

The Many Faces of the Pennsylvania Archives

By FRANK B. EVANS*

National Archives

UNTIL the present century Pennsylvania's archives, in the sense of her permanently valuable public records, shared in the general neglect that long characterized public archives in this country.¹ The Commonwealth had no separate archival agency; and, although Pennsylvanians could indeed point to the published volumes of *Colonial Records* and *Pennsylvania Archives* that had been appearing intermittently since 1838, few were aware of the price—not in editorial and publication costs—that had been paid for these volumes.

The published archives were the first face, and are still the most widely recognized face, of the Pennsylvania Archives. In creating these volumes a succession of editors selected what they regarded as historically valuable items from the inactive records still in the various departmental offices of the government. To these items were added related documents from the records of neighboring States, documents in private manuscript repositories, and documents in the possession of individuals. The resulting collection was then arranged in a roughly chronological fashion within the framework of ten relatively distinct series.

In selecting items for publication from the records still in the custody of the State, the editors made no effort to preserve the filing order of the material they rejected. The disarranged records that remained in the offices seem not to have been a matter of major concern to anyone. In time they were piled into attics and closets and dumped into basements, and eventually many were destroyed or otherwise lost to the State.

State records selected for publication fared scarcely better. The

* The author, formerly Chief of the Division of Public Records, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, is now on the staff of the National Archives.

¹ This neglect and its results, despite repeated legislative investigations and executive messages regarding the public records, are discussed in Herman V. Ames, "Report on the Public Archives of Pennsylvania," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association . . . 1900*, 2:267-293. See also Henry Howard Eddy, "The Archival Program of Pennsylvania," in *American Archivist*, 12:256-261 (July 1949).

editors made no attempt to indicate sources of documents, but they did attempt to supply them with titles, dates, and even signatures when necessary. This supplied information was written, frequently with ink, directly on the original documents, which were thus transformed into printer's copy. A succession of State printers then added their contribution to the project. The printers made no consistent effort to distinguish supplied information from the original text; in the frequently misidentified documents they arbitrarily changed capitalizations and spellings; and if a tax list or muster roll contained too many columns to fit the printed page, the offending columns were simply omitted, with no indication of the omission. After publication the defaced documents sometimes were returned—sometimes were not returned—to the offices from which they had been taken or to the State Library.²

The essential features of this first face of the Pennsylvania Archives were completed in 1935 with the appearance, after numerous lapses in publication, of the 138th and final volume of the published archives. Pennsylvania's experiment in archival preservation through publication was not unique, nor were the editorial procedures employed and the quality of the end product significantly different from those of other contemporary documentary publications.³ My purpose in reintroducing this familiar face of the Pennsylvania Archives—in such an unfamiliar fashion—is twofold: first, to warn the unwary researcher against accepting the contents of these volumes at face value, and second, to place the published archives in historical perspective. A product of their times, these volumes are a true "public records collection"—an aggregate of select documents removed from their official context and arranged in accord-

² This summary is difficult to "document" in the traditional fashion. It is documented, however, by the mutilated original records that survive in the Division of Public Records at Harrisburg, by the gaps in the Commonwealth's basic records (none of the records published in the later volumes of the Fourth Series, the "Papers of the Governors," are in the State Archives) and, less graphically, by the histories of publication contained in Marvin W. Schlegel, "The Pennsylvania Archives," in *Pennsylvania History*, 8:219-227 (July 1941), and Henry Howard Eddy, *Guide to the Published Archives of Pennsylvania*, p. 49-90 (Harrisburg, 1949).

³ See Eddy, in *American Archivist*, 12:257-259. The publication of "records basic to Pennsylvania history" has been traced back to Benjamin Franklin's edition, published after 1754, of the *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania*; Eddy, *Guide*, p. 51. The *Guide* does not mention the disappearance of the original records that formed the basis of Franklin's publication. Since Pennsylvania remained a proprietary colony, except for a very brief period, until the time of the Revolution, many of its early records have been regarded as the "private papers" of the proprietor and his heirs and are now in England or in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia. The above references to losses of original public records after their publication do not refer to the records for this period.

ance with a preconceived classification system. As a result, not only is their subject content incomplete and sometimes obscure, but their value in documenting the origins, structure, functions, and procedures of the government agencies that created or received them in the course of public business—their so-called “evidential value”⁴—has frequently been destroyed. This first face of the Pennsylvania Archives is, at best, a deceptive composite.

Less familiar are the faces of the Pennsylvania Archives that result from the triple meaning of the term “archives.” In common usage the term is applied to the permanently valuable records of any records creator; to the building or part of a building containing such records; and to the administrative unit responsible for preserving archival material and making it accessible. These three elements can be separated and independently traced, but the close relationship among them suggests that a single account encompassing all three will produce a series of more realistic and thus more readily recognizable pictures.

The Pennsylvania Archives in this triple sense had its beginnings in 1903. Six years earlier, on February 2, 1897, a fire had destroyed the State Capitol Building at Harrisburg, but since the valuable older records were regarded as already available in print and since most of the executive departments had previously moved out of the Capitol Building, taking their active records with them, there was no significant reaction to the destruction of the records that remained. In the words of a report made several years later, “only a limited volume of relatively unimportant legislative files” had been lost in the fire.⁵ The Public Archives Commission of the American Historical Association was created in 1899, and in a series of conferences and published reports it detailed the shameful neglect of public archival material in the United States. Two of these reports dealt with the situation in Pennsylvania. The activities of this commission helped in the creation in several States of separate departments of archives and history, but in Pennsylvania the legislature in 1903 provided only for a Division of Public Records within the State Library.⁶

⁴ T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*, p. 139-148 (Chicago, 1957).

⁵ Ames, “Report on the Public Archives of Pennsylvania,” p. 284.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 267-293, and Ames, “Report on the Public Archives of the City and County of Philadelphia,” in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association . . . 1901*, 2:231-344. On the activities of the Public Archives Commission see Victor H. Paltsits, “An Historical Résumé of the Public Archives Commission from 1899 to 1921,” *ibid.*, 1922, 1: 152-163.

The major figure in this modest beginning of the State Archives was Judge Samuel W. Pennypacker of Philadelphia, who had become Governor of the Commonwealth in January 1903. Self-trained scholar, collector of rare books, speaker and writer on Pennsylvania history and genealogy, Pennypacker had been elected president of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1900, a position he held for the next 16 years. In an autobiography published after his death, Pennypacker recalled that before 1903 "the State Library had long been neglected," that with few exceptions "the librarians had either been politicians, pure and simple, or incompetents, who neglected their work," and that "the archives, consisting of papers tied up in loose bundles, had long been the stamping ground of literary thieves." Pennypacker appointed a trained librarian to head the staff and "had arrangements made to have the archives that remained and all of the papers of the departments, prior to a certain early date [1750], repaired, chronologically arranged, bound into volumes and put in the library."⁷

From the first annual report of Pennsylvania's Custodian of the Public Records we learn that he had been instructed to visit Albany, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington to learn the latest techniques in manuscript arrangement and repair, and upon his return had hired "eight 'young ladies' who began 'briskly' arranging papers in chronological order in one hundred and twenty-four divisions and sub-divisions."⁸ The available evidence indicates that these divisions and subdivisions represented a combination of several different arrangement patterns—chronological, topical, and geographical—and included separate series for distinctive physical classes and types of records such as journals and maps.⁹ Our first picture of the State Archives is thus of a small division in the State Library "briskly rearranging"—in accordance with the best available advice—the filing order of the public records of the Commonwealth dated before 1750.

The next four decades produced relatively few significant changes in this picture. Several laws relating to the public records, chiefly to local records, were enacted during these years. The 1750 date lim-

⁷ Samuel W. Pennypacker, *Autobiography of a Pennsylvanian*, p. 284 (Philadelphia, 1918). See also Eddy, *Guide*, p. 78-79. Perhaps it was during this period that the signatures of the early Presidents and of other prominent public men were cut out of the documents that remain.

⁸ Eddy, in *American Archivist*, 12:261.

⁹ See particularly Library of Congress, *Notes on the Care, Cataloguing, Calendaring and Arranging of Manuscripts*, by J. C. Fitzpatrick, p. 5-16 (3d ed., Washington, 1928); and Pennsylvania State Library, "Report of Work for the Biennium June 1, 1933-May 31, 1935," by Gertrude MacKinney, in *Pennsylvania Library Notes*, 14:579-586 (1936).

itation on accessions of State records was eliminated, and in 1915 the legislature created the position of Supervisor of Public Records for county, city, and borough records, but the position was never filled. No comprehensive system for the appraisal and disposition of inactive public records was developed. A scattering of individual documents and parts of record series from State offices were added to the holdings of the Archives Division (as it had been renamed), but most of its accessions were of private rather than public origin.

The 1903 act had given the State Library editorial responsibility for continuing the publication of the archives—its major activity until 1935. The interests of the State Library and its Archives Division during these years were primarily genealogical, and these interests were reflected not only in the content of the later series of the published archives but also in the accessions of the Archives Division, which included family Bibles, deeds, church records, and collections of private papers of local interest. Much staff time was devoted to the name indexes for the published archives that appeared during this period—the index to one series alone contains more than a million names—and extensive name indexes were created for the material in the custody of the Division. The documents published in these later series of the archives were again drawn from a variety of sources, and again few of the public records selected found their way back to the Archives Division.¹⁰

Administratively the Division remained a part of the State Library, but in 1923 the State Library and the independent State Museum were combined and placed under the Department of Public Instruction. A decade later this department moved into a new Education Building, with the State Library occupying the first floor. The Archives Division was shortly thereafter located in three small rooms on the second floor, quarters which it still occupies.¹¹ The work of the Historical Records Survey in Pennsylvania before World War II provides us with a relatively comprehensive picture of the State Archives near the close of this stage of its career.

In 1941 the State Supervisor and the editor of the survey's Pennsylvania project published a paper on "Pennsylvania and Her Archives."¹² Observing that the Keystone State had "in no real sense a hall of records," they complained that the Archives Division had

¹⁰ Cf. Eddy, *Guide*, p. 79-90.

¹¹ Few of the administrative records of the State Library and its Archives Division have been preserved for this period. The above summary is based on Eddy, in *American Archivist*, 12:261-262, and on the published reports of the State Librarian.

¹² Eugene M. Braderman and Bernard S. Levin, "Pennsylvania and Her Archives," in *Pennsylvania History*, 8: 59-64 (Jan. 1941).

followed "no recognizable principles of archival economy" in the arrangement of its holdings. The earlier records by this time had been chronologically arranged under the following heads: Provincial Papers, 1664-1774; Provincial Record Volumes, 1682-1775; Revolutionary Papers, 1775-1783; Committee and Council of Safety Records, 1775-1777; Post Revolutionary Papers, 1784-1793; Supreme Executive Council Minutes and Correspondence, 1777-1790; and General Assembly Minutes.¹³

The two officials reported that for the period 1790-1838 the Division had executive minutes, comptroller general and auditor general papers, legislative communications, acts of assembly, Land Office records, and "a large mass of papers called Governor's papers, . . . a chronologically arranged assortment of bills and receipts, plus some letters and memoranda, a miscellany of negligible documents principally from the offices of the Treasury, Auditor General, and Secretary of the Commonwealth." This last material, they concluded, was "in no sense the archives of the executive, nor of any of the executive departments, but merely a mass of documents which, apparently, was the residue of those archives after more significant materials . . . [had] been taken from them." Road and canal records for this period had been segregated, and there were "several other subject classifications" by which documents were arranged, but the authors pointed out that in no instance did the arrangement follow "the basic archival principle of agency of origin." In addition, they called attention to "certain obvious gaps" in the documentation for this period, particularly in judicial and legislative records.¹⁴

The summary by these writers of the Division's remaining holdings was equally critical:

For the period after 1838 the Division has no consistent series of archival records. This means that practically all of the extant records of the Commonwealth's development during the past century are scattered among the closets and attics of public buildings in Harrisburg, under bridges, and in other places where they are exposed to every destructive element. Several large, but relatively unimportant groups of records for this period have found their way into the Division: legislative petitions and documents deposited with state agencies by county officials to 1889; records of pardons to 1888; Attorney General's letterbooks, 1875-1907; material relating to state roads to 1881; records of soldiers' absentee votes (a tremendous mass, of negligible value); and account books of State Treasurers. These and a few smaller groups of documents constitute the whole of the State Archives deposited in the Archives Division.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

There are about fifty personal collections and a considerable mass of materials relating to the Chicago Fair of 1893.¹⁵

This indictment, however, loses much of its force when further investigated and placed in its historical context. The "basic archival principle of agency of origin," a major issue in the indictment, had been but recently evolved from European precedents and from experience with voluminous and complex Federal records by the 7-year-old National Archives. Relatively few State archives in the country had arranged all their holdings in accordance with this principle. Not only had the chronological arrangement of the published archives provided a convenient example for the Archives Division in Pennsylvania, but for more than a century major American manuscript repositories, led by the Library of Congress, had practiced and recommended the chronological, geographical, and subject arrangement of manuscript material.¹⁶

The indictment is further weakened by its misleading statements and oversimplifications. The writers complained of certain obvious gaps—particularly legislative and judicial records—in the holdings of the Archives Division. The State Archives of Pennsylvania, however, never had statutory jurisdiction over the State's legislative and judicial records. The "Legislative Communications" and "Acts of Assembly" mentioned above are not records of the legislature but records of the Commonwealth's Department of State. All records of the legislature in the custody of the State Archives are either estrays or acquisitions through special resolution of the General Assembly. The reference to "Land Office Records" is similarly misleading. The constitution of 1873, under which the Commonwealth still operates, created a Department of Internal Affairs and charged it with responsibility for Pennsylvania's basic land records, dating back to William Penn. These records still remain with that department, and the records noted above are chiefly routine correspondence and financial accounts.

Finally, an objective view of the Archives Division would have noted not only its narrow statutory base, but also the virtual impos-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60-61.

¹⁶ See particularly the descriptions of the practices of major institutions in "Organization and Preservation of Manuscript Collections," in American Library Association, *Public Documents*, 1938, p. 357-389; and Howard H. Peckham, "Arranging and Cataloguing Manuscripts in the William L. Clements Library," in *American Archivist*, 1: 215-229 (Oct. 1938). In an interesting misapplication of the "agency of origin" principle, the Archives Division took petitions addressed to the legislature and arranged them under the counties from which they originated. On the experience of the National Archives, see Philip M. Hamer, "Finding Mediums in the National Archives: An Appraisal of Six Years' Experience," in *American Archivist*, 5: 82-92 (Apr. 1942).

sibility of taking in continued accessions of public records, the Division's long history of neglect by the parent agency, and its lowly position in the administrative hierarchy of the State, which did much to account for its inadequate quarters, its small staff, and its pitiful budget. These circumstances were indirectly acknowledged by the critics in their recommendations, which included the passage of comprehensive public records legislation, the construction of an archives building, and the appointment of a trained archivist empowered to select his own staff.¹⁷ Within less than a year, however, this movement for archival reform came to a halt because of the Nation's entrance into World War II.

The State Archives survived the war years, but this period was marked by heavy losses of inactive records still in the various departments. During the previous decade the Pennsylvania Historical Commission had begun its career within the Department of Public Instruction. The State Historian's Office of the commission did its utmost to prevent the losses, but inactive departmental records nevertheless contributed significantly to the success of the many wartime wastepaper drives.¹⁸

The end of World War II marked the emergence of the modern face of the Pennsylvania Archives. In 1945 the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, the State Museum, the Archives Division of the State Library, and several historical properties that had been acquired by other executive departments were merged into an independent executive agency, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The legislature granted this new agency extensive authority over the records of the executive departments of the State government and over local records, but it failed to provide physical facilities and funds adequate to the expanded responsibilities. The Historical and Museum Commission began its operations, and still continues to function, in what is now the State Museum Building, a small structure erected in 1893; and the Archives Division remained on the second floor of the Education Building.

In 1948 the Archives Division was renamed the Division of Public Records, its original title; and several years later, together with the Historical and Museum Commission's Division of Research and Publications, it was put under a newly organized Bureau of Research, Publications and Records. A broad view of the commission's

¹⁷ Braderman and Levin, in *Pennsylvania History*, 8:60, 63.

¹⁸ Much of this account of the State Archives after 1941 is based on information contained in the administrative records of the Division and on the author's experience as Associate Archivist, 1958-61, and Chief, Division of Public Records, 1961-63, of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

functions, and of the relative position of the State Archives within the commission, can be obtained by adding the title of the commission's other major unit—the Bureau of Museums, Historic Sites and Properties. The commission grew rapidly during the next decade, chiefly through the acquisition of historic properties, but there was no significant expansion of the archival program.¹⁹ As late as 1961 the Division of Public Records had a total staff of eight—one fewer than the staff of the original Division in 1903. The commission's budget during fiscal 1961 was approximately \$663,000; of this the Division of Public Records received about \$49,500.²⁰

Basic changes were nevertheless occurring in the archival picture in Pennsylvania during this postwar period. Despite the lack of staff and space, the Division of Public Records used its expanded legislative authority to develop a systematic program of records disposal for State agencies—a program increasingly coordinated with the records management program that developed after 1953 in the Governor's Office of Administration. In the process of approving the disposal of inactive records, the Division segregated more than 6,000 cubic feet of archival material that agencies agreed to hold until additional archival space was made available. Funds were also secured for the rental of commercial space for some of the Division's accessions, while other accessions were stored in the State Museum Building.

Equally significant was the final success of the commission's long campaign to obtain adequate facilities for its rapidly expanding functions. In 1957 the legislature authorized funds for the preparation of architectural plans for a new William Penn Memorial Museum and Archives Building, and the Division of Public Records played an important role in the development of these plans. It should also be noted that this period marked the emergence of the Philadelphia archives and records management programs under a new home rule charter,²¹ a development that will greatly facilitate

¹⁹ See Roy F. Nichols, "State and Local Archives: An Editorial," in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 69: 87-88 (Apr. 1945); and S. W. Higgenbotham, "The Public Records and Historical Program of Pennsylvania," in *Pennsylvania History*, 25: 424-431 (Oct. 1958).

²⁰ The most convenient source of this information is Society of American Archivists, State Records Committee, *Guide to State and Provincial Archival Agencies, 1961*, ed. by H. G. Jones, p. 60 (n. p., 1961).

²¹ On the background and history of this development, see Thomas Amelia, "Philadelphia Records and a Program for Their Administration," in *American Archivist*, 14: 47-57 (Jan. 1951); and Charles E. Hughes, Jr., "The Philadelphia Program," *ibid.*, 21: 131-142 (Apr. 1958).

the creation of a modern local records program for the rest of the Commonwealth.

Within the Division of Public Records these years witnessed a series of experiments in archival arrangement. To provide the necessary space, some of the material of private origin and of chiefly genealogical value was transferred to the Genealogical Division of the State Library, and shortly after 1948 the task of removing the mounted documents from their chronologically arranged volumes was begun. In the rearrangement of this material, however, the burden of precedent, the supposed greater convenience of subject arrangement, and the example and content of the published archives, particularly the later series, exerted decisive influences. To meet the increasingly heavy reference demands for information on early military service, most of the unbound records dated before the Civil War were arranged under the military units mentioned in their contents. An attempt was made to group these records by agency of origin, but obvious record series were submerged in subdivisions that distinguished between the various phases of military operations and between line and militia service. As a measure to preserve this original material from wear, the Division began to create a card file of individual service records. This project has since been limited to the records of the Revolutionary War period.

Subject arrangement was attempted with the remaining records removed from the bound volumes. Under the general heading "Internal Improvements" separate files were created for "State Roads and Turnpikes, Maps and Papers, 1783-1908," "Public Buildings, Papers, 1777-1897," and "Stream Clearance and Canal Papers, 1783-1908." Still other files were established for "Pardon Papers" and "Patronage Papers." Much of the nonmilitary correspondence addressed to the Governors was arranged in one chronological series, but letters from prominent public figures to State officials were frequently brought together and set up as separate collections under the writers' names. A large residue of this "drainage project" from the bound volumes remained unidentified and unsorted. Most of the public records accessioned during the previous two decades, however, had not been mounted in bound volumes, and although the original filing order had not always been preserved this material was identified by agency of origin. This was the general picture of the State Archives in 1959, when the Historical and Museum Commission published the first overall guide to its research materials.²²

²² Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, *Preliminary Guide to the Research Materials of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission*, p. 1-13

This face of the Pennsylvania Archives has changed again since 1961. In cooperation with the Governor's Office of Administration, the Division of Public Records is now in the process of creating comprehensive records disposition schedules for all executive agencies of the State government. In these schedules records of archival value will be designated for future transfer to the State Archives. Recent legislation provides for a similar program for county records, but as yet this program is limited to the records of certain offices in counties only of a certain class.²³ Other recent legislation authorizes the Historical and Museum Commission to cooperate with and provide technical assistance to local historical societies in the preservation, arrangement, and description of their materials; and the Division of Public Records has taken an active part in this program.

Since 1961 the Division has also completely reorganized its holdings. From the State Library it acquired the last of the public records overlooked in the 1945 transfer of the Division, and it turned over to the library's Genealogical Division the last of the private genealogical material in its custody. The State Archives was assigned responsibility for the arrangement and description of all of the Historical and Museum Commission's manuscript material of private origin, and to date about 140 "manuscript groups" have been established for this material. Among these groups artificial accumulations have been designated as collections, and natural or organic accumulations as either papers or records. Thus the researcher will find among the manuscript groups an "Appointments and Commissions Collection" and a "Map Collection," both created by the Division from individual items donated to or purchased by the commission; a "James Buchanan Collection" of stray private items written or received by Buchanan; the "John Franklin Papers," a natural accumulation; and the "Schuylkill Navigation Company Records," the archives of a private business concern. Summary descriptions and a variety of detailed finding aids are being prepared for each of these manuscript groups.

As part of the arrangement by which the Division took responsibility for these private papers, the commission's Division of Research and Publications was given responsibility for all transcripts and photocopies of research materials relating to Pennsylvania his-

(Harrisburg, 1959); and Henry Howard Eddy and Frank B. Evans, "Materials Available at the State Archives," in *Pennsylvania History*, 28: 58-63 (Jan. 1961).

²³ The situation of county records in Pennsylvania remains essentially as described in Martha B. Curtis, "Public Records in County Courthouses," *ibid.*, 25: 1-37 (July 1958).

tory but not in the custody of the commission: parts of the commission's extensive collection of such copies are available to researchers on interlibrary loan, and this definition of the responsibilities of the two divisions has materially improved the reference services of the commission.²⁴

The reorganization of its public records holdings proved to be the most challenging of the recent activities of the Division of Public Records. Least difficult was the reorganization of its later and recorded accessions. For this material record groups were established according to the known agency of origin. The record group concept was openly borrowed from the experience of the National Archives, but since State records are rarely so voluminous and complex as Federal records, the concept was applied to the records of an entire executive department or independent commission rather than to the records of major administrative units of such departments. The records of such administrative units were then designated as subgroups within the departmental record groups; the "Records of the Department of Health," for example, constitute a record group whose two subgroups are the "Records of the Office of the Secretary of Health" and the "Records of the Division of Sanitary Engineering."

After all the record groups and their subgroups had been established, the record groups were arranged, solely for convenience, in alphabetical order and were consecutively numbered. In October 1963 there were 29 such record groups, but a recent accession of State Police records will result, under this system, in the creation of a Record Group 30: Records of the Pennsylvania State Police. Record groups were not established for agencies none of whose records were in the custody of the Division, and further accessions from agencies for which record groups had already been established were either added to the proper subgroups or, when necessary, designated as additional subgroups. Subgroups within the record groups were generally arranged from the highest administrative unit through the lowest. To preserve the hierarchical arrangement, this system requires periodic relisting of the subgroups and series within each record group, but the overall pattern does have the advantage of flexibility and permits additions with a minimum of difficulty. The entire system is intended to facilitate control of the material and to assist in its description and in providing reference service. Apart

²⁴ For a partial listing of these materials, see Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, *Preliminary Guide*, p. 14-46.

from these considerations, the records now reflect the structure and functions of the agencies with which they originated.

Within this pattern of record groups and subgroups the series is the basic unit of arrangement and description. These series retain the original filing order whenever that order had been preserved, and in many instances the staff of the Division was able to reconstruct, from internal and external evidence, the filing order of series that had been disarranged. Titles were devised for the series that would convey to a researcher as much information as possible in a minimum of space; for example, "Land Warrant and Patent Receipts, 1781-1885, 21 cartons," and "Acts and Resolutions Approved Dockets, 1855-60, 1865-85, 15 vols." No single pattern was adopted for the arrangement of series within subgroups because of the fragmentary nature of much of the material. Series titles in several subgroups are in chronological order, in others they are in alphabetical order; most frequently, series titles were arranged according to their relative administrative importance or according to the physical type of records involved.

The record group and subgroup pattern was necessarily modified to accommodate the rest of the Division's public record holdings. Separate record groups were created for the "Records of Constitutional Conventions," with the records of each convention constituting a subgroup, and for the "Records of Special Commissions," with its 20 subgroups chronologically arranged under the following headings: Commemorative and Exposition Commissions, Investigating Commissions, and Planning Commissions. Experience thus far has demonstrated the utility if not the theoretical consistency of this arrangement.

The mass of totally disarranged early records obviously presented the greatest difficulties. In attempting to determine the agency of origin and the original filing order of these records, recourse was had to a wide variety of possible sources of information. Virtually no accessioning instruments for this material had been created or had survived. The few editorial notes in the published archives, the Public Archives Commission's reports on Pennsylvania, and the published reports of the State Library were of some help, but more valuable was an intensive study of the Commonwealth's statutes to about 1840. Out of this study emerged not only the outlines of the origin, structure, and evolution of government agencies and their functions, but frequently descriptions of the records they were to create and to receive and instructions regarding the administrative use of the records.

In view of the history and use of these records, and on the basis of all available information, the Division created a series of record groups with subgroups that would reflect the governmental structure of this period. Thus separate groups were established for the Records of the Proprietary Government, 1664-1776, and for the Records of the Supreme Executive Council, 1775-1790, the latter including as subgroups the records of the numerous extralegal revolutionary bodies that preceded establishment of the Council. In brief, the "principle" according to which records are inherited when the functions they document are transferred was frequently ignored, for its application would have resulted in unwieldy and complex record groups spanning nearly three centuries and ignoring the impact on government structure of four different constitutions.

The attempt to reconstruct from this material the original series in their original filing order was the most time-consuming, yet most rewarding, experience of the entire reorganization. Armed with the detailed information obtained from the statutes and other printed sources, the staff studied the records themselves to construct lists of elected and appointed officials and chief clerks and their assistants, along with their dates of service. The handwriting of these men was then identified whenever possible. The arrangement and content of manuscript volumes were also used to assist in the identification and arrangement of related loose documents. Size, color, and weight of paper; the color of ink; watermarks and fold marks; pin and spike holes; torn edges and endorsements concealed under patch repairs; all these provided evidence when combined with the above information. Enclosures were thus reunited with their accompanying correspondence; the separated pages of reports, accounts, and correspondence were reassembled; and from the collections and subject files of intermingled public records and private papers emerged the basic records series of a half-dozen early government agencies. In this work of reconstruction the distinctive handwriting of James Trimble, who served the Commonwealth from 1774 to 1836, of John Nicholson, whose public career spanned three decades, and of a score of lesser public servants, including county officials, was of extreme value. Many of the early financial records still await final arrangement, but the basic pattern and the procedures have been established.

This reorganization of the public records was accompanied by a descriptive program that included publication of a *Summary Guide to the Pennsylvania State Archives*, which lists in outline form the

newly established record groups, subgroups, and series.²⁵ The Division is preparing more detailed descriptions in the form of inventories, checklists, box lists, and special lists. Much of this descriptive material, including the *Summary Guide*, was necessarily created in the successive stages of the reorganization of the Division's holdings.

In January 1962 ground was broken next to the State Capitol in Harrisburg for the new William Penn Memorial Museum and Archives Building. This nine-million-dollar structure, scheduled for completion during the summer of 1964, will include space for nearly 100,000 cubic feet of public records and other research materials in its 19-story Archives Tower.²⁶ Its initial accession will be the above-described record and manuscript groups. This will be the new face of the Pennsylvania Archives.

²⁵ Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Division of Public Records, *Summary Guide to the Pennsylvania State Archives*, comp. by Frank B. Evans and Martha L. Simonetti, ed. by Donald H. Kent (Harrisburg, 1963). This is the third revision of the summary guide that first appeared in late 1961.

²⁶ On the background of this building, see S. K. Stevens, "The William Penn Memorial Museum and Archives Building," in *Pennsylvania History*, 29:249-256 (July 1962).

Joint Luncheon Meeting

Society of American Archivists

and

Mississippi Valley Historical Association

SAMUEL P. HAYS, SPEAKER

"The Historian's Search for Archival Sources on
American Political History"

Statler Hotel
Cleveland, Ohio

April 30, 1964
12:30 p.m.