# The "Better Reception, Preservation, and More Convenient Use" of Public Records in Eighteenth-Century England

By CHARLES F. MULLETT*

*University of Missouri*

BY ALL ODDS the most prosaic, by no means the least cogent, refutation of the Romantic libel of the Enlightenment as antihistorical was the persistent concern with original sources —their condition, care, and use. Although this concern neither originated nor ceased during the eighteenth century, it produced a sensible, informing Lords' report in 1719, a Commons' report equally sensible and informing in 1732, and reports from the Select Committee of the Commons in 1800—not to enumerate all the intervening activity and the disparate testimony back of these monuments. To footnote the historical impulse behind this attention one may recall the bald assertion in 1774 that the general histories were deficient because the authors had not searched out the proper materials.[1] The reports, the sentiments of Thomas Carte in 1738, the similar convictions of Gibbon half a century later, and the opinions constantly voiced in periodicals supply more voluminous evidence. Admittedly the men whose supreme duty it was to use public records had often neglected them, yet their condition—even after various recommendations—discouraged any but the most heroic. He who ventured into dark, damp, filthy, rat-ridden dungeons, sculleries, and outhouses to decipher illegible fragments and explore mouldy, confused heaps commands as much admiration as does that great explorer, Captain Cook.

In the judgment of men who had a right to speak, England had

* The author, professor of history at the University of Missouri, specializes in modern English history. He is the author of several books and many articles dealing largely with English intellectual history.

[1] Sir Joseph Ayloffe, *Calendars of the Ancient Charters* (London, 1774); see especially p. i, liii. Thomas P. Peardon, *The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760-1830* (New York, 1933), has a revealing chapter on some features of this problem. Other partial accounts may be found in the works cited in subsequent footnotes.

an unrivaled set of records, running back several hundred years. Although their preservation had stood first on legal necessity, the researches of the chronicler had long attested historical appreciation. In either case, at an early date men had appreciated the disastrous effects of anarchy; by 1320 the anxiety of the Crown to vindicate its prerogative, the desire of officials to defend their perquisites, and the interest of private folk in preserving tangible evidences of their rights prescribed the custody of public records. This conviction that they should not only be preserved, "methodized," and digested but also be accessible was related alike to the plea for official proceedings in the common tongue,[2] and to statutes against falsification, erasure, and embezzlement.[3]

The Tudors, intent on legitimacy, took many positive steps. In 1547, when several historians were busily saving the past from oblivion and propagandizing for the care and use of ancient records, a bill was drafted for their better preservation.[4] Later on, while numerous chroniclers were feeding the popular demand for history, Elizabeth instituted an inquiry into parliamentary, chancery, and exchequer rolls and sought the recovery of dispersed charters. Contemporaneously, judges petitioned for the better care of records, and antiquaries extracted ore from a hundred shafts.[5] The same spirit marked the early seventeenth century, when James I authorized the Office of General Remembrance of Matters of Record. In 1604 the Commons moved for a special record repository, and in 1620 the Lords appointed a committee to search for records. Since the early years of Elizabeth, some men had moved to place state papers under expert supervision; although for years this campaign

[2] The statute 36 Edward III, c. 15 (1362), considering that great mischiefs followed from ignorance of the tongue in which laws were pleaded, ordered that, to secure good government, pleas should be made and defended in the English tongue; they would, however, be enrolled in Latin.

[3] 8 Richard II, c. 4 (1384); 11 Henry IV, c. 3 (1409-10); 8 Henry VI, c. 12 (1429). As early as 14 Edward I (1285-86) the Statute of Exeter declared against the falsification and theft of coroners' inquests. For the earliest attempts to salvage records, see Ayloffe, *Calendars*, introduction; *Reports From the Select Committee, Appointed To Inquire Into the State of the Public Records of the Kingdom*, p. 3-5 (London, 1800); Hubert Hall, *Studies in English Official Historical Documents*, p. 23-26, 32-39 (Cambridge, 1908); and F. S. Thomas, *Notes of Materials for the History of Public Departments* (London, 1846).

[4] In 1525 Vergil had produced in his edition of Gildas the first critical edition of an English historical text; the first edition of his *Anglica Historica* came out in 1534, the second in 1546, the third in 1555. Hall's *Lancaster and York* came out in 1542 and 1548. Several others were active in the same decade. There were no Privy Council records until 1540.

[5] Eleanor Adams, *Old English Scholarship in England From 1566 to 1800*, ch. 1 (New Haven, 1917).

did not get beyond grants of money to a supervisor, by 1619 he emerged as a Keeper of State Papers and attempted, among other activities, a more complete classification. With the facilities thus expanding, Charles I issued a commission for searching after all records belonging to the Crown. In succeeding decades one House or the other repeatedly supported such policies and stressed the need for inventories, catalogs, and proper care.[6] Alongside official activity Camden, Selden, and others scarcely less distinguished were issuing their great folios, to point up the need for preservation and care. Even during the "Usurpation," when men would have burned records as monuments of tyranny, transactions had never been more fully recorded.

During the Restoration the Crown assiduously searched for papers lately dispersed and sought a safer place for records inadequately housed or useless for lack of calendars. The antiquaries waxed, if possible, more monumental than before. That all were alive to the value and to the deplorable losses of ancient records is evident, none more so than "Marginal" Prynne, onetime Keeper of the Records in the Tower, who, choked with dust that made him black as a sweep twice a day, patiently—or impatiently—deciphered neglected treasures.[7] Meanwhile the passion for printing documents mounted as in France, Germany, Holland, and Spain; and in 1692 the Government, having decided to print a large body of state papers, designated Thomas Rymer, the Historiographer Royal, as editor. Immediately he corresponded with Leibnitz, then at work on the *Codex juris gentium diplomaticus* (1693). The monumental *Foedera*, which appeared in 20 volumes between 1704 and 1735, not only surpassed its model, the *Codex*, but despite its defects be-

[6] *Commons Journals*, I:215; II:22; IV:273; V:348; VIII:310; IX:295. *Lords Journals*, III:17, 21, 65, 67, 74, 158, 174, 219. See also R. B. Wernham, "The Public Records in the Sixteenth and Seventeeth Centuries," in Levi Fox, ed., *English Historical Scholarship in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, p. 11-30 (London, 1956); and F. Smith Fussner, *The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought, 1580-1640*, p. 69-91, 117-149 (London, 1962).

[7] In the dedication of vol. 4 of his *Brief Register, Kalendar, and Forms of All Parliamentary Writs* (London, 1664) he stresses the need to preserve the records, "not only from fire, sword, but water, moths, canker, dust, cobwebs." He had endeavored to rescue these "sacred reliques" from that "desolation, corruption, confusion, in which (through the negligence, nescience or slothfullness of their former keepers) they had for many years lain buried together in one confused chaos under corroding, putrifying cobwebs, dust, filth. . . . In raking up this dung-heap (according my expectation) I found many rare ancient precious pearls and golden records . . . All which will require Briareus his hundred hands, Argus his hundred eyes, and Nestors centuries of years to marshal them into distinct files, and make exact alphabetical tables."

came the most important contribution yet made to the history of England.[8]

Simultaneously there was a lively interest in libraries. The great scholar Bentley built up the Royal Library, and about 1700 there appeared an anonymous *Proposal for Building a Royal Library, and Establishing It by Act of Parliament.* The author recommended chiefly a building contrived for capaciousness, convenience, and 200,000 volumes; a house for the librarian; and an annual revenue. He specified a particular site, chosen for elevation, good air and light, dry, sandy soil, and lack of contiguous buildings that would constitute a fire hazard. He specified the responsibilities of the curators and the sources of revenue. The library, he was confident, would enhance the glory of England and attract foreigners who would bring in more money than would be spent on administration. This butterfly never emerged from its pamphlet cocoon, but some changes did occur.[9] Official concern was reflected in two statutes stressing the importance of the Cottonian Library "for the knowledge and preservation of the constitution," reciting its history and defining its administration, and in a third, inspired by a contemporary pamphlet, for the better preservation of parochial libraries.[10]

It is indeed with Queen Anne's reign that systematic inquiries into the state of public records began. Why? The causes were various. No doubt the move was the fruit of a century and a half of sporadic burrowing and attendant education in the value of documents; it owed something to Robert Harley, whose own library was a great repository. Most of all it was owing to the partial restoration of legitimacy and the hope of more. Some of the greatest antiquaries —Hicks and Hearne—were Jacobites. Toryism was regaining

[8] Thomas D. Hardy, *Syllabus (in English) of the Documents Relating to England and Other Kingdoms contained in Rymer's Foedera*, preface (3 vols.; London, 1869-85). Hardy rated the *Foedera* even above the contribution made up to that time to the history of any nation.

[9] Edward Edwards, *Memoirs of Libraries*, 1:423-426 (2 vols.; London, 1859). Bentley, appointed Keeper of the Royal Library in April 1694, immediately exacted nearly a thousand volumes from the Stationers' Company and sought a new building. Thomas Bray, concerned with libraries for American clergymen, deserves mention for his *Essay Towards Promoting All Necessary and Useful Knowledge Both Divine and Human* (1697). Over half a century later, in 1753, Parliament purchased the collections of Hans Sloane and Robert Harley and joined them with the Cottonian to create the British Museum, "one general repository for the better reception and more convenient use" of these collections and any additional ones (36 Geo. II, c. 22).

[10] 12-13 William III, c. 7 (1700-1701); 5 Anne, c. 30 (1706); 7 Anne, c. 14 (1709). See also G. L. Anderson, "Charles Gildon's Total Academy," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 16:247-251 (1955). About 1710 Gildon recommended the sorting and study of public records as the necessary preface to writing an accurate English history for elementary schools.

strength in State and Church. If the Revolution could not be rationalized into a "good thing," it must be construed as an aberration now happily corrected, not as a breach of continuity. Dutch William was dead and Stuart Anne reigned in his stead: make haste then to recover the past and bind the present to it. Not for the first time or the last was historiography the chief servant of constitutional theory and partisan politics. Yet what began in controversy ended in scholarship.

Scarcely was Anne firmly on the throne than the Lords, in December 1703, referred the question of records to a committee, which should consider their actual state, remedy what was amiss, and report.[11] The fruits at first were nil; though 46 members were appointed, 5 comprised a quorum. Even the five did not meet, and 3½ months later the Lords revived the committee. It began its career immediately on March 30, 1704, by investigating the Tower records. A subcommittee found most of them in good shape, carefully kept, with transcription going forward; it also found that many rolls had neither calendars nor abstracts. Such calendars, said the committee, should be most carefully made, in the interests of public service. Admittedly some records were in confused heaps and—to national dishonor and damage—in danger of perishing. To save these would require clerks who understood languages and handwriting and were capable of making abstracts. Once cleaned and arranged, the records might be administered at small expense. Nearly 3 months elapsed before any positive action occurred, and this mainly consisted of precautions against fire. The committee, however, was continued, and in January 1706 it found the situation in the Paper Office far worse than in the Tower. No papers had been delivered there in years, and many were wanting from earlier times.[12] No one knew the whereabouts of the treaties of Breda and Ryswick. Such papers should be located and placed in the office and proper measures should be taken to preserve them "for the use of the public."

By April 1707, according to the committee, the Tower records had been sorted and digested; most of the rooms had been improved

[11] For what follows in the next several paragraphs see the *Lords Journals*, XVII: 341, 344-345, 549, 555, 574, 637; XVIII: 52, 69, 193, 318, 620, 715-717; XIX: 19, 247, 314, 317, 380, 586, 666; XX: 420, 435, 455, 486, 527, 529, 540.

[12] This sort of thing owed much to circumstance. Although the Office of Secretary of State had long existed and correspondence had steadily increased, centuries elapsed before there was an established repository. Meanwhile each Secretary had kept his own papers, and their preservation depended on his care, his clerks, and his survival for a reasonable time after leaving office.

and drawers provided; a protective brick wall had been built, though it could properly go higher; order and method had replaced confusion, dirt, and decay; clerks were carrying the work forward steadily. Once the present tasks were finished little would be wanting to keep the Tower records in good condition. Just over 2 years later the committee reported further progress. The contents of confused heaps had been put in chests, uncalendared rolls cataloged, some excellent shelves constructed, and the rooms made into a good repository. In addition, clerks had abstracted and indexed many Norman, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish rolls and alphabetized many Chancery depositions. Yet, important rolls needed attention; foreign correspondence and Papal bulls, furthermore, should be bound up according to states and chronology, and proceedings at common law and chancery sorted into reigns and subjects.

Improvement, it must be admitted, was sometimes more reported than achieved, and the care bestowed upon records seemed in inverse proportion to their value. The committee discovered Court of Wards papers in a fishmonger's warehouse. Although the room was large and fitted with shelves, vandals had stolen the lead from the roof and broken the windows, with the consequence that rain had destroyed or corrupted many records. The keeper had some transcripts, but of the rest he knew nothing. His father had indexed some records and listed the remainder. The main records of the court were in the Fish Yard in Westminster, where one Fabian, who paid little attention to his job, had pretended to their keeping; but the King's Fishmonger, having rooms for his stores adjoining the record room, always kept the key, so that Fabian needed his permission as well as the key to get in. The Fishmonger came and went when he pleased, as did others in his favor regardless of their purpose. Many records had been embezzled.

The records in the warehouse included bundles of pleadings and leases; books of orders, patents, and decrees; particulars of lands, wards, and receivers; bundles of accounts, affidavits, and warrants; and great quantities of depositions, all in complete disorder. The transcripts had decayed from rain and vermin; many were lost or beyond hope, but there was a list of those identified. According to the committee the pleadings had chiefly a curiosity value to show procedure, but might well be preserved; the leases, though of no great use, were in better condition. The various books should be kept dry and clean. The receiver's accounts were in good condition except for some damaged by rain. All the records lacked entries, and whether the profit could ever warrant so endless and expensive

a task was questionable. On the other hand, it would be worth the cost and effort to date and file the bundles of transcripts. The loose records trodden under foot would require much more attention, and some could only be thrown away.

The committee also visited two offices where Queen's Bench records were kept. In one the records were in good order and preservation, but in the other, fitter for a cellar than an archive, the very atmosphere was too much for the officials, and the records were rotting. The committee promised to seek better rooms and to salvage the records of the Court of Wards, and the Lords agreed to support the projects. As usual the Lords moved slowly and not until another two years had passed, in May 1711, did the committee find a usable room; other houses also were available. There the matter rested briefly. In February 1712 the committee was reappointed, and in August it looked into some Chancery documents. Nearly a year later it inquired into the books and other records of the Queen's Remembrancer and after still another year reported much evidence of neglect and confusion.

Three and a half years passed before the question came before the House of Lords, but in February 1717 some petitioners stated that the parliamentary records could not safely remain in their present quarters and that the allotment for repairs was totally inadequate. Although weeks later the committee promised an immediate investigation, it did not quickly go beyond good intentions. That it ultimately did move is clear from its report in July. A subcommittee confirmed the petition concerning the state of the buildings. The two rooms in use could not admit more records; two empty rooms above them could be utilized once put in proper condition, at a cost of £870.[13] Besides approving the necessary action the committee also found the Lords Journals indifferently bound and recommended calendaring and marginal notes. The Lords accepted the report and the King shortly issued the necessary directions.

Not until December 9, 1718, did the committee again consider the public records and their proper location. Among others Bishop Kennet, the historian, asserted his approval of such a policy. No other nation, he declared, was so happily engaged in preserving public records because none had such vast resources. With proper care there would have been more. Many had been saved at the last minute, but no one knew how many had been lost. How scan-

[13] The estimate included provision for a mason, bricklayer, carpenter, plasterer, plumber, joiner, ironmonger, smith, glazier, and painter; laborers; and an allowance for accidents.

dalous was the condition of the Tower records—"damaged goods in a grocer's shop, matted together with wet and spoil"! There was, he thought, great need for inspecting all repositories, even the Cottonian Library; let the committee "extend as far as possible, and do all the good that's possible." Moreover, let private persons be—"I would not say obliged"—encouraged to bring their papers to some public depository. How rich would be the result![14]

This renewed interest was climaxed by a comprehensive report dated April 16, 1719.[15] It pointed out that the repairs were moving slowly, that the estimate had been much exceeded, and that coals and candles were greatly needed. The committee had considered the transfer of Chancery records from the Tower; it had also found a heap of Chancery papers in the old house of the Master of the Rolls. Many papers lying loose in the Tower had been put in order, but more space was necessary; an available room needed repairs. Court of Wards records were to be sorted; calendars, indexes, and loose papers were being bound up; clerks were sworn not to embezzle or alter documents. Exchequer records, scattered in various places—all poor—cried out for better depositories.

The committee had consulted Thomas Madox, the great historian of the Exchequer, on Exchequer records. Following his report, the committee ordered various keepers, assisted by Madox, to report on their records. He found some in good shape but in need of covers and dating, sorting and digesting; others suffered from overcrowding and disorder; almost everywhere the cupboards needed repair; and desks, stools, and other supplies would benefit those arranging and consulting the documents. The roof leaked; the space was totally inadequate; important records lay unprotected; fit and careful clerks were a desideratum. The committee concluded its report with some reference to Rymer's transcripts, rooms available, costs, and embezzlements. The King immediately ordered the recommendations put into effect.

That the report did not end the matter appears from the revival of the committee in December 1719, but not until April 1725 did action result. Then the House of Lords appointed a committee to view the parliamentary records and more particularly to inspect others lying in disorder in rooms adjoining the King's House. Two weeks later the committee described the rooms as incommodious and

[14] Charles P. Cooper, *An Account of the Most Important Public Records of Great Britain and the Publications of the Record Commissioners: Together With Other Miscellaneous, Historical, and Antiquarian Information. Compiled From Various Printed Books and Manuscripts*, p. xiii-xvi (2 vols.; London, 1832).

[15] *Lords Journals*, XXI: 19, 44, 45, 46, 49, 134-143, 150.

inconvenient, and reported that it had asked the Officers of the Works for suggestions. These men had recommended a fireproof brick wall between the storage room and the clerks' room, an iron door and window shutters, and roof repairs. Some 3 weeks later the committee, having ascertained the value of the specified records, prescribed competent sorting and digesting. The Chapter House, where the work was to be done, needed a few repairs but these could be easily effected. Although the King ordered the necessary action, the House was obviously not satisfied, since 2 years later it requested the committee to investigate what had been done. After a year the committee reported considerable progress in sorting and abstracting but also the persistence of miserable conditions. Other evidences of concern cropped up in the following year.[16]

How long this period of piecemeal attention might have continued no one can say, but in October 1731 a disastrous fire in the Cottonian Library precipitated action from the Commons more complete than that of the Lords, yet similar to it. On February 15, 1732, the House of Commons moved the reading of the statutes of William III and Anne for the better settling, preserving, and securing of the Cottonian Library and appointed a committee to report on the reception, care, and use of the public records. Nine days later the Commons instructed the committee to consider an edifice where the records might be stored and used. On May 9 the committee submitted its report, over 90 pages in length, which went to the King with an address asserting the need for more space and better care and emphasizing that many records were in private hands and had not been moved to assigned places, that the lack of calendars and indexes and order prevented use, and that skillful clerks and a stipend for the Cottonian Librarian were essential.[17] The address insisted on the enormous value of the records, the desirability of their use, and the Commons' readiness to pay the bills. Of 958 manuscript volumes the fire had totally destroyed 114 and defaced 98; nearly two-thirds of the report went to the listing of these.

The report, furthermore, did not stop with the Cottonian. It covered 18 other repositories and recited the same story: damp, dirt, and decay; leaky roofs; inadequate space and inconvenience;

[16] *Ibid.*, XXI: 172, 176; XXII: 484, 502, 522, 526-527, 533, 551, 555; XXIII: 23, 128, 212, 287, 303, 422.

[17] *A Report From the Committee To View the Cottonian Library, and Such of the Public Records of This Kingdom as They Think Proper; and Report to the House the Condition Thereof, Together With What They Shall Judge Fit To Be Done for the Better Reception, Preservation, and More Convenient Use of the Same* (1803). *Commons Journals*, XXI: 799, 811, 917, 918-919; *Lords Journals*, XXIV: 54.

even totally extraneous contents such as spirituous liquors and painters' supplies. The most important records were as badly off as those that were expendable; some were sorted, more were not. Orders, statutes, and the 1719 report presumably had had no effect. Included in the report was also a memorial by a man whose father, out of his own pocket, had employed clerks and his three sons from 1687 until 1709 to index and arrange the records of the Court of Wards. One appendix cited the location of Chancery, King's Bench, Common Pleas, Exchequer, and Duchy of Lancaster records and another appendix listed the directions for indexes and preservation, running back to 1320. The whole made a dreary story indeed.

What official pressure could not accomplish was attempted by personal activity. In 1738 Thomas Carte described the materials necessary for a history of England, the qualities essential in a historian, the need for a "society for encouraging the writing of an History of England," and his own project for writing the same. Nothing could equal in importance to a nation a faithful history of its constitution, commerce, and customs—a record England had so far lacked except from the hand of a Frenchman, Rapin, who for all his excellence ignored many matters. After listing the inadequacies of existing histories, Carte admitted that a history such as he had in mind would be most difficult to compose. Besides truth, impartiality, and judgment, it would require painful researches into diverse sources. The materials were there—generally better kept than in other countries, in great number and variety, and in excellent libraries—but something should be done, and done quickly, to preserve them. To this end Carte stressed the need for a historical society, which might properly admit nobility and gentry, paying respectively 20 and 10 guineas a year. Since subscriptions were already coming in, he outlined his proposal: concrete evidence of the value and use of records.

He would begin with the Britons and Romans, collecting all relevant materials. Although knowledge of the early Anglo-Saxons, a people more given to rapine than to learning, was very deficient, Bede would tide him over; for the later Anglo-Saxons he would use biographies, charters, registers, chronicles, laws, and the accounts of neighbors. After the Norman Conquest, chronicles, government rolls, treaties, foreign documents, and ambassadors' letters abounded. He would search all English repositories and would check the histories against their contents. To digest and transcribe these documents would be a horrendous task, but Carte calculated that with adequate support he could in 7 years bring his account down

to 1688. Unfortunately, despite his sound and persuasive proposal, Carte's Jacobitism overshadowed his scholarship in some eyes. The London Common Council withdrew its annual subscription of £50; other discouragements followed, and the historical society faded into nothingness.[18] Undaunted, Carte produced a history, but for all his research he lacked general ideas and wrote in so diffuse, leaden, and prejudiced a manner as to defeat his purpose and jeopardize his ideal.

In succeeding decades other individuals moved for general reform. In 1764 Sir Joseph Ayloffe, Thomas Astle, and Dr. Ducarel, all antiquaries, memorialized George Grenville concerning the bad condition of the state papers and proposed to undertake the labor of sorting, digesting, arranging, and binding them and of making calendars, catalogs, and indexes. The three received a commission from the Crown, which lasted until 1800, Ayloffe and Ducarel being replaced at their deaths in 1781 and 1789. Although the commission existed for 36 years and although Ayloffe in his *Calendars of the Ancient Charters* pleaded for greater care, there remained few traces of their constant attention but much evidence "that their arrangements were very superficially and incorrectly performed."[19]

Contemporaneously the Commons displayed interest.[20] Besides appointing the commission the House voted large sums from 1767 to 1772 for the printing and reprinting of parliamentary and other papers. Actually this process had begun 25 years before. In 1742 the House of Commons ordered the printing of its journals beginning with Edward VI; later on, in 1783, two folios of Domesday appeared. Meanwhile, in 1772, having found the Rolls Chapel in decay and confusion, the House appointed an investigating committee. This committee reiterated the old story: many records partly obliterated, the remainder in danger from damp and heat, the floor weak and getting worse. Because the Chapel lacked working facilities, the records suffered loss and injury by being transported else-

[18] *Gentleman's Magazine*, 8:228-232 (1738); Cooper, *Public Records*, 2:458-470; *London Magazine*, 17:186 (1738). The Council granted the money in July 1744 and withdrew it early in 1748.

[19] *State Papers Published Under the Authority of His Majesty's Commission*, 1:xix-xx (London, 1830). Astle, who read old documents for the shapes of the letters, not for the meanings of the words, excited the derision of William Blake as one who conducted "an abundance of enquiries to no purpose." Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, p. 265 (London, 1932).

[20] *Commons Journals*, XXXI:411, 657; XXXII:440, 978; XXXIII:398, 775, 791-792; XL:427, 431; XLVIII:848-859. At various times between 1739 and 1781 the Irish House of Commons inquired into the state of the records, and between 1772 and 1789 the Scots were similarly concerned. Thomas, *Public Departments*, p. 127-128.

where. The committee recommended fitting up a cheap, convenient place nearby, and the House petitioned the King accordingly. The House also attempted to halt the continued transfer of public documents to the homes of officials and private persons, and in 1784 the Crown agreed to erect an office for the clerk of the Rolls Chapel records.

In these years parliamentary interest in records was somewhat obliquely manifested in the report of the committee to inquire into making more convenient approaches to Parliament. This committee, faced with the necessity of razing buildings, many of which housed records, suggested that the records might be preserved and arranged more conveniently for keepers and public alike. The committee emphasized the danger of fire, the confusion, the inconvenience, the cramped quarters, the lack of calendars and indexes as well as the failure to carry out the recommendations of the 1732 report; it also searched out proper rooms into which to move the records. This flurry of interest does not, however, tell the whole story; for although John Bruce, appointed Keeper of the State Paper Office in 1792, worked diligently until 1800, war with France bulked much larger than public records.

Private activity had meanwhile kept pace with public. In the introduction to his *Memorials and Letters Relating to the History of Britain* (1766) David Dalrymple sought to awaken interest in sources. Gilbert Stuart, no great scholar himself, observed,

> when we know our public law, and our constitution in their rudeness, and in their progressive conditions of refinement, we shall be able to dispel this uncertainty, and to arrive at simplicity and science. . . . An infinite multitude of materials and records must be collected, and a thousand painful researches must be made, before our jurisprudence is to ripen to perfection. The mine abounds in riches; but they are hid in the ground, and must be fought for with ingenuity and toil.[21]

Much more deliberately a dozen "Letters to the People of Great Britain, on the Cultivation of the National History" in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1788 by "Philistor" propagandized to the same purpose. The author, John Pinkerton, greatly impressed Gibbon, who, had he lived only the biblical span, might have filled the role, the English Muratori, he cast for Pinkerton. The latter, be it said, did not impress all his contemporaries so favorably: in the very volume containing the "Letters" Pinkerton's *Dissertation*

[21] Gilbert Stuart, *Observations Concerning the Public Law and Constitutional History of Scotland: With Occasional Remarks Concerning English Antiquity*, preface (Edinburgh, 1779). Stuart (1742-86) was a historian, reviewer, and student of philosophy.

*on the Goths and Scythians* was condemned by "Secutor" for its inadequate documentation. Nonetheless, the letters command attention.[22]

Pinkerton began by denying the absurd proposition that new books could only repeat what was already written. For nearly a century England had utterly neglected publishing monuments; the Society of Antiquaries was trifling; and booksellers had often inspired what little had been done. How happy the day when gentlemen would patronize literature as well as the racetrack! Because it took patronage to publish, Pinkerton undertook to stop the gap. Certainly the fault did not lie in the lack of materials: the presses might groan for half a century if the Government appointed a society for publishing the documents and if the "great" contributed. Historians were notoriously given to systems and prejudices, and the sources were the necessary refutation. Moreover, because of the close relationship between historical study and patriotism, the revival of the first would benefit the second.

In historical studies England lagged behind even Russia, and infinitely behind France, to whom she was otherwise equal or superior. England had her historians, but the lack of easily available sources had turned Gibbon and Robertson to other times and places. The loss was great, for if poetry, philosophy, and divinity disappeared, as good might appear again, "but if one historic fact perish, it is lost forever." As far back as 1619 France had reached England's present state and had maintained her earlier pace. Germany, Italy, and Denmark had accomplished great deeds. What was England doing? A few slovenly editions, but nothing much since Hearne. What indeed of Hearne? "A weaker man never existed. . . . Instead of manly erudition, thought, and elegance, . . . his prefaces show the most trifling and abject pursuits of antiquarian baubles." France possessed historians for every century beginning with the sixth. England had nothing between Bede and 1100 except the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and this, the most valuable monument a nation could possess, had, for all its numerous manuscripts, been totally neglected.

[22] *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 58, pt. 1, p. 125-127, 196-198, 203-206, 284-286, 305-308, 404, 499-501; pt. 2, p. 591-592, 606-608, 689, 777, 877, 967-969, 1056-1058, 1149-1151 (1788). Pinkerton (1758-1826) early displayed great enthusiasm for antiquities. After some youthful ventures into ancient Scottish poetry he concentrated on more prosaic matters and corresponded with all who might forward his projects. By 1785 he was promoting *Vitae Sanctorum Scotiae*, for which he drew up a prospectus anticipatory to the one he later prepared for publishing the English historians.

The achievements abroad only heightened the need for collating ancient English historians with freshly discovered manuscripts. "The spirit of philosophy and criticism," Pinkerton wrote, "was hardly known in antiquities until the present century." How much was needed was revealed in the dissertations by English literati. Let anyone compare Lenglet's catalog of English works with French, German, and Italian: a few pages as contrasted with almost volumes. Selden, erudite as he was, could not stand against criticism; Dugdale was full of gross errors. Men should settle the foundation, then build the fabric; but Englishmen had reversed the process. Moreover, numerous important subjects—chronology, geography, diplomatics, literature, commerce, government, social life—demanded attention and in a form elegant and vivacious. The most neglected period was the Anglo-Saxon. Why? Because men had avoided the "wars of kites, or crows"—they had accepted Bolingbroke's conviction that it was worthless. Furthermore, whereas the French investigated subordinate regions, the English had neglected Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

How could one explain such indifference? Chiefly by the lack of royal and noble patronage; in contrast to France, England rewarded pamphleteering but not scholarship. Moreover, the public showed little curiosity; in most small libraries one book on a subject was thought sufficient. England was more concerned with science; humane scholarship nourished merely the satire of the wits. English historians must interest youth in English history, offer prizes for scholarship, study foreign achievement, build public libraries, and secure government patronage. The Government should offer medals and publish every year a volume of documents and every 2 years a volume of memoirs, edited in a most critical fashion.

That Pinkerton cast his net wide appears from his correspondence. A few months after the letters in the *Gentleman's* he applauded a scheme for publishing cartularies and hoped that it would call widespread attention to national antiquities, the neglect of which could not be too much deplored. In 1792 he drew up a prospectus for publishing the original English historians from the earliest accounts down to 1500 in 10 or 12 double-columned folio volumes, collating the text with manuscripts and various printed editions. The arrangement would follow that of Muratori, of Langebek, and, above all, of Bouquet's edition of the French historians. Gibbon, to whom Pinkerton sent this prospectus, praised Pinkerton's energetic devotion and pledged his help. He would write the prefaces, sug-

gest materials and organization, and propagandize in behalf of the project.[23]

This last he did in an "Address" published shortly after his death. Amid some general reflections he sketched English historiography, lauding the monkish historians for achieving a natural picture of manners and opinions, which the most exquisite art was unable to imitate. Although he praised some antiquaries, he dismissed Hearne as "poor in fortune, and indeed poor in understanding," of "voracious and undistinguishing appetite," but accurate and useful. Yet, he continued, "the antiquarian who blushes at his alliance with Thomas Hearne, will feel his profession ennobled by the name of Leibnitz." Not only the patient Germans had distinguished themselves but also Frenchmen, Italians, and Danes. In England the age of Herculean diligence, which could devour whole libraries, had apparently passed away. How sad was England's record! Caxton merely gratified the vicious taste of his readers; his successors were worse. The world was "not indebted to England for one *first* edition of a classic author." Now there was hope: Pinkerton—whose "Letters" displayed "the zeal of a patriot, and the learning of an antiquarian" and whose treatises on medals, Scottish antiquities, and the Goths showed great distinction. Pinkerton himself credited his ideas to Gibbon and seemed content with the role of executor; soon after Gibbon's death Thomas Astle and others approved him as the one to carry the plans ahead.

For all the relevance of his appeal Pinkerton had no monopoly on scholarly devotion: the antiquary is as common in eighteenth-century historiography as the *philosophe*. In 1707 Humphrey Wanley and others revived the Society of Antiquaries, which was incorporated in 1751 and began publishing *Archaeologia* in 1770. Hearne and others had published volumes of several old English historians; and such useful pillars of history as *Somers Tracts*, the *Harleian Miscellany*, Winwood's *Memorials of State Papers*, and the papers connected with the names of Strafford, Clarendon, Thurloe, Sydney, Hardwicke, and Dalrymple appeared in force. All sustained Bentley's verse:

> Who studies ancient Laws and Rites,
> Tongues, Arts, and Arms, all History,
> Must drudge like Selden, Days and Nights,
> And in the endless Labour dye.

[23] Pinkerton, *Literary Correspondence*, 1:214, 328-333, 336-338, 347 (2 vols.; London, 1830); Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 834-842 (London, 1837).

For this the scholar could expect only "toil, envy, want, the patron, and the gaol"; yet, though dunces left him behind, he was "great without patron, rich without South-sea."[24]

Though Bolingbroke in 1735 dismissed the antiquaries as peasants, he nonetheless saw them as men who hewed the path for the historians, who made fair copies of foul manuscripts, and who gave the signification of hard words. Joseph Priestley insisted upon the importance of archives, since no society had long subsisted without compacts and laws.[25] Anonymous contributors to the periodicals repeatedly averred the need for proper vouchers and original materials; they stressed the responsibility of society to preserve its records lest one be ignorant of what had happened: a single volume contained more truth that a hundred histories. At the same time, in pressing the value of documents, these writers recognized that sources lied and that historians often selected only what suited their purpose.

Among journalists none had more to say, as indeed none had greater enthusiasm, than James Anderson, the editor of the *Bee*. His short-lived magazine, subtitled the *Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, printed many superior dissertations on history and several reports on antiquities. From the standpoint of public records Anderson struck his strongest blow on January 26, 1791, with "A Proposal for Obtaining a Complete Collection of Papers Printed in the British Dominions," a plan that he ardently hoped to translate into policy. A year later his hopes promised to bear fruit when Thomas Johnes, the translator of Froissart and Joinville and a very public-spirited man, agreed to present the proposal to Parliament.[26]

Because the "collection," so arranged as to be easily consulted, would illumine the history of society, Anderson urged the enactment of a statute requiring that one copy, or preferably two, of every book, pamphlet, or detached paper printed in Britain after a specified date be sent by some safe conveyance to a general repository at London, there to be available for public use at all times. In case of papers from overseas two papers should be sent, and if both arrived one might be sold, or, better, deposited in Edinburgh. If one was lost, the deficiency would fall upon Edinburgh's repository. On no

[24] Quoted in H. W. Garrod, *Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value*, p. 8 (Cambridge, 1946).

[25] Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, letter i (2 vols.; London, 1752); Joseph Priestley, lectures iv-vii in *Lectures on History and General Policy* (Dublin, 1788).

[26] *The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, 1:126-131 (1791); Pinkerton, *Literary Correspondence*, 1:291-296.

account should any *unpublished* paper be sold, and fines were scheduled for evasion or carelessness. On arrival in London the papers should be uniformly arranged into volumes, with tables of contents as necessary, and shelved according to size and class in chronological order. The contents of the respository were to be entered in a catalog, which would be published at intervals and sold to the public. The repository should be in the care of a reputable qualified person with a reasonable number of assistants and maintained by parliamentary grants. It should be open each lawful day for certain hours, during which "every person in a decent dress, and unsuspicious appearance (otherwise bringing a written recommendation, from some known person to a reputable character)," should be admitted to the common hall, which should be properly heated and conveniently furnished with benches, desks, and catalogs, where people might call for any volume and use it in the presence of a librarian. No book could be taken out.

Under these circumstances, Anderson continued, England could have the most complete collection of materials in the world without expense to the nation or hardship to individuals. Materials that would otherwise be lost would be preserved, and what some men might regard as useless lumber and trifles would serve to authenticate dates and facts, prevent useless litigation, and variously mark the progress of manners and arts. Moreover, Anderson reminded his readers, it was much better to err on the side of acquisition that on the side of exclusion, for in the latter case no one knew what might be lost. Although the collection ought to be wholly national, it would perhaps encourage other countries to organize their own. Then a philosopher of enlarged mind could compare one period with another, one country with another at the same or different periods; he could survey the world—physical, moral, and intellectual—at any period he chose and contemplate the progress of the human mind.

A year after Anderson had printed his proposal he sought Pinkerton's backing for the prospective parliamentary campaign. Several public men had already approved the scheme and Anderson was anxious to push it along. He outlined the project for Pinkerton substantially as he had printed it a year before. The only changes were greater precision and the definite requirement of two copies of every paper so that there could be an Edinburgh repository. Unfortunately this activity came to nothing. For whatever reason Johnes did not introduce the bill and the proposal for a public record office died aborning.

Failure here, however, by no means halted agitation for improvement. In the very year that Anderson offered his solution John Bree, parson and medievalist, swelled the chorus. He particularly condemned the failure of historians to use records that revealed the daily life of bygone Englishmen. To study original materials was, admittedly, hard—and made worse by difficulties of language and decay. Nevertheless the task was worthwhile, for history, in dwelling on public affairs, had scanted private life; the various neglected records would redress the balance.[27] Similarly, David Macpherson and George Rose were insisting that authentic editions of the earliest histories would enrich English historical studies. An even more substantial boost came from Sharon Turner, who complained that "the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts lay still unexamined and neither their contents nor the important facts which the ancient writers and the records of other nations had preserved of the transactions and fortunes of our ancestors had ever been made a part of our general history."[28]

Such assertions—constant, weighty, and various—withered the prevailing inertia, and early in 1800 Charles Abbot, witnessing the gradual decline of information about records, moved in the Commons for a parliamentary investigating committee on the ground that national disgrace would attend continued mistreatment. As one might expect, he was named chairman of the committee appointed on February 18, 1800. Several months later, the committee reported that since the last general inquiry the difficulties had increased and that with few exceptions most records were in very bad condition: unarranged, undescribed, unascertained; exposed to erasure, alteration, embezzlement, and decay; located in buildings totally incommodious and insecure. Many records, the committee thought, should be printed. The House of Commons promised to provide the money.[29]

[27] John Bree, *The Cursory Sketch of the State of the Naval, Military, and Civil Establishment, Legislative and Judicial, and Domestic Economy of This Kingdom During the Fourteenth Century; With a Particular Account of the Campaign of King Edward the Third, in Normandy and France, in the Years 1345 and 1346, to the Taking of Calais. Collected From the Ancient Manuscripts in the British Museum, and Elsewhere*, introduction (London, 1791). Bree contented himself with excerpts from the sources.

[28] David Macpherson, ed., *De Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, preface (London, 1795); Sharon Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons From the Earliest Period to the Norman Conquest*, preface (London, 1799-1805); and the preface to the third edition (1820) of Turner. Rose made his contribution in the *Reports From the Select Committee*, p. 43 (1800); he had supported Anderson's proposal.

[29] *Reports From the Select Committee* (1800); *Commons Journals*, LV:201, 729, 740, 753, 764.

The report recited the protective measures down to 1732. It stressed the tremendous increase in records, the change in the language and character of judicial proceedings, and the neglect of many blocks of material. Since the committee had followed the procedure of its predecessors so far as circumstances permitted, the report listed all public repositories whose officials had been questioned concerning the contents and state of the building; catalogs, calendars, and indexes; and staff. The 1732 report published 18 returns to these inquiries; the 1800 report included between 300 and 400, in many cases full and informative beyond the call of duty. The committee did not inquire into the state of documents currently in use or in private hands.

In viewing the principal repositories, the committee compared the situation of 1800 with that of 1732. It also conducted special searches where the confusion required more than a general view or account by the present officers. The committee found that many attainder and treason records were in the hands of unauthorized persons and that copies of parish registers were not regularly transmitted to the proper authority. It found the buildings good, bad, and indifferent, and the calendaring and indexing generally complete. Clearly the great repositories needed regulation, for many documents useless and inconvenient to preserve (with usefulness rather than historical value the standard) were being destroyed. The committee recommended repair and enlargement of buildings, protection from fire and damp, the rapid completion and printing of calendars and indexes, and the purchase of private ones. It opposed the transfer of records, recommended that the duties of officials be specified and salaries provided, and prescribed which important papers should be printed.

The returns from the keepers of the several repositories, though most informing, varied enormously. George Rose reported the Chapter House in good condition, free from damp and in no danger of fire, and the records generally in good order. Many rolls needed indexes. He would not estimate the time required to complete the indexes and calendars; four clerks were working at the task, but they were frequently distracted by calls to search the records; moreover, the lack of warmth in winter was a great hardship. He cited the salary budget as £900 and the fees for searching, which went to the chief clerks; but much of this searching was never paid for. As early as 1372 the records had been opened for use. In 1732 the office had three clerks, now it had four, but the records had vastly increased. Some records, for greater use, should be moved

elsewhere, some should be printed. Because authors, seeking to strengthen their cases, had suppressed pertinent data, records were absolutely essential to an accurate history of the constitution.

Similarly Thomas Astle described the Tower records, of which many were chronologically arranged and nearly all were well preserved. There were some indexes and calendars, but more were needed. Equally desirable was the printing of charter, close, and patent rolls as well as many others. The Lords reported their papers in good shape, with calendaring underway. The Commons reported theirs in a fair state of preservation, but deficient in cataloging and calendaring. The State Paper Office contained a great variety of useful documents, generally in good shape; many had been calendared, and the work was progressing steadily. The chief difficulty was cramped and ruinous quarters; if some buildings were fair, the situation as a whole was bad—vermin, damp, danger of fire and theft. The Rolls Chapel presented a less dismal picture. It housed numerous and diverse documents safely and conveniently; nevertheless they needed calendars, indexes, covers, and printing, and the office needed salaried clerks.

So the story went. Undoubtedly the keepers reported more favorably than circumstances warranted, for the committee took a far dimmer view. Mild as were its recommendations it clearly did not like what it found. Besides the improvements already specified, it proposed both a commission to execute the recommendations and to report to Parliament and occasional committees of inquiry. Although the report showed how little had actually been accomplished since 1732, it also showed that the historical motive was rivaling the pragmatic, that patriotism was not a dominant factor, and that the committee sought to put teeth in its recommendations.

The commission appointed in 1800 consisted of 12 men to supervise digesting, repairing, calendaring, indexing, and printing. Successive commissions were issued in 1806, 1817, 1821, 1825, and 1831; in 1837 new and fundamental steps were taken to secure reforms. The story of these commissions was long a dreary one—until 1831 not a historian in the lot. At first glance, and according to their own accounts, the commissioners did not do so badly. The first and second general reports, signed June 2, 1812, and July 1, 1819, listed an impressive roll of achievements.[30] Buildings had been improved, calendars completed or carried on or revised, records put in

[30] *Reports From the Commissioners Appointed by His Majesty To Execute the Measures Recommended by a Select Committee of the House of Commons Respecting the Public Records of the Kingdom, &c. 1800-1819.*

proper repositories, and hitherto unknown records discovered; the authentic edition of the Statutes of the Realm had been started, Journals and Reports of the Commons printed, plans for reprinting the *Foedera* inaugurated, and other projects considered; the whole administration had been tightened up. In addition the reports described particular publications and collections. Conversely, all this had been piously pronounced before, and the very slim and faulty products soon footnoted the bitter criticism of the Record Commissions. The fault, as contemporaries and later critics make clear, cannot altogether be laid on the commissioners themselves. They lacked authority to force the keepers, many of whom regarded their offices as private preserves, to execute reforms. The keepers were unpaid, untrained, and unsupervised; they would rather put their names on the title page than do the work that justified putting them there. It could scarcely be wondered, then, that the documents and catalogs published under their auspices were faulty and infrequent and that the Commons seemed willing to move independently.[31] As a result of these circumstances a fiery controversy broke out on the expiration of the commission in 1830.

Presumably the commissioners had been aware of their dereliction. In response to the Commons Address of that year they approved the publication of medieval materials along the lines conceived by Gibbon and Pinkerton. They appointed Henry Petrie as Keeper of the Tower Records. Petrie in 1816 and again in 1821 had outlined "a Plan for Collecting and Publishing the Materials for the History of Britain, from the earliest times to the end of the fifteenth century," a project recommended by a private committee of noblemen and gentlemen. He commenced work in 1823, and though he carried on his researches for 9 years ill health prevented him from publishing a volume. Following his eighteenth-century predecessors Petrie emphasized the superiority of Italy, Denmark, and, above all, France, and he characterized existing publications as uncritical. He stressed the importance of early inscriptions and coins, and he would bring together the various general histories—original, secondary, and mixed—the particular histories of monasteries, lives, miracles, letters, charters, laws, and seals, all properly edited and collated and divided as feasible into primary and hearsay. Because of his great admiration for the French he determined to follow the plan of the *Recueil*, namely, the arbitrary ex-

[31] *Commons Journals*, LXXVII: 439, 444, 449, 458, 459, 461. The following year the Lords appointed a committee to view the parliamentary records and to consider the possibilities of improved usefulness. *Lords Journals*, LV: 871, 872.

clusion of fabulous, irrelevant, or repetitious material, and strict chronological division. Although Petrie modified this scheme somewhat, Brewer in 1836 criticized the basic assumptions as mutilating the materials and rendering almost impossible a correct opinion of what had happened.[32]

For their part contemporary periodicals continued to attribute the prevailing distrust of historians and the slow progress of historical writing to indifference to sources. Secondhand materials only produced accounts over which one slept as in a coach where the road was "familiar and trite." The historian should dignify a theme by inquiry into original documents; he might even quite properly include a critical essay on them. Whatever their merits, Hume and Mitford would have had far more value had they searched through sources that would give substance to their works. To neglect such was shameful; to investigate them was painful and tedious, yet how rewarding and invigorating! That their study nourished the genius of history could be evidenced by comparing Niebuhr with Mitford; the first consulted sources, the second had depended on abridgments. How necessary it was to collect manuscripts, prepare grammars, and publish original records, so that the historian could go beyond the compiling of gazettes!

Here, at the risk of tearing a seamless web, the story must be broken off; the eighteenth century was ending in historiography as in politics and social structure. The 1820's, it need scarcely be reiterated, were years of bitter criticism, the 1830's even more so.[33] Whatever else, this criticism bespoke an ever-mounting desire to preserve, arrange, and make variously available the archival wealth of England. Progress was as always slow and devious. Commission followed commission; criticism and controversy struck at high and

[32] *Monumenta Historica Britannica, or Materials for the History of Britain, From the Earliest Period to the End of the Reign of King Henry VII*, general introduction, p. 1-47 (London, 1848). This volume, largely the work of Henry Petrie and John Sharpe, appeared under the name of Thomas D. Hardy. It contained excerpts from 115 Greek and Latin writers (Herodotus to Nicephorus); from inscriptions, coins, and medals; and from Gildas and Bede. In 1814 Lord Grenville wrote Pinkerton in the hope of reviving the earlier proposal, but Longman & Co., seeing no prospects of adequate public support, opposed it. Thereupon Pinkerton attempted, unsuccessfully, to enlist the Prince Regent's interest. *Literary Correspondence*, 2:436-457.

[33] It is sufficient here to recall that fiery curmudgeon, Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, who in the *Retrospective Review*, the *Westminster Review*, and, above all, in *Observations on the State of Historical Literature* (London, 1831) struck at the Society of Antiquaries and the Record Commission; Thomas Duffus Hardy, *A Letter to His Majesty's Commissioners for Public Records* (London, 1832); Cooper, preface, *Public Records*; and the *Report From the Select Committee on the Record Commission; Together With the Minutes of Evidence* (London, 1836).

low; a committee report paved the way for the Public Record Office. In course of time the goals that men had been struggling toward were realized. Although the historian must place the failure to accomplish them sooner firmly at the door of the ministries and Parliament for their neglect of committee reports and informed pressure, he cannot assert that during the century and a quarter here surveyed the issue was either long out of view or the exclusive concern of the antiquary and the dilettante.

---

### *Criterion*

The initial contribution [to the Wisconsin Historical Society] was made early in 1849 with a gift of the William Henry papers from Cyrus Woodman of Mineral Point, who remarked, "A letter is rarely written which is not worthy of preservation."

—ALICE E. SMITH, editor's preface to *Guide to the Manuscripts of the Wisconsin Historical Society*, p. vii (Madison, 1944).

---

### *A Careful Preservation*

It would be unnecessary, on this occasion, to enter into a minute detail of the sources from which we have drawn the materials of this compilation. It may not be unnecessary, however, to observe that, in the prosecution of our labours, we have, personally, examined the publick records in each of the thirteen original States. We regret to say, that we have found these, in some instances, in a lamentable state of deterioration, confusion, and decay; many important documents and publick proceedings appear to be irretrievably lost. We have, however, the satisfaction of believing that the inquiries and examinations we have instituted have, in some instances, been instrumental in rescuing many of inestimable value from the very jaws of destruction; and in others, in awakening a feeling of interest in the memorials of our past history, which promises to result in a more persevering search for such as may still remain in existence, and a more careful preservation of such as have survived the hazards to which they have been exposed. No doubt is entertained, but that there still exist, not only in publick places of deposite, but in family archives, papers of great importance as illustrating the history of the times, and we would earnestly press upon individuals, in whose possession such documents may be found, a minute examination among them, and a careful preservation of such as possess general interest; more particularly, the correspondence of the members of the various Committees, Conventions, Assemblies, and Congresses.

—*American Archives: Fourth Series, Containing a Documentary History of The English Colonies in North America, From the King's Message to Parliament, of March 7, 1774, to The Declaration of Independence of the United States*, preface, vol. 1 (M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, Washington, Dec. 1837).