Archival Sources for American Political History

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HISTORIANS are beginning to exploit a vast quantity of source material for American political history heretofore hardly tapped. Archival materials for political history have traditionally been primarily the personal manuscripts of political leaders; in these the private and public, State and Federal depositories abound. But lying almost unnoticed and relatively unused in county, State, and other archives are masses of information about popular voting, legislative voting, and demography—and about thousands of political leaders who left no papers. This evidence is more quantitative, more bulky, and more difficult to use because of the enormous task of compiling and presenting it in manageable form. There is a growing awareness of its vast importance, a growing desire to use it in research, and a growing ability to cope with it through new techniques of data computation, storage, and retrieval. It is on this type of archival source for research in American political history that I wish to dwell here.

Interest in these sources reflects dissatisfaction with the outward and formal, with the individual and episodic, in political history and an interest in the social analysis of political life. The setting of political history concerns the distribution of power among the various distinct groupings—socio-economic, ethno-cultural, sectional, managerial and managed, local or cosmopolitan—which develop in society. One main task of the historian is to reconstruct a picture of these groupings and their changing interrelationships. But much of the traditional emphasis on the outcome of single elections, on the campaign debates, on congressional proceedings, on the relations among party leaders, and on Supreme Court decisions fails to get at these basic patterns of political life and the impulses that spring from them. Such evidence deals with the

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results rather than the wellsprings of political thought and action, and it fails especially to give a full account of the variety of political impulses vying for expression and the particular inequality in political power that develops.

This interest in the social analysis of political history is revealed in a number of recently published works. But it appears also in the research activities of students, at both the M.A. and doctoral levels, at several institutions where faculty members have been especially interested in such an approach. Some of these researches stress the analysis of popular voting and the association of demographic characteristics with differences in voting patterns over space and time. Others involve the systematic analysis of legislative voting patterns at both the Federal and State levels and the association of differences with either the personal characteristics of legislators or the group characteristics of their constituencies. Still others are concerned with collective biography of political leaders —national, State, or local—to determine the characteristics of factions within parties, of different political movements, or of political leadership in general. Still further studies utilize material about nonpartisan economic and social groups interested in political issues to determine the patterns of forces involved in legislative battles.

The most significant aspect of these studies is that they are focused primarily on human behavior, on the way in which people think and act in specific historical circumstances. More important for our purposes here, they are based upon evidence that describes human behavior. Much of the traditional analysis of politics is derived from statements produced by people and institutions—statements intended to establish the particular picture of what these people and institutions are doing that they feel will elicit the most public support. Such evidence describes fairly accurately what people wish to think about themselves and their society, but it does not describe what they do. It especially obscures those elements of social structure that it is not considered wise to describe in detail. For example, ideological evidence would establish American society as overwhelmingly "middle class," primarily because most Americans wish to think of themselves in these terms. But evidence about what people do, their occupations, their income, their patterns of consumption, their residential locations, their activities, yields a picture of many different social classes. While ideological evidence obscures these groupings, behavioral evidence makes them clear. The need for such behavioral evidence, suffi-

ciently extensive to describe large groups of people, has generated the interest in relevant archival sources and in the technological innovations to cope with them.

Research in this vein has advanced more fully in the field of early American history. Here statistical evidence about large numbers of people individually and collectively is available, and yet not in the abundance that overwhelms the student of the more recent past. Studies published or underway include those of colonial assemblies in the 18th century, the Massachusetts General Court in the 17th century, conventions called to ratify the Constitution of 1787, and voting in 18th-century Massachusetts and Virginia. The social analysis of political life in early America has been greatly facilitated by the rapid microfilming of newspapers and State and local records, by the early publications by historians and genealogists of family records and vital statistics, and by the activities of the Institute of Early American History and the *William and Mary Quarterly*, both of which have been peculiarly receptive to this approach.

But there is no reason why a similar interest and a similar approach cannot develop for other parts of the country and for later periods of time, and this is now happening. Vast quantities of similar evidence are available for a similar analysis of society in the South, the Midwest, the Mountain States, and the Far West. Local historical societies have not been so active in making this evidence usable as have societies in the original 13 States, but there is no reason why the evidence could not be gathered, given sufficient time and resources. It may well be that such an interest will come primarily through the detailed examination of the 19th- and 20th-century growth of industrialization in, and its impact on, specific communities, both rural and urban. The cost of accumulating the necessary data is greater, but new technologies hold out the possibility—at least for some data—of coping with the problem. There is no reason, therefore, why the analysis of political life in the rest of the country cannot be as intensive as that now underway for early America.

Two implications of considerable significance emerge from this new concern. First, it implies a renewed interest in local history. Patterns of political structure and political process inevitably develop in a local setting; the struggle for control and power is carried out within the context of community institutions where the concerns of people concentrate. The politics of industrial society can be studied, for example, through the intensive examination of

mining communities, or of city suburbs. Local history has already received a considerable impetus from the growing interest in urban history. Local historians and academic scholars have often been at odds because of their very different concerns, the former being considered "antiquarians" by academicians, and the latter too remote from reality by local historians. The analysis of political structure and political change in local contexts, however, offers the opportunity for the two groups to come together in a common effort. Information about local industry, religious groups, political parties, working and middle classes, nationalities, upper classes, and patterns of land ownership is of vital interest to the social analyst, and the records developed and kept by local historical societies are indispensable to his work.

The social analysis of politics also implies a crucial interest by the historian in genealogy. The shift from individual to collective biography in political studies requires information about enormous numbers of people. It requires that we know as much as possible about every individual who held office, who ran for office, or who occupied a position in party organization at every level. It requires that we know about the individual's ancestry as well as his descendants. It requires that we have extensive family histories of those whom we are studying. The vast collections of birth, marriage, death, and family records that genealogists have brought forth or inspired in the past—such as the Massachusetts town records or the microfilm records of the Federal manuscript census returns—are invaluable to the social analyst. The relative lack of such research aids for areas outside the original 13 States hampers his research. Large collections of genealogical data are badly needed. There is no reason, therefore, why the academic historian should not support wholeheartedly the work of the genealogist. He should, in fact, insist on more complete family records than we have had in the past.

An enormous amount of evidence, useful for social analysis, lies ready to be tapped. A most important source is popular election data, which constitute the only comprehensive type of documentary information that approximates a record of public opinion. Much information on popular voting appears in State manuals, known by such titles as "red books" or "blue books"; these include returns for presidential and gubernatorial and often for other statewide contests, for Congress, and for the State legislature. In a number of States—for example, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Ohio,

Michigan, and Iowa—the returns are given for minor civil divisions, such as towns in New England or townships elsewhere and for wards and precincts in cities. Publication of election data in this fashion began usually in the 1860's and in many cases has continued until the present day. It is especially valuable if it includes minor civil divisions, which are usually small enough to encompass homogeneous population groupings of class, national origin, race, or religion. All such material, readily available, entails no special task of compilation; its use awaits only the application of modern methods of compilation, storage, and retrieval.

More effort is required to collect other election data found in scattered and often not yet known sources. State returns, especially before the 1860's, are frequently found in State house and senate journals. City returns, broken down by wards, are at times available in city directories. Some State returns exist in the midst of compilations of Federal census returns brought together at the direction of State legislatures. Many returns are available in newspapers, although how many is not yet fully known. Newspapers will have to be relied upon especially for the years before the 1860's and for returns from minor civil divisions in a number of States. The microfilming of newspapers, already highly developed, is invaluable for any project to recover election data because it makes this diffuse source readily available. Suffice it to say that all these sources give promise that a formidable amount of election data can ultimately be recovered.

Manuscript election returns present a more difficult problem and one calling for more immediate attention. The material, available in both State and county archives, is abundant; yet the pressures of space, which frequently prompt local county officials to consider past records of little worth, threaten its destruction. One case in point will suffice. Indiana precinct voting returns have not been published, yet much is available in archives. In Harrison County, Ind., for example, there are still extant the original voting returns, the tally sheets, and the complete poll lists for each precinct for each election since 1817, the year after Indiana became a State. These records are in good condition and are kept in orderly fashion. In the next county to the east, Floyd County, however, a new courthouse has been constructed recently. Although it contains ample storage space for present purposes in its basement vault, records were not transferred from the old to the new building but were sold to a scrap dealer or destroyed. Floyd County thus has no election returns of any consequence earlier than 1940. Al-

though the problem of space for county records is real and acknowledged, it also seems clear that, if officials could be made sufficiently aware of the increasing interest in these records within the historical profession, means to preserve them would be found.

Substantially complete legislative voting data at the Federal and State levels, for the most part published in the *Congressional Record* and in State senate and house journals, are more readily available. As is the case with published popular election data, the frontiers of research here lie in the use of modern technology for compilation, storage, and retrieval—methods that will enable the researcher to discover, in masses of data, patterns of voting not apparent on casual examination and to determine relationships between the votes of legislators and the characteristics of their constituencies. This approach has been used to some extent already with Congress but to a far less extent with State legislatures. Similar data for city councils are more elusive. Some information has been published in municipal reports of various kinds; far more lies in newspapers and municipal manuscript sources. Historians, moreover, have almost completely ignored the possibilities of analyzing city council voting patterns and of relating them to constituency differences; these now offer some of the most exciting and unexplored frontiers in the systematic study of local history.

Both legislative and popular voting data require for their analysis a vast amount of related demographic data, of information about the economic, religious, educational, and ethnic characteristics of the ward or county whose voting patterns are under study or of the constituency the votes of whose legislators are being examined. Two broad sources of information exist for these purposes. The first is the census data, Federal, State, and local, which have often been published but which exist in greater detail in unpublished form. The microfilm publication of the manuscript population schedules for the Federal censuses, especially those from 1850 to 1880, has made it possible for historians to examine county, township, city, and ward demography far more precisely than in the past. But manuscript materials of State censuses have hardly been touched, and the precise data available in them as a whole are hardly known. Even less is known about the availability of urban demographic data such as those taken regularly for school purposes or those compiled by private economic, religious, or ethnic groups.

Equally important in its overall implications, but still more scattered and more difficult to gather, is the vast amount of information available in county and municipal archives. These are pri-

marily, though not exclusively, economic records—of taxes, real estate assessments, and similar matters pertaining to property holdings and economic conditions. Such records have already been used in the study of early American history, and only the difficulty of making their analysis manageable impedes a similar approach to the 19th and 20th centuries. An excellent example of this possibility for modern urban history is the study by Sam Warner, Jr., of the process of suburbanization in Boston, *Street-Car Suburbs*. Through the examination of 23,000 building permits issued for Roxbury, West Roxbury, and Dorchester between 1870 and 1900, Mr. Warner has been able to present the first precise picture of the process of urban outward migration and the rise from blue- to white-collar occupations. His study is a model in the imaginative use of local economic records for the illumination of social processes. As the vast importance of local economic records becomes clearer, the task of preservation becomes more acute. As the social analysis of history proceeds, the historian will be more dependent than ever upon the farsighted archivist who can foster the preservation of demographic records.

Equally extensive is the source material, waiting to be tapped, concerning individual political leaders. Historians have only recently undertaken studies of groups of political leaders—as contrasted with individuals—in order to determine patterns in the origin and nature of political leadership. For the most part confined to national leaders, these studies have relied heavily upon information drawn from existing biographical compilations or from personal manuscripts. They have, therefore, been limited in coverage. But information is available in great abundance about tens and hundreds of thousands of political leaders at the State and local level. City directories show the occupation and address of every adult inhabitant; they reveal changes in both occupation and residence within and between generations and therefore demonstrate patterns of social mobility. Social registers provide ample information about upper class groups to permit the full examination of a facet of political life hardly tapped. Manuscript census returns, both Federal and State, provide a wealth of information about individuals, which at least for the years 1850–80 currently permits an extensive analysis of political leadership. And local economic records provide even more data for individuals. Such sources make available an almost unbelievable amount of information about individual political leaders that permits types of collective biographical analyses hardly even imagined in the not

too distant past. Although such data often require considerable work in compilation before they can be used, much can be explored efficiently and quickly even now.

In using this material the major problem confronting historians is the task of collection and classification, of reducing vast amounts of data to comparable quantitative units and of presenting them in forms that facilitate analysis. For example, although 90 percent or more of all popular election data ever recorded is still available, little has been collected in one place and almost none is available in the form of percentages. Enormous amounts of time and effort are therefore required to make such data usable, and researchers, whether graduate students or faculty members, do not have the time or the facilities to undertake the task. Studies of relatively small geographical areas over very short periods of time are feasible, but larger studies covering more election units and defining longer trends, or comparative studies of different types of electorates, are now impossible to undertake. The development of new technologies, however, provides the opportunity to solve some of these problems through modern methods of computing, storing, and retrieving data. A project is now underway to do this for popular voting; if this is successful, as it apparently will be, the way will lie open for the application of these techniques to other data, thereby enhancing enormously the opportunities for the social analysis of political history.

Some 3 years ago a number of historians and political scientists formally requested the Social Science Research Council to take up the project of collecting, computing, and making available past popular election data. Responding to this request, the council appointed W. Dean Burnham, compiler of county returns for presidential elections of the 19th century, to survey the problem. This Mr. Burnham did in the summer of 1962. His report drew the conclusion that a vast quantity of such data was still extant, some published, some in manuscript sources in State archives and in county and city record offices, and some in newspapers. From the standpoint of the physical availability of material the project was feasible. After receiving this report, the council provided funds for Mr. Burnham to make a more extensive and precise determination of the whereabouts of data. This he has been doing during the academic year 1963–64 from his post at the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. Mr. Burnham soon found that the survey could be completed quickly, and

as a result attention was turned in the fall of 1963 to the actual collection and computing of data.

At the same time the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan expressed an increasing interest in popular election data. Established originally to collect survey data through interviewing and questionnaire techniques, the center began to collect documentary census data as well, and the extension into data on past elections seemed to be a natural evolution of its concerns. This development tied in very closely with the center's changing role in the academic world. In 1961 it took the lead in creating the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research. It invited academic institutions to join in annual financial support of the new institution and in turn to receive political data, which it would collect in its data repository, and to participate in training seminars during the summer at the University of Michigan. Originally established as an organization of political scientists, the Consortium could be developed to include those in other disciplines interested in political research.

These two developments, one growing out of the activities of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the other out of the Consortium for Political Research, began to converge less than a year ago. The major problems then confronting the project to collect election data were twofold: (a) even though the existence of popular election data was now known, how could data be copied and transmitted to a central place? and (b) how could the computation and storage be financed? The Consortium seemed to be an agency through which these tasks could be done, but it had neither the facilities for collection nor the funds for the technical work. Through discussions between Lee Benson, then professor of history at Wayne State University, and Warren Miller, executive director of the Consortium, it was decided to enlist historians themselves for the task of collection. Other historians besides those who had presented the original request to the SSRC were drawn into the project, and meetings to elaborate it were held at the annual session of the American Historical Association in December 1963. In January 1964 the American Historical Association (AHA) established an Ad Hoc Committee To Collect the Basic Data of American Political History, composed of Profs. Lee Benson, Allan G. Bogue, Dewey Grantham, Samuel P. Hays, Morton Keller, Richard McCormick, Philip Mason, Thomas Pressly, and Charles Sellers, with Mr. Benson as chairman.

The AHA committee proposed to function through State com-

mittees, each of which, with the help of information that Mr. Burnham had already collected, would agree to undertake the task of locating and photocopying the documents containing data in its State and to send the photocopies to the Consortium headquarters at Ann Arbor. Within 3 months committees were organized in 46 States. Their initial task was to obtain county returns since 1824 for the elections of President, Governor, U.S. Senator, and U.S. Representative, as well as for other statewide contests in years when these elections were not held. This project is now approximately 75 percent complete and is expected to be virtually complete by August 1, 1964, when Mr. Burnham's tour of duty under the Social Science Research Council grant will end.[1] The response from historians who have served on the State committees has been extremely gratifying, for it reveals a considerable interest long believed to exist but now confirmed. Several hundred historians are serving on the State committees. Some political scientists have also been drawn in, and a number of State archivists and other public officials have provided considerable help. The committees often have sent in much more documentation than that originally requested. In some cases sets of returns in State archives have been microfilmed as a whole; in others minor civil division returns have been included. These will provide a good beginning for extensions of the project as the collecting moves toward the inclusion of information on other contests and minor civil divisions. From the historians' side, therefore, the entire project is off to a good start.

As the AHA committee began to function, plans emerged to request the National Science Foundation, then showing increasing interest in research in political science, to provide funds for computing and processing the data. The Consortium submitted such a proposal and it has now been approved. At the same time the National Science Foundation has provided support for a director of the project who will continue the work begun by Mr. Burnham, serving at the Consortium in liaison between the Consortium and the AHA committee and in general coordinating the entire project. Howard Allen, of the history faculty of Southern Illinois University, has been appointed as project director for the academic year 1964–65. It seems quite feasible, therefore, to anticipate that the county data now being collected will be computed, processed,

[1] As of October 1, 1964, 85 percent of the presidential returns, 80 percent of the congressional, 95 percent of the senatorial, and 94 percent of the gubernatorial had been collected.

stored, and made available for research sometime during the summer or fall of 1965.

The success thus far in its initial project, which now seems well on the way to completion, has prompted the AHA committee to define its next objectives. The first of these is to extend its collection of popular election data by covering more types of elections over a longer period of time and by preparing data for all of these elections at the smallest recorded political unit—township, ward, precinct, or other type of election district. The extended coverage of counties includes elections before 1824, primaries of all kinds, and state referenda. It will be more difficult to obtain comprehensive coverage of these elections than of those for President, Governor, U.S. Senator, and U.S. Representative; but the data are available and can be recovered.

The collection of data for minor civil divisions is a more formidable task, not simply in the problem of recovery but more crucially in that of computing and processing. Most political historians are agreed that analysis of the distribution of and shift in votes requires the examination of votes in the minor civil divisions. Because these units are far more homogeneous in occupational, ethnic, or religious terms, analysis of them can proceed far more effectively than with county units. But while there are only several thousand counties there are tens of thousands of precincts, and the cost of computing and processing data from the precincts is far greater. Because of the enormous value of analysis at this level, however, data from minor civil divisions must be collected if the social analysis of political history is to proceed effectively. The committee, therefore, plans to start such collection on a selective basis, emphasizing those geographical areas and time periods where research is already underway.

The committee's second task is to collect and prepare the demographic data needed to interpret the election statistics. These include such data as those pertaining to national origin, race, religion, production, employment, income, communications, education, transportation, and percentage of urban or rural population. As with the election data, this information will be most useful if collected for minor civil divisions as well as for counties. The simplest part of this task will be to make available in appropriate form the printed returns of the U.S. census. The same can be done for printed State census returns, for which fairly complete bibliographies exist. But censuses conducted by municipalities and

by such private groups as religious organizations will require considerable work in searching out sources before the data from them can be prepared in usable form. One of the committee's most pressing initial tasks will be to determine precisely what kinds of demographic data are needed and how the available data can be classified most appropriately for historical analysis.

The collection of data pertinent to the analysis of the legislative process constitutes a third major area of the committee's work. This includes the collection not only of roll-call votes, but also of information concerning committee assignments, bills not passed, and case histories of bills as they moved through the legislative mill. The most useful initial task will be to prepare the roll-call votes so that they can be analyzed in relation to the personal characteristics of legislators and the characteristics of their constituencies. Demographic data collected for the analysis of popular voting can also be used for the analysis of legislative voting with little change in form save the combination of smaller political units into legislative districts. But analysis in terms of biographical characteristics of legislators will require the collection and preparation of an additional kind of material. For the congressional phase of this task material already available, such as the roll-call votes of the Federal Congress compiled by WPA workers in the 1930's or the lives of Congressmen in biographical dictionaries will be invaluable. Much of the committee's task will consist of preparing this material further for rapid retrieval and analysis and making the collections of data more complete. The analysis of roll calls in State legislatures and city councils will require more collection of basic data, but the task is fundamentally the same as for the Federal Congress.

One of the committee's most important tasks, it is hoped, will be to serve as a clearinghouse of information concerning the need for and the availability of data, and concerning research projects underway in the social analysis of political history. It is apparent that a good many historians have had access to collections of data or have spent considerable time compiling and tabulating data they no longer need. The same can be said for work done by graduate students in seminars and for M.A. theses, which are seldom published. A complete compilation exists, for example, as a doctoral dissertation, of the religious composition of each county in the United States in 1850. Availability of information about this kind of data might not only aid the individual researcher but might lead us to comparative studies of politics as related to religion, for in-

stance, in different geographical areas—a direction in research that would be of enormous value. It is hoped that the State committees especially will take up this task of getting information about who is doing and has done what, and that such information can then be circulated by the national committee.

The possibilities that lie ahead in the collection and preparation of data for the social analysis of political history are enormous. The task obviously can occupy the AHA committee for years to come. It is so extensive that it cannot be undertaken by the Consortium at Ann Arbor all at once. Most likely, a threefold approach will be adopted. For some kinds of data the collection, tabulation, and processing will be complete; this will be the case for countywide election returns in major contests and for countywide selected demographic data. The cost of compiling and processing such data is reasonable in the light of available resources. For more extensive data, such as election returns from minor civil divisions or State and municipal legislative roll calls, the cost of a complete tabulation is now prohibitive. Work on these will probably be selective and will be confined to data immediately relevant to a particular research project for which particular funds can be found. But whatever the comprehensiveness or selectivity of data storage, both the AHA committee and the Consortium will facilitate research in the social analysis of history by making contact among historians possible, by encouraging the exchange of ideas and information, and by emphasizing areas of possible research.

This project to collect the basic quantitative data of American political history has special significance for archivists, because the AHA committee and the Consortium are actually establishing a new type of archival collection: a repository for quantitative political data. This repository rests upon basic archival records long known to historians and archivists but now being used more extensively and systematically. Much of the success of the project depends on the degree to which the archival sources pertaining to statistical and biographical data are readily available. This, in turn, involves a sense of urgency in the preservation of manuscript records at the State and especially the local levels, an urgency not heretofore sufficiently stressed by professional historians. The AHA committee hopes that archivists will take an active part in this effort. Archivists are now members of several State committees, and some nonmembers have been invaluable in gathering county election data. Upon the active support of archivists much

of the success of the entire venture will depend. For as the work moves from the printed page back to the manuscript sources the archivists' knowledge of these sources will be essential, and their efforts to preserve materials that might otherwise be destroyed will be crucial. If these vast quantities of data can be preserved, collected, computed, and stored for ready retrieval and use, research in American political history will have exciting possibilities ahead.

"A Great Archivist"

Just after his death one of the big illustrated weeklies printed a photograph of Jenkinson with the caption "A Great Archivist," and in that simple phrase we may perhaps find the key to what he did and what he was. For what could that phrase have meant when, more than fifty years ago, Jenkinson first entered the Public Record Office? There were no archivists in England then, as we in this Society know them now. There was one record office, the Public Record Office, and its senior staff were Assistant Keepers; men of learning and ability, but in their training and tastes more akin to historians and men of letters. Among them Jenkinson took his place, and his work upon the arrangement, listing, and publication of records, not only at the Office but for the Surrey Record Society of which he was a founder, earned him a resounding reputation as a "record scholar." But it was not his way simply to continue, however well, work already started by others and upon lines already laid down. It was his way (and here we touch the quality which raised him above the common level) to think out and explore to its limits and foundations every idea which engaged his attention and every activity to which he set his hand. In this spirit he surveyed the whole work of the Public Record Office: its links with the Ministries, the transfer and scheduling of records, storage and repository arrangements, classification, the making of lists and calendars, production and access, binding and repair, the practical study of palaeography and diplomatic; and where his predecessors had for the most part been content to work (albeit with great distinction) in their allotted spheres, Jenkinson saw the work as a whole. This was his own, and his greatest, contribution. Binding and repair might be too banausic an occupation for a scholar, palaeography beyond the range of a craftsman; very well—a new being must be called into existence, capable of comprehending, practising, and directing all these divers activities; and he should be that now familiar blend of scholar, craftsman, and administrator, the Archivist. To Jenkinson, more than to any other man, we owe the founding of our profession in England.

—ROGER H. ELLIS, "Sir Hilary Jenkinson," in *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 2, no. 4: 174 (Oct. 1961).