The Taft Commission and the Government's Record Practices

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National Archives

THE work of the Taft Commission on Economy and Efficiency was evaluated in 1919 as "much the most comprehensive and systematic investigation that has ever been made of the national government, if not, indeed, of any government." [2] Not until the two Hoover Commissions of 1947-49 and 1953-55 was the Taft Commission equaled in the scope of its explorations into the business and business methods of the Government.

The Taft Commission was one of a long series of administrative investigations that began as early as 1789. The investigations became increasingly comprehensive and searching in the 1880's and later, when the congressional Cockrell Committee and subsequent Dockery-Cockrell Commission, followed by President Roosevelt's Keep Commission, examined the administration of the executive branch. But Congress, disappointed in the results produced by these agencies, began as early as May 1909 to consider the establishment of still another investigation of the Federal administration.[3] It was not until June 1910, and after long and heated debate, that the House and Senate finally agreed to an amendment to the Sundry Civil Appropriation Act for 1911 authorizing the President to "inquire into the methods of transacting the public business." [4] With the approval on June 25, 1910, of the act containing this authorization,[5] the way was open for the Taft administration to investigate the business and business methods of the Government.

Authorization by Congress for the investigation added nothing to the powers of the President, but it gave him the opportunity for

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[2] Gustavus A. Weber, *Organized Efforts for the Improvement of Methods of Administration in the United States*, p. 84 (New York, 1919).

[3] *Congressional Record*, 61st Cong., 1st sess., p. 2305 (May 24, 1909).

[4] *H. Journal*, 61st Cong., 2d sess., p. 816.

[5] 36 Stat. 703.

an executive inquiry whereby he could gather exact and complete information on which to base administrative reforms. The Taft inquiry was unique in that it was the first executive inquiry supported by congressional appropriations. President Roosevelt had attempted such an inquiry — the Keep Commission — without special funds, but by means of the Tawney amendment Congress had brought his effort to an end.[6]

Preliminary Investigation

The official existence of the Taft investigation began on July 1, 1910, the day on which its first appropriation became available. As his first step in getting the investigation under way, President Taft put his secretary, Charles D. Norton, in charge. Norton's first move was to arrange for a rapid survey of administrative conditions throughout the Government and to call on various experts for suggestions as to what the program of the inquiry should be. In early July Maj. Charles Hine, who had done extensive work for the Harriman railroad lines and had established himself as an expert in problems of organization, was employed to make a survey of the organization and administrative methods of the executive departments and to outline a tentative plan for the organization and program of the Taft investigation. Hine, joined in August by Prof. S. W. Gilman, of the University of Wisconsin, accomplished a prodigious amount of work and produced a large number of brief but comprehensive reports.[7]

On Aug. 10, 1910, Norton sent letters to various firms specializing in accounting or business efficiency, asking each to submit written recommendations for the inquiry's program. Among these firms were Arthur Young and Co., which had revised some of the Treasury Department's procedures; Gunn, Richards and Co., which had surveyed and made recommendations on certain administrative aspects of the Interior Department and was currently making a study of the Department of Justice; Marwick, Mitchel and Co., which had devised a cost-accounting system for the Navy Department; and Haskins and Sells, headed by the C. W. Haskins and E. W. Sells who had served as experts for the Dockery Commission in 1893-

[6] Frederick A. Cleveland, "Causes of Waste and Inefficiency in National Government," in *Review of Reviews*, 45:467 (Apr. 1912).

[7] Copies of Letters To and From the White House, file 080.2, in the records of the President's Commission on Economy and Efficiency. These records are part of Record Group 51, Records of the Bureau of the Budget, in the National Archives; they are hereafter cited as PCEE, RG 51, NA. In other citations also the symbol RG is used for Record Group, and NA for National Archives.

95.[8] The Haskins and Sells firm was later to work with the first Hoover Commission.

Before the end of August replies to these requests had come in and had been carefully studied. Most of the early planning, carried on through personal conferences, is not documented in the records of the Taft Commission. It may be inferred, however, that during this period Norton held many discussions with the President and with others concerning plans for the investigation and that they had decided to concentrate their efforts on the study and reform of accounting procedures.

During the summer newspapers carried accounts of the shaping plans for the investigation. The *New York Times* reported on August 3, "The inquiry will not be devoted so much to cutting of a clerk here and there as to formulating an entirely new structure of methods whenever present practice seems to demand such treatment." [9]

Meanwhile Norton explored the field for a man suitable to take charge of the inquiry. His attention soon centered on Frederick Albert Cleveland, lawyer, economist, public accountant, and educator, who had achieved distinction as a pioneer in scientific research into governmental administration. Cleveland seemed ideally fitted to take a leading part in the inquiry. He had studied law and practiced for 5 years. He had done graduate work in political science, specializing in finance, at the University of Chicago and in economics at the University of Pennsylvania, where he had received his doctorate in 1900. After serving as an instructor in finance at the University of Pennsylvania, in 1903 he moved on to New York to become professor of finance in the School of Commerce, Accounts, and Finance at New York University and to join the staff of Haskins and Sells, public accountants. From 1905 until his appointment to the Taft inquiry, Cleveland served as a member of several municipal committees and commissions that helped to bring reform into the administrative and financial aspects of New York City's government. He was instrumental in establishing the New York Bureau of Municipal Research and served as one of its codirectors. In September Norton asked the President for authority to employ Cleveland and to have him "go to work quietly first of all on the budget and on the cost accounting proposition, slowly working up an organization for the scrutiny into and the development of ef-

[8] White House Letters, file 080.2, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

[9] Folder for Aug. 1910, file 215, in the William Howard Taft papers, Library of Congress.

ficiency."[10] Cleveland, who had already come to Washington, was formally appointed by the President on Sept. 27, 1910, to take charge of the inquiry, under Norton's direction, at an annual compensation of $10,000.[11]

The Inquiry

With the appointment of Cleveland the investigation moved into its second phase, that of establishing a preliminary informal organization and gathering facts. This phase was officially designated by Cleveland as "The President's Inquiry In Re Economy and Efficiency." In every possible way the President's strong support of the investigation was emphasized.

By the time Cleveland was appointed, the decision had been made that the investigation should be carried on through committees of experts appointed by each department or other Government agency. These committees of experts, later referred to as departmental committees on economy and efficiency, were to supervise and coordinate the gathering of data called for by Cleveland and to serve as a clearinghouse between the departments and the Inquiry. For special studies and reports within each department, the committees were to appoint subcommittees. And later, joint committees, consisting of representatives from several departments, were appointed to study and report on problems common to most agencies.

At the very first cabinet meeting after the summer vacation, held on Sept. 27, 1910, the day that Cleveland was appointed, President Taft asked each agency head to appoint a committee of competent experts already in Government service, "to collaborate with the White House staff, and through cooperation to provide both for joint consideration of common problems and for uniformity of departmental action upon subjects of Executive determination."[12] The departmental committees were appointed during the month following. They included in their membership officials of high standing and usually included also each agency's chief clerk and a staff member whose duties concerned financial matters.

These departmental committees were called together for the first time on Nov. 5, 1910, at the White House, where the President made them a charming little speech. After expressing his own vital

[10] Memorandum from Norton dated Sept. 15, 1910, file 215, Taft papers.

[11] Norton to Cleveland, Sept. 27, 1910, file 215, Taft papers.

[12] President's Commission on Economy and Efficiency, *Interim Report on Plan of Inquiry and Progress of Work From September 27 to December 31, 1910. Circular No. 4*, p. 5 (Washington, 1911).

interest in the difficult investigation they were about to undertake and his conviction that any bad methods in the Government's work were not the fault of its civil servants, Taft emphasized that the survey was not being undertaken in criticism of anybody in the departments. "What I want to impress upon you," he said, "is that there is nobody investigating you, but that you are investigating yourselves; you are trying to determine what can be done to reduce expenditures and increase efficiency." [13]

While the agencies were busy selecting and appointing their committees of experts, Cleveland was deciding what detailed data should be gathered from the agencies and was having prepared the forms, questionnaires, and instructions for the collection of those data. With characteristic logic he went after basic information first, seeking answers to these questions: What reports or other data are available in the agencies as a result of previous studies of their organization, personnel, records, methods of procedure, or other aspects of administration? What are the powers, duties, and limitations of each officer, office, department, or division of the Government as determined by the Constitution, the statutes, decisions of courts, Executive orders, departmental orders, or other legal authority? What is the current organization of each agency, and who are the officers and employees within each of its organizational units? What records are kept by each organizational unit of each agency? What business methods and procedures are followed by each agency in the performance of its various functions? What criticism or constructive suggestions can either those in charge of work or the committees of experts make concerning their agencies?

Forms for the presentation of data in answer to these questions were sent to all agencies of the Government in mid-October 1910. Cleveland also called for detailed analyses and reports on such matters as the kinds of documents used as evidence of financial transactions, the methods of audit, the methods of handling and filing correspondence, the methods of preparing and submitting estimates and the kinds of records used in supporting estimates, and the classification of objects of expenditure.

With the departmental committees appointed and in operation, and with the areas of investigation already laid out for them, the President's Inquiry In Re Economy and Efficiency became intensely active. By Mar. 8, 1911, when it was succeeded by the Commission on Economy and Efficiency, the Inquiry had issued seven questionnaire forms and eight circulars. The Inquiry's special interest

[13] Commission on Economy and Efficiency, *Interim Report*, p. 8.

in accounting and budgetary matters is evidenced by the fact that six of the eight circulars related to some phase of accounting. The other two circulars were the *Interim Report*, Circular 4, and the questionnaire and instructions, Circular 5, relating to the handling and filing of correspondence. The departmental committees had forwarded extensive data to the Inquiry by the time it was succeeded by the Commission.

THE COMMISSION

In its third and final phase the Taft investigation was designated the President's Commission on Economy and Efficiency. On Mar. 8, 1911, in a letter to his secretary, President Taft announced the establishment of the Commission, to consist of five members and a secretary.[14] The President said that he was appointing as commissioners Frederick A. Cleveland and William F. Willoughby, the former to be chairman, and as secretary Merritt O. Chance. He asked for Cleveland to recommend candidates for the remaining three places on the Commission, specifying that he wanted one man who had training and experience as an engineer, one as a lawyer, and one as an administrator or accountant.

Subsequent appointments were made with the same careful consideration of qualifications that Norton had shown in choosing Cleveland to head the investigation in its Inquiry stage. And the President himself played a decisive part in the choice of the commissioners. Writing to the Secretary of the Treasury about his selection of Chance to serve as secretary, Taft said that he had tried to avoid raiding the Treasury but had come to the conclusion that Auditor Chance was the best man for the job. Taft wrote that he found Chance particularly well qualified because of his experience in serving as Root's secretary, his familiarity with the Post Office, War, and Treasury Departments and with Washington, and his understanding of the difficulties of dealing with newspaper men.[15]

William F. Willoughby, aged 44, had served as an expert in the Department of Labor; successively as Treasurer and Secretary of Puerto Rico; as President of the Executive Council of the Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico; and as Assistant Director of the Census.

Those finally chosen to complete the membership of the Commis-

[14] Minutes of the Commission, Mar. 8, 1911—June 30, 1912, p. 1-3, file 107.12, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

[15] Taft to the Secretary of the Treasury, in Presidential Letterpress Books, 20:358, Taft papers.

sion were Frank J. Goodnow, Walter W. Warwick, and Harvey S. Chase. Goodnow, aged 53, was appointed to the Commission on Apr. 20, 1911.[16] Then professor of law at Columbia University and later to become president of the Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Goodnow had served as a member of the commission appointed by Gov. Theodore Roosevelt in 1900 to revise the charter of New York City, as a member of several municipal committees for New York City, and as a delegate of the United States Government to the first Congress of Administrative Science at Brussels.

Walter W. Warwick, aged 43, was also appointed on April 20.[17] Warwick had been secretary to Taft when the latter was a United States Circuit Court judge and had later served in several legal positions in the Treasury Department and in auditing work of the Isthmian Canal Commission and the Canal Zone. He had been appointed Associate Justice of the Canal Zone by Taft but did not enter upon this duty because of his appointment to the Taft Commission. On Jan. 29, 1906, he had been appointed to serve on the Keep Commission's Subcommittee on the Distribution, Record, and Handling of Correspondence.

The last Commissioner to be appointed was Harvey S. Chase.[18] At the time of his appointment on June 30, 1911, Chase, aged 50, was the head of Harvey S. Chase & Co., a leading accounting firm in Boston. Graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1883 as a mechanical engineer, Chase had had brief experience in New England cotton mills and later as an engineer of electrical and mining plants in Tennessee and North Carolina. His interests soon shifted, however, from engineering to financial matters, and after entering that field he had extensive experience in investigating the financial organization and procedures of municipal governments.

It can readily be seen that the Commission was weighted with men whose specialty was accounting. Legal background was the next most characteristic feature of the membership. Only Warwick, from his experience with the Keep Commission, seems to have had any previous knowledge of records.

In reviewing the experience and qualifications of the Commissioners, we should not overlook those of the President himself, who

[16] Taft to Goodnow, Apr. 20, 1911, in *Presidential Letterpress Books*, 25:313, Taft papers.

[17] Taft to Warwick, Apr. 20, 1911, in Presidential Letterpress Books, 25:314, Taft papers.

[18] Taft to Chase, June 30, 1911, in Presidential Letterpress Books, 27:458, Taft papers.

played so important a part in creating and directing the work of the Commission. Taft came to the Presidency with a rich background in law and governmental administration. He had served as collector of internal revenue, judge of the Ohio Supreme Court, United States Circuit Court judge, Solicitor General, Secretary of War, and the first civil governor of the Philippine Islands. His familiarity with the frustrations that result from the labyrinthine organization of the executive departments is shown by his comment that while he was Secretary of War he "never had been able to find out what went on in the War Department." [19]

A great admirer of President Roosevelt, Taft had Roosevelt's Keep Commission as an example of presidential effort to bring administrative reform into the executive branch of the Government. And his wish to attain that reform was strengthened by a Congress that was held off from meat-ax economies only by his seizing the initiative to bring efficiency and economy into Government operations. One of the sharpest goads applied by Congress was a provision in the Sundry Civil Appropriation Bill for 1910 requiring the President to bring expenditures within the limits of revenue or, if that were not possible, to suggest new sources of revenue.[20] Taft made an earnest effort to comply with the statute, but it was evident that the current helter-skelter methods for estimating expenditures and making appropriations were in need of extensive reform. He sought to use the Commission on Economy and Efficiency to bring about the reform. Thus arose the Commission's emphasis on financial matters.

There was no break between the end of the Inquiry period and the beginning of the Commission period of the Taft investigation. Picking up smoothly the work already in progress and expanding the investigation into many other areas, the Commission explored almost every phase of governmental administration.

The work of the Commission was of two main classes: (1) general inquiries into problems affecting all or most of the Government's agencies; and (2) investigations of particular services or groups of services, and related topics.[21] The first class included

[19] Walter Otto Jacobson, "A Study of President Taft's Commission on Economy and Efficiency and a Comparative Evaluation With Three Other Commissions; Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Political Science, Columbia University," p. 12 (June 1941). A photostatic copy of this thesis is in the library of the National Archives.

[20] 35 Stat. 1027.

[21] Report to the President on the Work of the Commission on Economy and Efficiency, file 073.2, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

studies and reports concerning the budget, organization, personnel, functions and activities, accounting and reporting, office practice and equipment, Government quarters, and standardization. The second class included inquiries and reports dealing with commerce and navigation services, health services, statistical services, cartographic and survey services, central auditing and accounting services, and records and files. In its Circular 34 the Commission made its final report to the President, listing well over 100 special reports completed, under way, or to be undertaken. Most of the reports were concerned with accounting methods and procedures.

The Commission in time encountered hostility from both the executive branch and Congress. One of the main causes of this hostility was the President's insistence on a new method of submitting estimates for appropriations, in the course of which he caused embarrassment and resentment among the Cabinet and came into direct conflict with Congress. With the President no longer in firm control and with a Democratic majority in Congress, the Commission was unprotected from the cold winds of political adversity; its days were numbered. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 1913, Congress gave it an appropriation of only $75,000 and limited to three the number of its employees permitted to receive salaries of more than $4,000. On Aug. 10, 1912, Taft wrote to Goodnow, Chase, and Willoughby, accepting their resignations.[22] By a joint resolution of Aug. 21, 1912, Congress directed the Commission to make a report and recommendations on the organization and work of the Patent Office.[23] Because of this diversion of its efforts, the curtailment of its funds, and the reduction of its personnel, the Commission was forced to discontinue some of its projects. Nevertheless, it remained energetically productive, completing in its last months a number of significant reports, including a series on the handling and filing of correspondence in the War Department, Department of Justice, and Office of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue.

The *Journal of Commerce* reported in its issue for Jan. 13, 1913, that the Democrats had had a change of opinion about continuing the Commission although they formerly thought that some good could come of its continuation. One reason for this change, said the *Journal*, was the overbearing attitude adopted by the Commis-

[22] Presidential Letterpress Books, 41:142, 143, 146, Taft papers.

[23] *Report on the Investigation of the United States Patent Office Made by the President's Commission on Economy and Efficiency, December, 1912* (62d Cong., 3d sess., *H. Doc.* 1110).

sion itself and by the President. Another was the opinion prevalent in Congress that the Commission had taken so broad a range and attempted to correct so many ills in such widely scattered branches of the Government that it had not been able to do anything well. The *Journal* quotes an unnamed Cabinet member as saying in substance:

It is strange that President Taft has endorsed this commission in the unqualified and unhesitating manner he seems to have adopted. I have found it a constant trouble in my department, and I have yet to learn of a single useful suggestion it has made with reference to the affairs falling under my jurisdiction.

In its issue for Feb. 13, 1913, the *Journal of Commerce* reported that Taft had just sent to Congress a special message concerning the systematic framing of the annual budget. The *Journal* believed that Taft's proposal for a systematized presentation of the national budget was worthy of the most serious consideration.

A different journalistic estimate of the Commission's work was expressed by the *New York Times* in its support of Taft's request in January 1913 for additional funds to continue the Commission: "Now that the value of the work of the Commission is shown beyond all cavil, and its continuance is proved to be of still greater value, Congress is asked to provide for that continuation." [24]

Congress, however, did not provide, and on the last day of the fiscal year 1913 the Commission quietly expired.

Investigation of the Handling and Filing of Correspondence

In studying the Government's recordkeeping practices the Commission proceeded in the logical fashion of the efficiency expert, first gathering all the facts on current practices. Among the questionnaires issued by the Inquiry in October 1910 was Form 4, on which each operating unit was requested to report, by functions, a detailed description of the business methods and procedures followed in the performance of each function. Most of these reports were turned in before the end of the year. But the information relating to the handling of the records was insufficient for a thorough study, and the Commission therefore decided to prepare a questionnaire calling for more detailed information.

The Commission also created a Joint Committee on the Handling and Filing of Correspondence, consisting of two members of the Commission's staff, W. E. Wilmot and F. H. Tonsmeire, and mem-

[24] *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 1913, p. 8.

bers nominated by each of the Departmental Committees on Economy and Efficiency. A Special Committee on the Handling and Filing of Correspondence was created in each agency and assigned responsibility for recommending procedures for its agency. Wilmot and Tonsmeire served also on all the special committees.[25]

Circular 5, *Questions to be Answered and Memorandum of Instructions to be Followed in the Preparation of Report (Form 6) Asked for on the Subject of the Handling and Filing of Correspondence*, was ready for issuance early in February 1911, together with the blank copies of Form 6, on which the answers were to be recorded. The instructions directed that answers to the questionnaire be prepared by the head of each operating unit concerned with the preparation of correspondence and the maintenance of correspondence files. The circular and forms were transmitted to the heads of all departments and independent establishments.

The self-examination that these questionnaires forced upon them caused some offices to undertake the immediate correction of their faulty practices. Getting wind of this development, Norton sought to put a stop to it by a letter of February 17, in which he asked that all changes in the handling of records be delayed until the Joint Committee had made its report.[26]

The questionnaire was divided into two main parts, the first headed Incoming Correspondence and the second Outgoing Correspondence. In the part relating to incoming correspondence the questions were grouped under the following four headings: Receiving and Opening, Briefing, Recording and Indexing, and Distributing. In the second part of the questionnaire, concerning outgoing correspondence, the questions were grouped under the following six headings: Preparing, Briefing, Recording and Indexing, Press Copying, Dispatching, and Filing of Correspondence. Under each group of questions in both parts, the questionnaire asked the names and salaries of persons engaged in the particular phase of the work, the estimated percentage of their total time used in such work, and the cost of that time.

Norton did not allow the agencies to lag in their work on this questionnaire; he sent followup letters to the heads of departments from which the reports were not received within a few weeks after the questionnaire's issuance. While the agencies were busy gathering the requested details about their record practices, as well as after

25 List of Committees, file 00.02, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

26 Norton to heads of departments, Feb. 17, 1911, in White House Letters, file 080.2, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

the reports came in, the Commission's staff set about to inform itself further concerning record procedures, particularly those in private industry. Arrangements were made for two members of the staff, accompanied by assistants from the Post Office Department and Department of Justice,[27] to visit large business offices in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, for the purpose of observing their filing systems and procedures.

In Boston the group visited the offices of the New England Telephone and Telegraph Co., where they found that the Dewey decimal system, installed in 1909 to replace an older numerical system, was giving complete satisfaction. In Boston also they visited the Barrett Manufacturing Co. and the Gillette Safety Razor Co., finding that the former filed under a self-indexing subject system and the latter under an alphabetical system. In New York City they visited, among other companies, the International Steam Pump Co. which was still filing under an arbitrary numerical system; William Bondbright and Co., which used the decimal system; the Adams Express Co., which had used a modified decimal system for nearly 20 years; and the Delaware and Hudson Co., which also used the decimal system. W. H. Williams, third vice president of the Delaware and Hudson, who had originated the decimal classification for railroad correspondence, told the group that he saw no reason why a decimal system would not work well in the Government's offices. In Philadelphia they visited the offices of the Pennsylvania Railroad Co., which had recently decided to install the decimal system. There J. L. Hanna, chairman of the committee studying the company's file classification plans, expressed the opinion that a subject classification should be entirely feasible for the Government's records.

In summarizing their findings, Wilmot and Tonsmeire reported that the problem of handling and filing correspondence was being considered with increasing interest by private management and its importance was fully recognized, that the trend in business offices was away from the elaborate toward the simple system, that vertical filing had almost completely supplanted all other systems, that the numerical system with its supporting indexes was being gradually supplanted by alphabetical or subject systems, and that in offices that had made a change from the numerical to the alphabeti-

[27] Memorandum, O. J. Field to the Attorney General, Mar. 29, 1911, in folder 2, file 44-5-2-1, General Correspondence, Records of the Department of Justice, RG 60, NA. According to this memorandum, G. F. Mikkelson, in charge of the Mail and Files Division of the Department of Justice, was designated to represent the Department on this junket.

cal or subject system the consensus was that time and money had been saved.[28]

In July 1911 inquiries concerning press copies, carbon copies, and the single or double spacing of letters were sent by the Commission to 15 business concerns, among them the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Co., Western Union Telegraph Co., Carnegie Steel Co., John Wanamaker, the Pennsylvania Railroad Co., and the Baltimore and Ohio Railway Co. Tabulation of the replies showed that all had formerly made press copies but had abandoned the practice; that all currently made carbon copies; and that most of them used either double or single spacing for letters, depending on the length of the letter.[29]

The Commission expressed a special interest in the filing system of the Department of State, and asked Secretary of State Knox for a copy of a report, identified as State Department file 111.29, on the filing and index methods in the Department's Bureau of Indexes and Archives.[30]

Even earlier, during its preliminary phase, the Taft investigation had been strongly impressed by the record system of the Department of State. In a report of Aug. 20, 1910, to the President concerning the Department of State, Charles Hine wrote:

> The Bureau of Indexes and Archives in the State Department, after intelligent, painstaking and laborious effort, has worked out a decimal filing classification that may be taken as a model by some other executive departments. The State Department has availed itself of the service of Gunn, Richards and Company, and has wisely considered suggestions from various sources on the improvement of its methods. The success of the Department, however, is due to its willingness and ability to work out its own salvation with the benefit of whatever outside light could be afforded.[31]

By April most of the departments had completed and forwarded to the Commission their replies to the questionnaire contained in Circular 5. The work of analyzing the reports, of preparing a re-

[28] "Report on the Observations of Methods Employed in Handling and Filing Correspondence in Railroad, Manufacturing, and Other Commercial Concerns . . .," in records relating to the President's Committee on Economy and Efficiency, among the records of the Office of the Chief Clerk of the Treasury Department, General Records of the Treasury Department, RG 56, NA.

[29] Memorandum, n.d., file 410, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

[30] Norton to Knox, Mar. 6, 1911, in White House Letters, file 080.2, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

[31] Charles Hine, Preliminary Report, no. H-7, in White House Letters, PCEE, RG 51, NA. Hine's admiration for the decimal classification might have stemmed from his familiarity with it, as he had worked as an expert in problems of railroad organization, and the system was used in the offices of a number of railroad companies.

port on the Commission's general recommendations for the handling and filing of correspondence, and of preparing special reports on the findings and recommendations of the Commission on the recordkeeping practices of a number of particular Government offices was assigned to Merritt O. Chance, Secretary to the Commission. Chance, assisted by staff members of the Commission, worked on these projects with the Joint Committee on the Handling and Filing of Correspondence and with the various departmental committees concerned with the subject.

On Nov. 13, 1911, Chance laid before the Commission the 5 general principles that had been recommended by a number of the special committees on the handling and filing of correspondence, and the Commission approved the principles as a working hypothesis.[32] These 5 principles were included among the 10 general recommendations that were issued by the Commission early in 1912.

Apparently the Commission originally planned to issue an extended report of its findings and recommendations on the Government's record practices after the issuance of a special report on the record procedure in the Department of Justice. Presumably because this special report was not forthcoming on schedule, the Commission decided to submit without delay a memorandum report to the President on its general recommendations and findings relating to the handling and filing of correspondence.[33] This memorandum report was issued by the President on Feb. 13, 1912, to the heads of departments and independent establishments of the Government, bearing the title "Memorandum of Conclusions Reached by the Commission Concerning the Principles That Should Govern in the Matter of Handling and Filing Correspondence and Preparing and Mailing Communications in Connection With the Work of the Several Departments of the Government; Together With Suggestions for the Use of Labor-Saving Devices in Preparing and Mailing Letters, etc." [34] The memorandum was promptly issued in printed form as the Commission's Circular 21.

In his letter transmitting the memorandum to the heads of agencies President Taft wrote:

> It is my desire that, so far as may be practicable, the methods of handling correspondence in the Government service be made to conform to these standards. After investigating the subject and putting into effect the principles

[32] Commission Minutes, Nov. 13, 1911, file 017.12, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

[33] Commission Minutes, Feb. 12, 1912, file 017.12, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

[34] Memorandum of Conclusions, file 417.7, PCEE, RG 51, NA. Transmitted to the Senate and House of Representatives by the President on Apr. 4, 1912, the memorandum was published as 62d Cong., 2d sess., *H. Doc.* 670.

referred to in such offices as you may consider it advisable, please report to me those offices under your department where it would appear to you they cannot be adopted with advantage.

Findings, Recommendations, and Results

In its Memorandum of Conclusions the Commission presented its general recommendations for procedures to be followed in the recordkeeping practices of the Government, supporting each recommendation with a statement of the considerations it had kept in mind in arriving at the recommendations and setting forth in general terms the pertinent practices that it had found prevalent in the executive departments. In the memorandum the Commission also gave its estimate of the savings that could be achieved by improving certain procedures. It limited those estimates to the nine executive departments but pointed out that much higher savings could be achieved if the improvements were extended throughout the Government service, both in Washington and elsewhere.

In commenting on its observations regarding field offices, the Commission remarked that there was no uniformity between the filing systems of departmental headquarters and their field offices and expressed the opinion that uniformity was highly desirable. The Commission also commented on the great extent of duplication between field office files and headquarters files in the form of communications between headquarters and field offices and pointed out that a uniform filing system would enable either office, in the case of misplacement, loss, or destruction of any part of a file, to obtain copies from the office where the files were still preserved.

The Commission made 10 general recommendations regarding recordkeeping practices. The mystic number 10 seems most appropriate because of the Commission's strong advocacy of the decimal system; but one feels, on looking over some of the recommendations, that the number was somewhat forced. These 10 recommendations, with the underlying considerations on which they were based, were as follows:[35]

Recommendation 1. "That the system of folding correspondence in document files should be discontinued, and that all correspondence should be filed flat in vertical files."

In its investigations the Commission had found that many of the records in the Government's files were folded to a size of about 3½ by 8 inches and put into document containers although some few of the offices had recently changed to flat filing. In railroad and in-

[35] Memorandum of Conclusions, p. 4, 14-40, file 417.7, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

dustrial concerns the practice of folding records for filing was found to be extremely rare; the almost universal custom outside of Government offices was to file records flat.

Recommendation 2. "That the briefing of correspondence should be discontinued."

The purpose of briefing correspondence on the back was to facilitate the identification of papers that were folded and filed in document files. The adoption of flat filing would do away with the need for such identification. The Commission estimated that an annual saving of $88,524.12 could be made if briefing were eliminated in all the executive departments.

Recommendation 3. "That all correspondence, both incoming and copies of outgoing, should be filed upon a subjective classification arranged as nearly as possible upon a self-indexing basis, and where numbers are regarded as essential that a logical arrangement of numbers under a decimal or analogous system should be employed."

The Commission considered that essential requirements for a filing system were (1) certainty of locating a particular paper or of locating all papers relating to a particular subject, (2) rapidity of filing and of locating papers, (3) cheapness of operation, (4) simplicity, and (5) economy in the use of space.

It found that only a few of the over 250 filing systems used in the executive departments could be regarded as scientific or logical. It considered the usual system (consisting simply of the numbering of letters or cases received in one immense progressive sequence) to be a numerical finding aid rather than a classification system. Such unscientific systems could work only through the support of elaborate registers and indexes; they did not bring into logical relation papers on different branches of a subject, nor did they even bring together papers relating to the same subject.

The Commission had found, in its explorations of the record practices of private industry, that a number of railroad and industrial corporations had put into use a subject classification. A decimal system had also been adopted by a few Government offices, notably the State Department's Bureau of Indexes and Archives. Among the advantages that the Commission attributed to the decimal system were (1) the ease with which it could be applied to the most varied subjects and its ability to represent by the use of a few figures the interrelations of subjects on both prime and subordinate levels, (2) its capacity for unlimited expansion, (3) its efficacy not only in drawing together all papers relating to the same subject but also in putting papers on allied subjects in systematic physical relation, (4) its numbers, which served the double purpose of indicating both the subject and file location of the papers, and (5) its elimination of the necessity of referring to a subject index.

The Commission estimated that the installation of an effective system of subject classification in the executive departments would result in direct savings of at least $200,000 a year and that additional indirect savings would come from the resulting better organization of working materials.

Recommendation 4. "That no book or card record of incoming or outgoing correspondence should be made except where absolutely essential; and that all bound book registers of correspondence received and sent should be discontinued."

The imperfections of the filing systems prevalent in the Government offices had led to the creation of a system of registers and indexes that were time consuming in both maintenance and use. Further cause for the intricate and cumbersome structure of finding aids lay in the effort of the Government offices to keep a record of every letter passing in and out and to provide for every contingency, no matter how remote, that might arise in the call for material from the files. Each year the executive departments filled 800,000 pages of register volumes and 8,000,000 cards at a cost of $502,662.90 in salaries alone.

The Commission contrasted this situation with that of commercial firms, which, it said, surrounded their affairs with proper safeguards and kept enough records to provide for reasonable demands but did not, in the Commission's words, "waste their time in devising systems so elaborate as to provide against every contingency which might by ingenious conjecture be conceived as possible." [36]

The Commission believed that with the installation of modern filing systems in Government offices the necessity for book or card registers would disappear.

Recommendation 5. "That carbon copies should constitute the record of outgoing correspondence, and that press copies should be discontinued."

The Commission found that the carbon copy had almost universally supplanted the press copy in the offices of private business. But in the Government, although a few offices had substituted the carbon copy, most of them still made and filed press copies.

The Commission's recommendation for supplanting the press

[36] Memorandum of Conclusions, p. 8, file 417.7, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

copy by the carbon copy was based on a study of their relative permanency, economy, and adaptability — standards that had also been used by the Keep Commission, which in addition used the standard of "evidential value." [37] The Taft Commission estimated that the substitution of the carbon copy for the press copy would save the Government over $31,000 a year.

The remaining five general recommendations were rather obvious if not trival and relate only indirectly to recordkeeping practices:

Recommendation 6. "That the employment of the dictation machine for the preparation of correspondence should be widely extended in the Government service."

Recommendation 7. "That 'window' envelopes should be used whenever possible, in order to eliminate the cost of addressing envelopes, assure accuracy of addressing mail, and facilitate its dispatch."

Recommendation 8. "That circulars issued by the Government should be wrapped and mailed by machinery as far as possible, in order to reduce the cost at present sustained by hand methods."

Recommendation 9. "That the forms to be filled in on the typewriter should be arranged so as to facilitate the making out and reviewing of them."

Recommendation 10. "That the salutation and the complimentary close should be eliminated from 'service' correspondence; that is to say, correspondence originating in and addressed to offices of the same department and that the title below the signature on such correspondence should be omitted and the title of officials addressed abbreviated."

Analysis of the cost figures given by the various departmental offices in their replies to Circular 5 are tabulated in the Commission's Memorandum of Conclusions. These tabulations show for each executive department the cost per thousand communications handled: [38]

[37] Although the Commission in its Memorandum of Conclusions did not refer to the comparative evidential value of carbon and press copies, it had studied this matter at some length. In file 410, PCEE, is a 9-page memorandum prepared by Commission staff member Wilson E. Wilmot, dated Sept. 19, 1911, and entitled "The Press Copy Versus the Carbon Copy in Its Legal Aspect." The conclusion of the memorandum, supported by cited cases at law, is that the carbon copy, both as primary and secondary evidence, was held by judicial authority to have greater validity than the press copy. This memorandum was published as appendix 3 of the Commission's *Report on Business Methods in the Office of the Adjutant General, War Department*, p. 476-480 (62d Cong., 3d sess., *H. Doc.* 1252).

[38] Memorandum of Conclusions, insert between p. 10 and 11, file 417.7, PCEE, RG 51,

Handling Incoming Communications (exclusive of filing)	Cost per M.
1. Department of Agriculture	$ 5.84
2. Post Office Department	5.96
3. Department of the Treasury	11.83
4. Department of the Navy	13.17
5. Department of the Interior	16.12
6. Department of Commerce and Labor	19.42
7. Department of Justice	44.28
8. Department of State	49.95
9. Department of War	81.40

Handling Outgoing Communications (exclusive of filing)	Cost per M.
1. Post Office Department	$ 70.00
2. Department of Agriculture	85.44
3. Department of the Interior	127.50
4. Department of the Treasury	127.77
5. Department of Commerce and Labor	143.65
6. Department of State	282.42
7. Department of the Navy	285.13
8. Department of War	343.45
9. Department of Justice	508.18

Filing	Cost per M.
1. Post Office Department	$ 6.53
2. Department of Agriculture	6.96
3. Department of the Treasury	8.24
4. Department of the Navy	12.87
5. Department of Commerce and Labor	12.89
6. Department of State	13.08
7. Department of War	16.18
8. Department of Justice	18.33
9. Department of the Interior	20.33

The Commission expressed the opinion that a number of changes in the methods of handling correspondence and in filing systems had been made by the Government offices in conformity with the recommendations in its memorandum. It believed that many of the changes were attributable, directly or indirectly, to its efforts. And, although it did not specify the improvements that had been effected, the Commission estimated that the changes in procedure had re-

NA. The wide range in cost may have resulted from different interpretations of the question and of what elements should be included as part of the cost of handling communications.

sulted in an annual saving to the Government of from $50,000 to $75,000.[39]

In investigating the record practices of the Government the Commission worked through the Special Committees on the Handling and Filing of Correspondence that were formed in the various agencies. Each Special Committee, with the exception of that for the State Department, included in its membership personnel from the agency concerned, one member from a different agency, and two members from the staff of the Commission. These committees studied the replies sent in response to the questionnaire in Circular 5 and supplemented them with personal inspection of conditions and practices in the recordkeeping offices of the agency. They then prepared and forwarded preliminary reports to the Commission. The strong influence of the Commission and lack of independent thinking by the committees are evident in many of these reports, most of which slavishly repeat the Commission's first five general recommendations — in some instances even recommending discontinuance of procedures already discontinued by the agency.

The preliminary reports were not published, but the Commission did publish extended reports on the handling and filing of correspondence in the Department of Justice and in six major bureaus of the Department of War.[40] The preliminary reports contain only the committees' recommendations; the published reports on the Justice and War Departments contain both the Commission's recommendations and summaries of current practices and conditions.

When the Taft Commission made its survey of current practices, those practices differed widely among the various agencies. Most of the departments had already abandoned folding records and were filing flat, with resulting discontinuance of briefing on the back of the records. Notable exceptions, however, were the War and Navy Departments, the Bureau of Pensions in the Interior Department, and the Weather Bureau in the Department of Agriculture. Folding also persisted in some of the semiautonomous bureaus of the Department of Justice and in subordinate divisional files here and there throughout the Government.

The old straight numerical system of filing was still the system generally used in the executive departments, but here and there subject systems, either alphabetic or decimal, had been adopted, notably in the Bureau of Indexes and Archives in the Department of State and in the Office of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior.

39 Memorandum of Conclusions, p. 41, file 417.7, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

40 62d Cong., 3d sess., *H. Doc.* 1252.

Registering correspondence was the general practice, although most agencies had discarded bound volumes in favor of cards. In the War, Navy, and Justice Departments, in particular, detailed recording on slips or cards was extensive.

Most of the agencies were preparing both carbon and press copies of letters sent, filing the carbon with the related incoming letter and maintaining the press copies in chronological order, either loose or bound in volumes.

Few of the agencies had, at the time of the Taft Commission, regular and effective programs for the disposal of records. The Department of Justice was especially conservative on this point. On the other hand the Department of Commerce and Labor made full use of existing disposal legislation, listing records for disposal in response to regular periodic requests from the Secretary.

The Commission's recommendations for the abandonment of folding and the adoption of flat filing was effective in the few offices where folding still persisted. The Bureau of Pensions began to convert from folded to flat filing late in 1913. The Navy Department changed to flat filing late in 1911.[41] Most of the bureaus of the War Department changed from folded to flat filing at the time they installed the decimal system of classification, as did also the Weather Bureau in the Department of Agriculture. With the adoption of flat filing the practice of briefing on the back of the record was automatically discontinued.

The Commission's recommendation of a self-indexing, subject system for filing records, preferably under a decimal system of symbols, was extensively accepted in only two of nine executive departments — the Department of War and the Department of Justice. After considerable study and cautious investigation of the system, including a visit by a delegation to a number of private business offices in Jersey City, New York, Brooklyn, and Boston, the War Department adopted the decimal system of filing. Most of the Department's offices went under the new system in 1917, although two had installed the system a few years earlier and the Office of the Chief of Engineers did not apply the system to all its records until 1943.

Although the Department of Justice did not adopt a decimal system of classification, it devised, in response to the Commission's recommendations, a "duplex-numeric system" of coding a new sub-

41 Memorandum, Secretary of the Navy to the naval bureaus, Nov. 25, 1911, file 28067-27:4, General Correspondence, in General Records of the Department of the Navy, RG 80, NA.

ject-classification and installed it in 1914. To this day, however, the Justice Department has not completely abandoned the old straight numerical system and it still uses that system for filing communications of a type for which the later system does not provide.

The Commission's recommendations regarding filing systems brought results in other departments, though less extensive. In the Department of Agriculture a decimal system of classification was adopted by the Weather Bureau early in 1912 and by the Bureau of Animal Industry in 1913. The Bureau of Mines, Interior Department, installed the decimal system in 1911.

Except in the Department of War, the Commission's recommendations for discontinuing the recording of correspondence were generally ignored. Most of the offices that recorded their correspondence continued in their accustomed way. To this day, for example, the Department of Justice follows a very elaborate system of recording, covering about 35 percent of its communications. A recent self-survey of the Department recommended that this percentage be increased.[42]

Despite the Commission's recommendations that the making of press copies be abandoned, most of the agencies persisted in the practice. Exceptions were the War Department and the Navy Department, where press copying was stopped in 1912, and the central files of the Department of Justice, where the practice was stopped in 1913. Most of the departments objected strongly to the recommendation, insisting on the legal value of press copies. The making of press copies persisted in many Government offices as late as the 1930's.

The Commission made no recommendations concerning the disposal of records but did, in its special reports on the War and Justice Departments, suggest that certain inactive records should be transferred from active file rooms to storage files.

Evaluation of the Commission's Work

We can arrive at an evaluation of the Commission's work relating to records by noting the degree to which its recommendations influenced the recordkeeping practices of the Government, by appraising the quality of its recommendations, and by observing some of the problems that it overlooked. Certain of its recommendations concerning other operations of the Government, particularly those

[42] Department of Justice, *Record-Keeping Survey*, p. 7 ([1955], processed).

relating to accounting, auditing, and estimating budgetary requirements, affected the paperwork in those activities and exerted an influence on the creation, form, and maintenance of financial and other special types of records. But the influence of the Commission as it affected such technical records is not considered here.

From our review of the response of the departments we can see that no one of the Commission's recommendations received general acceptance throughout the Government. In some cases, such as the matter of folding and briefing records, this lack of response was caused by the fact that most of the agencies, with the notable exception of the War and Navy Departments, had already stopped those practices. But the Commission did deal the coup de grâce to folding and briefing in departments where the practice had survived the recommendations of the Keep Commission. The Taft Commission's recommendation against recording had extensive effect only in the Department of War. Most of the agencies had already turned from recording in bound volumes to recording on cards, and they continued to record on cards. In the matter of press copying, the Commission's recommendations were generally ignored.

Perhaps the most important and effective of the Commission's proposals was for the installation of a "subjective classification arranged as nearly as possible upon a self-indexing basis." Two of the nine departments, the Department of War and the Department of Justice, were notably influenced by this recommendation; and two others, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior, were affected to some degree.

One reason for the limited influence of the Commission on record practices in the Government was the administration's failure to press for the adoption of its recommendations. The experience of previous investigations had demonstrated that administrative reforms are not achieved merely by the issuance of academic reports and recommendations. It is true that President Taft did, in his letter to heads of agencies accompanying the Commission's Memorandum of Conclusions, say that he wished, "so far as may be practicable," to have the practices of the Government conform to those recommendations.[43] And he asked for a report as to the offices within the departments in which it was concluded that the recommendations could not be adopted with advantage. The requested reports were made by most of the agency heads; but, since

[43] Taft to the heads of departments, Feb. 13, 1912, unnumbered preliminary page in Memorandum of Conclusions, file 417.7, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

there was no followup by the Administration, the acceptance of the recommendations was left to the discretion of each department.

As to the substance of its recommendations, very little that the Commission had to say was new. The Keep Commission had previously recommended most of the reforms advocated by the Taft Commission, and some of the same reforms had been suggested also by the Cockrell Committee and the Dockery-Cockrell Commission. Only in its emphasis on the desirability of a subject system of classification did the Taft Commission present an idea that had not been already presented by its predecessors; and much that it had to say on this point only repeated the recommendations of the private firm of Gunn, Richards and Co., which had been employed by the Department of Justice and several other departments to make an efficiency survey of their practices and procedures. The one point that the Commission added to the Gunn-Richards recommendations was its strong advocacy of coding the subject classification by a decimal system. It was through this recommendation that the Commission had its most extensive and important influence on the recordkeeping practices of the Government.

In recommending the decimal system the Commission asserted that the system could be easily applied, was capable of unlimited expansion, would group subjects in logical sequence and with proper subordination, would bring together all papers relating to the same subject, and would serve as a mnemonic device to indicate not only the location but also the subject of each letter.

There can be no quarrel with the Commission's recommendation for the adoption of a self-indexing, logical subject system of classification. But its wisdom in recommending the decimal system in conjunction with the subject system of classification is open to question. We must remember that the decimal system is not a system of classification but merely a system of coding. In urging its adoption the Commission led some agencies to place their subject classification in a numerical strait jacket. For experience has shown that the decimal system does not truly possess all the advantages claimed for it.

When such a system is set up, it is necessary first to establish very broad subjects as the primary divisions in order to keep the number of primary divisions within the limit of 10. As a consequence, many of these broad primary divisions comprise secondary divisions that are themselves very broad. Some of these secondary divisions, representing major activities of an agency, have to be developed extensively to bring out their subordinate breakdowns. The result is a complex and cumbersome coding. And the often long coding symbols are of little mnemonic use.

Nor is the system, in practice, always logical or capable of expansion. Because of the rigidity of the decimal framework, it is not always easy or even possible to put new topics in their proper logical place in the numerical sequence. As a result there is a tendency to use the "000 General" section as a catchall, throwing there topics that are not truly general in nature, and thus disrupting the logical relation of the subject progression.

We may conclude, then, that in the one sphere of recordkeeping practice in which the Commission achieved its most notable results — that of the decimal filing system — the benefit of its influence was doubtful.

A number of important problems relating to the Government's record practices were not mentioned by the Commission, and this despite the fact that the problems had been recognized and discussed by its predecessors and had even been called directly to its attention. Repeatedly the Commission would come face to face with a problem and then either ignore or sidestep it, going off into a discussion of a related but tangential matter. Thus, although in its Circular 5 it asked, "Are any classes of letters and documents destroyed at the expiration of regular periods?," it said nothing in either its Memorandum of Conclusions or its special studies regarding the disposal of records. It did prepare a special report on the disposition of wastepaper, presenting impressive statistics on the quantity available from the several agencies and discussing the most profitable methods of disposing of such material.[44] But it said nothing about the standards and regulations that should control the transmutation of records into wastepaper. In its special recommendations for the Justice and War Departments the Commission proposed the transfer of certain inactive records to departmental storage files, but it did not suggest considering their ultimate disposability. In its Memorandum of Conclusions it commented on the duplication between field office and headquarters records.[45] But, seemingly unaware of the possibility offered for the disposal of records, it proceeded simply to call for uniformity of filing systems, so that papers missing in one office might readily be replaced by copies from records in the other office.

[44] Commission on Economy and Efficiency, *Report on the Collection, Handling, and Disposition of Waste Paper in the Government Service . . ., February 13, 1913.* (62d Cong., 3d sess., *S. Doc.* 1105).

[45] Memorandum of Conclusions, p. 9, file 417.7, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

Nor did the Taft Commission mention the large accumulation of noncurrent Government records that lay mouldering in cellars and attics and other makeshift storage places. This subject was at the time gravely disturbing historians and other scholars, who expressed their concern not only in learned journals but also in popular magazines.[46] If members of the Commission were unaware of the situation from direct observation, and if somehow they missed reading about it in the public press, they should still have known of it from a letter written in September 1910 by J. Franklin Jameson to Norton concerning the condition of the Government's noncurrent records. The letter from Jameson has not been found in the Commission's records, but it is printed in the recent volume of Jameson letters.[47] In November Norton replied:

> Your letter of September 7th has had careful consideration, and I am taking it with me to Panama, together with a comment made upon it by Assistant Secretary Hilles of the Treasury Department, and will see that it is laid before the President. I suggest that on my return from Panama you come to the Executive Office at your convenience.
>
> I feel myself very strongly the danger involved in having the Government documents in their present condition. Do you not think that the organization of the present Library of Congress might be an effective one through which to classify, index, and store these valuable records? [48]

But the Commission made no special study of the Federal archives, and this letter to Dr. Jameson seems to be the only paper among its records in which the subject is mentioned.

In all fairness, of course, we should not judge the Commission harshly because it did not base its recommendations on the modern principles of record management that have slowly evolved during almost a half century since its investigation. And we must also remember that it was acting as an efficiency expert. Its measuring stick was the dollar mark. It took the obvious factors of time and materials involved in a procedure, reduced them to terms of dollars and cents, totted up the results, and came forth with a recommendation. The Commission, therefore, quite naturally addressed itself to those current problems that could readily be translated into terms

[46] See, for example, Rosa Pendleton Chiles, "The National Archives; Are They in Peril?" in *Review of Reviews*, 45:209-213 (Feb. 1912).

[47] Jameson to Norton, Sept. 7, 1910, in Elizabeth Donnan and Leo F. Stock, eds., *An Historian's World; Selections From the Correspondence of John Franklin Jameson*, p. 135 (Philadelphia, 1956).

[48] Norton to Jameson, Nov. 9, 1910, in White House Letters, file 080.2, PCEE, RG 51, NA.

of efficiency and economy and neglected those more subtle problems in which the values are cultural and imponderable.

But the Commission, regardless of its sins of omission, fostered the dawning awareness of the problems involved in the administration of modern records and in the evolution of modern methods of handling records. By repeating the recommendations of preceding investigations, by indoctrinating a corps of Federal workers in the joint and special committees on handling and filing correspondence, and by stirring up a general ferment over record procedures throughout the Government, the Commission sharpened the awareness of both clerks and administrators of the existence of record problems and of the possibility of developing new and better procedures for dealing with them.