creating as a new and entirely independent agency, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission under which we now operate.[12]

So much for the story of how we came to be where we are. Beyond that point the discussion rapidly becomes theoretical, for thus far the new administration has been merely taking stock, unearthing and linking together the facts incorporated in this paper, initiating the process of securing a reasonably clear and complete inventory of present holdings, and formulating plans. It is certain that we will not progress merely by wishing to progress; we must win respect by "what we do with what we got." Fortunately, we will not be burdened with any large amount of genealogical work, for we have in Pennsylvania a splendid network of county historical societies, in part supported by public funds, which helps investigators with such matters, and in addition the State Library has a division devoted entirely to genealogy. Thus the Division of Public Records will be free to devote its energies to its more proper functions: the rendering of an increasing number of services to the other state agencies, helping in all matters relating to their noncurrent files, and, what becomes easy and somewhat incidental when this first function is once mastered, preserving and servicing that

[12] See also *Laws of Pennsylvania*, 1947, pp. 604-08 for revisions which incorporate into the Administrative Code most features of the model public records act published in *American Archivist*, 3:107-15 (1940).

priceless core of official records, whose continued existence and accessibility is so essential to both the efficiency of governmental administration and the soundness of scholarly research.

For several years now the Division has been approving disposals, and for these we have an established procedure. We hope to expand this service greatly, to aid the agencies, upon request, in drawing up retention and disposal schedules, to make ourselves generally useful just so far as proves possible with the staff, space, and equipment placed at our command. In starting this program there is great need for gaining the acquaintance and coöperation of the officials in the departments, for educating them to an understanding of our objectives, for demonstrating that good records practice can bring increased efficiency, and, above all, for winning confidence.

The offices on Capitol Hill will become aware of our program when we request permission to inventory their older and more neglected files. There will be no all-inclusive survey, no counting of every cabinet and transfile, no long questionnaires for file room personnel to worry over and complete by guess work. We will inventory with our own staff and we will cover the older materials only. During much of the survey we will be searching rather definitely for certain series which we know should exist. We will first list our holdings in the archives, department by department, just so far as that may yet be possible. We will compare our listing with that prepared by Dr. Ames fifty years ago, and we will visit the departments attempting to locate those record series which he found and reported in 1900. Some will have been lost, no doubt, but many we can find and inventory in preliminary fashion as they lie. Working at this task with a limited but competent and tactful staff, we will gradually collect information and build a central inventory file which will be of immediate value to us and potentially useful to scholars. Special attention will be given, of course, to types of material which provide in condensed form information useful for either administrative reference or scholarly research. This means that we will be watching for such things as minute books, manuscript reports, budget requests, ledgers, and executive correspondence. Methodically, in department after department, we will go over the older files, matching what we find with statutory requirements, with what we now hold in our files, and with what Dr. Ames reported. We will in every case record carefully such details as name of series, nature of contents, inclusive dates, bulk, state of integrity, order and preservation, present location (with

comment as to suitability and safety), the name of the immediate custodian, and the degree of use in the current affairs of the agency. Undoubtedly in the process of surveying we will become soiled, but we will certainly become familiar with the older state records in Harrisburg, and will secure a "rat's-eye" view of them.

As this survey goes forward, we should be able to improve somewhat the general condition of the non-current files, for inevitably we will encounter useless materials long retained merely through inertia and indifference, trash whose destruction we can stimulate and approve. In still other cases we can recommend the services of the state microfilming unit. Should it prove possible for us to secure the staff and equipment necessary for manuscript repair, we ourselves can offer repair service for valuable but fragile or damaged items. Since, in general, departmental officials now think of our personnel as pure antiquarians, we will avoid startling them when we approach their offices on the basis of our genuine and sincere interest in their older series, of our desire to locate materials which will match with materials now in the archives; if, somewhat incidentally, we should demonstrate an ability to assist with practical problems of saving space, maintaining order, and increasing efficiency in their file rooms and storage rooms, then gradually we can win friends and come to influence people.

The time has not yet come for setting policy in regard to such major matters as the centralization or non-centralization of local records,[13] or for making any definite plans for an archives building. Since the Economy League of Pennsylvania is promoting actively more efficient administration for the records in county and local offices, we may find ourselves involved with county, city and borough records before we are recruited to a point where we can handle such matters with ease. The William Penn Memorial Building, which was to have included both the museum and the archives, seemed to be imminent three years ago, but is for the present abandoned. Its tentative design was not functional or carefully considered, and the postponement may mean that eventually the archives will profit from the delay, and will secure quarters better arranged and more suited to its needs. At the end of so long a session, there seems little point in taking your time to discuss matters still so vague.

[13] Since 1911 the archives has possessed authority to take in local records (*Laws of Pennsylvania*, 1911, p. 100). In 1915 provision was made for a Supervisor of Public Records to work with the local offices (*Laws of Pennsylvania*, 1915, pp. 528-29). Apparently nothing much resulted from either of these acts.

The story of Pennsylvania's archival struggles stands out clearly, however, and there is no uncertainty whatever as to the general outline of our future program. During the century past Pennsylvania has experienced most of the vicissitudes and failures common to the states of the northeastern region, but we look forward eagerly to winning a position in the very front rank during the period of archival expansion and development, which is undoubtedly opening before the state archives of America right now.

CORRECTION

An omission of part of the translator's footnote No. 2 in the article on "The Conservation of Medieval Seals in the Swedish Riksarkiv" (April issue, p. 167) should have stated: "Sixty degrees of Celsius (Centigrade) equals 140 degrees Fahrenheit," the temperature at which the fungi of the wax seals are destroyed. As the melting point of wax is found at about 145 degrees Fahrenheit (footnote No. 3), "any attempt to eradicate the fungi by heat without injuring the seal verges upon the impossible."