

Reports of State Archivists¹

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Maryland Hall of Records

IN THE very earliest years of the *American Archivist* an effort was made to describe State archival institutions, their plants, work, and holdings. I recall, for example, that an account of the Maryland Hall of Records, written by the distinguished first Archivist of Maryland, James Alexander Robertson, appeared in this series.² These descriptions, although brief, were quite useful. It was a time when many of us were very young men, entering a new profession for which we had had little or no formal training. There were problems, old and new, whose solutions we did not know (as it turned out no one knew all of them, but at that time we were unaware of it), and we naturally looked to the initiates for guidance.

From time to time in later years, other articles on individual State archives were published in the *American Archivist* and elsewhere. Also, some small part of the program of our annual meetings has been devoted to this subject. In 1951, for example, an opportunity was offered to certain directors of new institutions and new directors of old institutions to report on their accomplishments and their hopes. Although all of this has been useful, it has also been hit-or-miss. If there is any need for this sharing of information among members of the same profession, then some better means of doing it ought to be employed. As it stands now, for the most part, what we have is a group of one-shot reports (to borrow the jargon of records management), without continuity and therefore with little meaning. Could our purpose be accomplished by the development of a medium of communication already known to us in rudimentary form, that is, the annual or biennial report, or must we think of something entirely new?

The difficulty with the annual report is that it has fallen into disrepute. One of the archivists who was asked by the book review editor to send an annual report to the *American Archivist* replied,

¹ Some months ago the Review Editor persuaded Dr. Radoff to write an article reviewing current annual and biennial reports of State archival agencies. The scope and importance of Dr. Radoff's study is such that it is published here rather than in the review section.

² *American Archivist*, 1: 30-32 (Jan. 1938).

in part, as follows: "The things which go on at the old-fashioned type of state archives, such as most of the states still have, are almost entirely routine of the most *routine* type. About all there is to report is the number of visitors, the number of letters written, the photostats and certificates furnished." Well, statistics can be drab but in our present imperfect state what better measuring sticks do we know?

Even avowed partisans of the annual report find it necessary to take notice of its sad repute: "Some may regard it as an annual 'headache,' a legal requirement to be fulfilled, or a necessary evil demanding the expenditure of much valuable time at a busy season of the year."³ Of course, an annual report is a bore! Few know that better than the writer, who is now preparing his nineteenth. And certainly the period following the end of the fiscal year is a busy one, but so are they all if we are honest in our universal complaints about being short-handed.

Mr. deValinger, in his article quoted above, puts emphasis on the value of the annual report as a means of informing the taxpayers of the State how the service they have commanded is being performed. He is not concerned with the problem of informing one's colleagues, and this is the subject in which we are at present interested. He does, however, in the last paragraph of his modest article issue a challenge to those who neglect the rest of us:

A perusal of the last number of the *American Archivist* reveals that astonishingly few archival agencies of this country have submitted reports to be reviewed in the journal of their Society. It cannot be that those submitted are from the only archival agencies in the country that prepare annual reports. . . . Archival establishments throughout the country are coming into being or maturing with each year. Those administering them are avid for information on the proper methods of procedure. The annual reports of others would be invaluable to these new agencies in making decisions involving the selection of methods and equipment. Let us hope that an increasing number of archivists will prepare their reports and publish them so that the fund of archival knowledge in this country may thus be enriched.⁴

The writer wholeheartedly supports Mr. deValinger's plea. He too did not believe that the *American Archivist* was reviewing all annual reports; and it seemed, therefore, that the problem consisted primarily in stimulating a wider distribution of such reports. This could be done, first, by persuading the authors of these reports to make them available and, second, by calling them to the attention

³ Leon deValinger, Jr., "Preparation of Annual Reports," in *American Archivist*, 16: 161 (Apr. 1953).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

of others in reviews, however brief, in the *American Archivist*. Perhaps, we thought, it might be possible to review them all at once, pointing out what the reviewer felt was noteworthy and disregarding the "entirely routine."

Our first problem then was to determine how many reports were issued, in what form they appeared, and at what intervals. The results were startling. There were some few States which did not reply at all, and their silence, no doubt, indicated no report. But even if we disregard this group, there are still nine States confessing to no report of any kind: Arkansas, California, Connecticut, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Texas. This list includes the richest and the largest States in the Union, and among them is only one without a recognizable archival agency. The list also includes one of the real pioneers in our work, Connecticut, which has only recently ceased to publish a report.

Almost as inconceivable is the size of the group of reports prepared for internal use only, although, to be sure, a manuscript or typewritten report of this kind is valuable for the writer and for his staff and successors. In this group are the following States: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Wisconsin.

More useful are the reports of archival agencies which are subsidiary to other agencies. In such cases the report of the archival department is included in the report of the parent agency. The archives report may be long or short — but usually short; it may appear in a separately printed annual or biennial report, in a quarterly or monthly periodical, in the general report of an officer of a historical society; it may be plainly marked or disguised and concealed.

States issuing reports of this category are: Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nebraska, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia, and Washington.

The most easily accessible and comprehensive reports are issued by those States where the archives is a separate establishment, where the archivist is also director of the museum or other affiliated agency, or, finally, where the archives is joined with, and equal to, one or more other agencies. The following States fall into one or the other of these categories: Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. These reports are mainly full-length, processed or printed.

Without exception, all reports are issued either annually or

biennially. There can be no doubt of the usefulness of biennial reports. This is especially true because in many cases, in practice, they are the most comprehensive reports that we have. The States which issue biennial reports in whatever form are: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

The great disadvantage of the 2-year report is obviously the time lag. Often what is reported has occurred 2 or 3 years earlier, depending on how quickly the assembling of material, writing, and printing can be accomplished. The annual report, however, has added value because through it one can be informed of operations that are current or almost so. The States listed below feel that this time advantage justifies the added cost of the annual report: Colorado, Delaware, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, South Carolina, South Dakota, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

An added advantage of the annual report is that it may more easily be used for comparative purposes; this is especially true because bienniums are not the same in every State. For example, this reviewer now has before him biennial reports for the fiscal years 1950-52 and 1951-53. In the very fluid state of archival and, especially, records management programs today, the difference of a year or two may be of importance.

How valuable are these reports to other archivists? Some are extremely valuable, others are next to worthless. Although their value does not necessarily depend on their length or form, yet in general it may be said that the longer the report and the more independent of the reports of other agencies, the more likely it is to be useful. Whether he intends to or not, the archivist who prepares his own report at length and knows it will be printed or processed and then widely distributed will consider his audience of professionals and write up to them, never forgetting, of course, that he also has important lay readers. On the other hand, if he is writing only for the head of his parent agency, he is more likely not to stress his accomplishments — they are presumably already known — but to pass immediately, in the little space allotted him, to his most pressing needs, which are of course of interest only to him.

All the manuscript reports that we have are prepared for the head of a parent agency, and they are short and concerned almost entirely with local problems and needs. The Department of Ar-

chives and History of the State of Alabama reports (1-1/3 pp.) to the trustees on its needs and hopes in the briefest fashion. Obviously, there is regrettably little for other archivists here. The Public Records Supervisor of New Jersey gives us an excellent summary (8 pp.) of the first year of records management work in that State. He also describes a new records center and plans for centralized microfilming. The Archivist of Indiana reports (5 pp., now in manuscript but ultimately to be a part of the State Library's printed report) that excellent progress is being made in the microfilming of newspapers. In the report of the Archivist of Wisconsin (2 pp.) there are some interesting notes on recent accessions and meeting storage space problems. The Minnesota State Archives Commission gives an account (8 pp.) of good work done under the severest handicaps. Perhaps it is unique in its budget cut: \$53,000 requested, \$21,000 granted.

The printed or processed archival reports included in the reports of parent bodies show much variation in length and interest. In the report of the Florida State Library for 1951-52 archival activities are omitted altogether. Likewise, in the biennial report of the Idaho State Historical Department no mention is made of the archives. In the face of this apparent neglect, it is a pleasure to turn to the January 1953 issue of *Illinois Libraries* for the biennial report of the Archives Division (7 pp. double column). This report easily merits a separate review along with the group of separately printed archival reports, but for the purpose of this summary it will have to suffice to point out that original and important work is reported in records disposal, the use of departmental vaults (a unique arrangement), and the indexing of archival material. The Archivist also notes with satisfaction that plans are ready for the resumption of document rehabilitation.

Unfortunately, the biennial report of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives did not arrive in time for this review. The State Historical Society of Iowa has in its custody some archival materials, but the biennial report of that society does not discuss this phase of its work.

The State Archivist of Kansas is a functionary of the Kansas State Historical Society, and his annual report appears in the spring number of the *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, published by that society. For the year 1952-53 this report (3 pp.) is to be found on pages 52-54. As in every case where the archives are administered by the State historical society, little attention is given them. This very brief report does, however, note the acquisition of important

public records. In the annual report of the Secretary-Treasurer of the Kentucky Historical Society the first two sentences are devoted to archival activities (*Register of The Kentucky Historical Society*, January 1953, p. 78).

Archival activities in Massachusetts are conducted within the office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. In his annual report (p. 12) less than one-half page is used by the Archives Division. Those few sentences give an account of the filing in the Secretary's office of oaths of office, petitions, and other executive papers. Nebraska's archives are administered "as an integral part of the [Nebraska State Historical Society] Library"; the archives report (2 pp.) is found in the *Nebraska History Quarterly*, December 1953, and is only a list of accessions. Of interest to other archivists is the account of how the society moved into new quarters (pp. 289-310).

The South Dakota State Historical Society does not prepare a formal report of any kind on its archival activities; bits and pieces of archival news may be gathered from its monthly *Bulletin*. Although the Utah Legislature made the Utah State Historical Society the official archival agency of the State in 1951, funds were not provided to begin the program until several years later. The program is only now beginning to function, and presumably it will be reported in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* with the annual report of the society. This report even now contains archival news, but dispersed and unmarked.

One of the distinguished members of our profession is the Archivist of Virginia. He directs one of the best operations in the country and he functions in perhaps the best plant. It is all the more to be regretted, therefore, that so little space is devoted to his report (3 pp.) in the *Annual Report of The Virginia State Library*. Those who do not know the Virginia Archives would not get a fair introduction from this report. For other archivists even these few pages are not all useful, because much space is given to the names of persons or organizations sponsoring the rehabilitation of historical records. The microfilm and county records accessions are worthy of special attention.

The Department of Public Institutions administers the archives of the State of Washington, and according to the State Archivist, "As the Archives form such a minor division in the over-all responsibilities of the department, they do not receive much space." As a matter of fact, only two-thirds of the last page (p. 267) is allotted to the "State Archives Report," although contained therein is some

useful information about a new but vigorous records management program. There are also some statistics about the quantity of space and the mass of materials now held in the archives.

With only one exception the reports that remain to be noted deserve full reviews in the *American Archivist*, and indeed they have received this attention in the past. They are all full reports, giving details of technical as well as administrative activities. They are included here for the sole purpose of making the catalog of archival reports complete.

Arizona publishes a "Report of the Department of Library and Archives" (12 pp.), which presents in readable form an account of all of its activities for a single fiscal year. Archives are given equal attention with the library, and one gets the impression that the future will be better. The present activities are financed — library and archives — by an appropriation of \$40,000 per annum, and however well this sum is spent, other archivists will recognize that the activities can be neither extensive nor complex.

The Archivist of Colorado has known how to get the maximum value from a full-length annual report (20 pp.). She gives a clear, concise picture of all the work of her institution — no one need send her a questionnaire about any phase of it. Her special interests at present are a large newspaper filming project and a vigorous effort to acquire a records center. She includes detailed plans for this admirable building. The reviewer does not think she could buy it for \$160,000, but she is in a better position to know. It was gratifying to see that a salary report of our Society's Committee on State Archives was being put to good use in Denver.

For a long time the Public Archives Commission of Delaware has published a full-length annual report of all its activities: archives, records management, museum, and so forth. This report (59 pp. ms.) will be beyond the means of many — it is on good stock and illustrated. Its value, however, lies in the quality of its reporting. Each phase of the Delaware Archivist's work is clearly described, and since the work includes every conceivable function of an archives office there is something in it for everyone. Of special interest this year is the museum and the restoration work, which has been only recently undertaken.

Maryland's archives are controlled by the Hall of Records Commission, which appoints the Archivist; and it is this officer who prepares and publishes the annual report (60 pp.). Again, this is a full-length account that contains details of every phase of archival operations. It is perhaps too detailed; but in this field, it seems

to the reviewer, sins of commission are less heinous than those of omission. Along with those of North Carolina and South Carolina, this report furnishes a full breakdown of salaries paid, and since the scale is relatively high, other archivists will find these figures useful. Perhaps the records management laws and plans are of most interest in the report for the fiscal year 1953.

According to the biennial report of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (30 pp.), too little is being done with the public records, and an expansion of facilities is imperative. On the other hand, good progress is noted in publications, museum work, and historical research. The Director, most recent past-president of the Society of American Archivists, spent most of the biennium in the armed services. His release will no doubt give impetus to the ambitious future program that he outlines in his report.

The most impressive of all the archival reports is the *Biennial Report of the North Carolina Department of Archives and History* (95 pp.). The habit is an old one in that State: this is the twenty-fourth such report. In form, however, it cannot serve as a model because its slick paper and pictures of staff and equipment are, alas!, beyond the means of most of us. Still it is to be admired. This agency has well-established programs in every field of archival and historical science. It conducts a publications program, a museum, a records center. The reporting is done by the heads of the three large divisions, supplemented by a statement of the Director and several appendixes which include full budgetary breakdowns. Profitable reading for all of us!

While the biennial report of the State Archivist of Oregon is printed independently, its extreme brevity (2 pp.) makes it a doubtful member of this group of reports. It contains a description of the duties of the Archivist, an account of various microfilm projects, and a breakdown of the quantity of records kept in the State Archives and elsewhere.

One of the annual reports which no archivist should be without is the *Report of the Historical Commission of South Carolina* for 1952-53 (37 pp.). It is, in the first place, almost unique in its literary quality. It orients the reader in the history of the archives of South Carolina and accounts in detail for procedures, equipment, and program adopted or acquired by the present director. The accomplishments of the last 2 or 3 years will challenge all of us. Those among us who find it difficult to function properly because of the miserably low salaries paid to archivists will be shocked to see how really low salaries are in South Carolina.

The *Biennial Report of the Public Records Commission of Vermont* for 1951-52 (28 pp.) is devoted almost entirely to an account of the genesis and first year's operation of a records management program for that State. It does not seem possible that so much could be accomplished by a staff of three, operating on a budget of \$10,000 (1952), but the evidence is here for all to see. An additional item of interest is the plans for the proposed new archives building. These plans have been in existence for a long time now. Could it be that they are a little elaborate for so small a State and that a compromise is in order?

The work of the Department of Archives and History of West Virginia is characterized with disarming candor by the Director in her *Biennial Report* (27 pp.): "Upon consideration of what has been stated so far and upon further examination of the accession list which is to follow it will be noted that the Department . . . is devoting the greater part of its time and attention to the Museum and Library with little or no emphasis being made upon other phases of its archival duties" (p. 9). On the other hand, excellent work is being done in microfilming newspapers and collecting imprints.

The "Archives" section of the *Seventeenth Biennial Report of the State Historical Department, State Archives and State Museum of Wyoming* (22 pp.) is only three pages in length, but since this report is for the biennium 1950-52 and there was no Archivist before 1951, this relative quiescence is not surprising. The same law which created the position of Archivist also gave that officer broad powers in archives and records management. New quarters are also available. It will be interesting to see what vigorous leadership, beginning almost at scratch, can accomplish in the next biennium.