

# Reference Service in the Indiana State Archives

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PEOPLE are much the same everywhere. Functions of government throughout our part of the world are similar. For this reason much of what I have to say will be familiar to you. I hope, then, to share with you a few examples representing the types of reference service that we in Indiana have been privileged to give. These specific examples are either a matter of public knowledge or are cited with the permission of the persons concerned.

The Indiana State Archives includes both historical documents and modern records. In mentioning some specific examples of service rendered I shall not differentiate between these though they are stored differently; for both the older and the more recent records are intensively and extensively used. Both are referred to in answering requests for specific records, for more complex information, for extensive search and compilation of data, and for certification and photographic reproduction. It is imperative that staff members engaged in reference service be familiar with the history, organization, and functions of the government they are serving, what records have been made and transferred, and what these records contain.

As for Indiana, there are no more important or basic records than those of the United States land offices opened after the original land survey and later particular surveys. The information contained in the survey plats, field notes, tract books, and the records of land sales is sought by State, county, and local officials as well as by lawyers, abstractors, surveyors, historians, corporations, newspapermen, genealogists, and others of the general public. We call on the National Archives when we cannot answer the questions these people bring to us.

Who has not had his share of troubles over the Indian land

\* Paper read, Oct. 6, 1960, at the 24th annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, in Boston, as a part of a session on professional training and reference service over which LeRoy DePuy presided. The author is State Archivist of Indiana.

claims? An attorney for the descendants of the Miami Indians asserted, after consulting the Land Office records and the Census of Agriculture, that he found a startling difference between the amount paid the Indians and the subsequent valuation of the land and its products. Of course we made the records available to representatives of the other side and remained neutral when the information found was used effectively before the U. S. Court of Claims in 1959. Meanwhile, the number of descendants of the Miami Indians increases!

This reminds me of an inquiry from a member of the Indiana Historical Society who was perplexed about what appeared to be a misplaced 1818 St. Mary's Treaty line on a map he had used. Could we find the original survey?

I never did find any field notes for that line [he said], and I am not sure surveyors ever really ran it. I noted a seeming error on a 1920 map. But I perhaps should mention to you that I believe I may have found the authority for this seeming error on an earlier map. Also, a later atlas map seemingly echoes this seeming error. All three are in headlong collision with Pence-Armstrong's "Indiana Boundaries." The moral is, of course, "Don't ever make any mistakes, for if *you* jump the track, all subsequent trains are likely to be derailed at that same spot!"

There is a story that the original Uncle Sam Wilson came to Indiana and died in a northern county. We were asked to search for a purchase of land in this area from the U. S. Government by Samuel Wilson. To date we have been unable to take this hero from his home in Troy, New York!

Inquiries about internal improvements are frequent. The officials of one municipality, unable to find the exact location of the uncompleted Wabash and Erie Canal through their city, came to us. These records are especially interesting, for Indiana "went broke" and work on the canal system was stopped in 1839 because of financial failure. The impact was so great that the second constitution adopted in 1851 forbade the State's incurring indebtedness except for casual expenses or to provide for the public defense.

I do not need to remind the Society of American Archivists that the Civil War anniversary is at hand. I am sure archivists in all States are working closely with Civil War centennial commissions and Civil War round tables. These enthusiasts know their business. Uniforms interest them. From correspondence we found that some of Lew Wallace's men who had organized at the beginning of the war had equipped themselves with red coats trimmed with blue, white pants with blue stripes, and black caps. They

were proud of their uniforms and asked that they be permitted to wear them. One question often asked is, "Wasn't the youngest soldier in the Union Army from Indiana?" To answer inquiries about the Civil War we have already made extensive use of the correspondence, appointments, and commissions of the Governor as well as of the orders, telegrams, reports, muster rolls and military-service card-index records of the State adjutant general. Within the past two years, authors, Ph.D. candidates, and members of the press have intensified reference to these records. This needed to be done.

In fact, reference to the records transferred from the State adjutant general occupy approximately 25 percent of our time. Reference requests of greatest frequency—for certified statements of service of Indiana men in the War of 1812, the War with Mexico, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I—are usually easily handled. At present, the card service records furnished the State by the Adjutant General of the Army and the draft registration records for World War I are used to verify the ages of individuals who are approaching retirement. Many persons born before 1907 have difficulty in establishing their birth dates. Such records are accepted as a source of evidence by Social Security officials, the Railroad Retirement Board, and the State's Department of Public Welfare.

Claims by members of the National Guard for longevity pay require considerable time. Included in the statement of service is a record of active duty and attendance at camps of instruction and national matches having Federal recognition. Such statements are compiled from the payrolls and special orders and are certified to the adjutant general of the State of Indiana. In cases of dispute, photographic copies of these records are furnished. This sometimes seems a service beyond the call of duty, but it is a satisfaction to know that we can be helpful to individuals in this way.

But, important as they are, I would not leave the impression that questions on land and military service occupy the major part of our time. One of our best users is the State's attorney general, whose advice is sought by every department of government. Unofficial opinions, correspondence, briefs, and civil and criminal cases are studied for precedents. No data are too minute. We have been asked to keep penciled notes and work papers for a time. Since the attorney general works under pressure, telephone calls are frequent.

Nor should I fail to mention the financial records. Whether

they are used in tracing a State fund account number through the auditor's ledger records, or a transfer of several million dollars from a special fund to the general fund, we are conscious that the State could not carry on its business without them. Also, since the passage of the Public Employees' Retirement Fund Act in 1945, the State employee earnings records transferred from the auditor are very often referred to by the staff, and statements of prior service of employees are certified. Alleged irregularities bring calls for vouchers and warrants.

Architects and engineers have derived benefit from plans and blueprints of the State House and the Library and Historical Building in planning the State Office Building soon to be occupied next to us. In fact, the Administrative Building Council, the Fire Marshal Department, and the Board of Accounts require that plans of buildings used for public purposes be approved.

Various requests come from other State officials. The Division of Teacher Training and Licensing calls for the license records of former teachers who have returned to teaching. Is there an archival establishment without tax records? In Indiana they are used by individuals, the Inheritance Tax Division, the Board of Tax Commissioners, and obviously the District Office of Internal Revenue. If a tax has been underpaid or evaded, that is important. If it has been overpaid, that too is important. The secretary of state calls for the enrolled acts and files of corporations judged to be dead but whose influence is living. Bank officials whose institution grew from a branch of the Indiana State Bank wish to see the early bank papers. The State's Supreme Court, ever guarding the separation of powers, issues strict orders about the use of its papers.

The variety is exhilarating, if perplexing. Long distance calls—from writers wishing to verify statements challenged by reviewers, from graduate students checking on bibliographical references, from professors about election returns, from heads of State institutions in a hurry for photographic reproductions—all add to the day's liveliness. Much of the reference service is deadly serious, some of it is amusing, and some reflects the pathos of human helplessness and frustration.

In the end, our success rests on our ability to offer good reference service. It is this that justifies our existence.