

Margaret Cross Norton, Archivist Emerita

By PAUL POWELL

State of Illinois

ILLINOIS has a long heritage of leadership in the field of Archives-Records Management. After a survey by the American Historical Association, the General Assembly of Illinois followed this organization's recommendations concerning the preservation of official State documents. House Bill no. 694 was approved on June 20, 1921, establishing an Archives Division within the State Library. At the same time, the Secretary of State was named, by statute, the "librarian of the State Library."

Immediately, steps were taken to secure an archivist for this new division. After examination, Miss Margaret C. Norton was selected for the post. She held a Master of Arts degree from the University of Chicago and was a librarian and historian. With few guides to help her, she began as a pioneer in the archival profession.

Upon assuming her office on April 1, 1922, she discovered that most of the State records—irreplaceable manuscripts—were stored in damp rooms in the basement of the Capitol. Quickly she searched out all these hiding places and collected the documents into a special area of the new Centennial Building. By 1925 she was authorized to store records for all State agencies. But space soon became a problem. There was no room for expansion, and there were no special record vaults available in the Centennial Building because it had been constructed for other purposes.

From time to time, minor office fires caused record destruction before some manuscripts could be declared noncurrent and deposited with Miss Norton. But when the State Arsenal burned on February 18, 1934, public attention was focused on the necessity of protecting public records. For out of the past the future is fashioned. And the Arsenal fire not only demolished the building but also destroyed many military and bonus records of World War I veterans. To prevent another such tragedy, Secretary of State

This address by the Secretary of State of Illinois was delivered on Monday afternoon, July 18, 1966, in the Edward J. Hughes Room on the first floor of the Illinois State Archives Building, Springfield, at a convocation honoring Margaret Cross Norton. The convocation was attended by more than 150 persons. A proclamation issued by Governor Otto Kerner on the same day (printed at the end of Mr. Powell's address) named Miss Norton "Archivist Emerita of the Illinois State Library," and as a part of the ceremonies a portrait of Miss Norton, painted by William Allen, was unveiled. A reception followed the ceremony.

Edward J. Hughes immediately began to formulate a bill for consideration by the next regular session of the legislature. Miss Norton also joined him in advocating a special structure to house the priceless history of our past.

On July 2, 1935, House Bill no. 1012 was approved; it appropriated \$500,000 for the erection of "a fire-proof building in the city of Springfield suitable for the purpose of storing the archives and records of all the departments of the State." To this modest sum the Federal Government contributed an additional \$320,000 through the Public Works Administration (project no. Ill. 1490 R), and the building was commenced in 1936. C. Herrick Hammond, State Supervising Architect, made the plans himself with the help of the Department of Public Works and Buildings. Two years later it was finished, a beautiful structure formed in classic design with massive blocks of Bedford limestone. Some of the finest craftsmen worked on it. Not only was it beautiful; it was also fireproof, conveniently arranged, and planned for efficiency.

Miss Norton had gleaned many new ideas for its design and appointments from the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and the Maryland Hall of Records at Annapolis. There were 12 floors for the storage of records; facilities for cleaning and fumigating old papers coming into the building; and adequate office space for the administrative activities necessary for such an expanding enterprise. Soon the Illinois State Archives took a leading role in new fields such as the microfilming of records, or microphotography as it is sometimes called. Film laboratories were constructed in the basement, and Kalvar, or positive microfilm, was tested and adopted almost as soon as the process was discovered. Whenever new techniques or methods were made known, one could be sure that Miss Norton would test them for efficiency. As a result, Illinois became a leader in the field of record storage and management. The public was made to feel at home here whenever it sought information. College faculty members and graduate students trooped here for research in Illinois history. Our facilities were being used and enjoyed by the citizens of this and other States.

When not engaged in administrative duties, Miss Norton compiled huge indexes to the important records. She listed all the enrolled laws of the general assembly and where they were filed. She indexed the Senate and House Journals and wrote a history of the various departments. Then she became interested in the early Federal census returns for Illinois. With hours of her own labor, she edited two volumes of census information, which were published by the Illinois State Historical Library in 1934 and 1935. These

books cover the years 1810, 1818, and 1820 and are two of the basic sources for early Illinois history and genealogy. This work brought her national recognition as a careful scholar. Later she taught courses for those archivists taking summer training at The American University in Washington, D.C.

Upon the organization of the Society of American Archivists, Miss Norton became a founding member, and in 1958 she was named a Fellow. In this Society she has been vice president, president, Council member, and editor of the *American Archivist*. From the American Society for Public Administration she received the Distinguished Service Award in 1957.

Largely through the combined efforts of Miss Norton and the late Edward J. Hughes, an archival program achieved success and renown in the State of Illinois. Secretary Hughes' name was recently carved into the frieze of the new addition to the Centennial Building. This is the closest thing to a Hall of Fame in the State of Illinois. His portrait also hangs in this Reference Room in tribute to his leadership and integrity.

We now wish to honor his partner in this development of an archival program in Illinois, a program so successful that other States and many foreign countries have patterned their buildings and methods upon the system devised by Secretary Hughes and Miss Norton. Therefore, it is with pleasure that I now read the following official proclamation:

*STATE OF ILLINOIS
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
Proclamation*

WHEREAS, Margaret Cross Norton served as Archivist of the Illinois State Library from April 1, 1922 until her retirement on April 15, 1957, and

WHEREAS, she was one of the pioneers in the field of record preservation, being the first archivist for the State of Illinois, and

WHEREAS, she was instrumental in preserving countless cubic feet of State documents and protecting them from the ravages of improper storage, loss, theft or fire, and

WHEREAS, she has won national fame as a leader in the field of archival management,

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Otto Kerner, Governor of the State of Illinois, in recognition of Margaret Cross Norton's devotion to

VOLUME 29, NUMBER 4, OCTOBER 1966

duty during a lifetime of archival study, planning and research, do hereby proclaim and declare that she is invested from this day forward with the title of Archivist Emerita of the Illinois State Library.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Illinois to be affixed.

Done at the Capitol, in the City of Springfield, this eighteenth day of July, in the Year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and sixty-six, and of the State of Illinois the one hundred and forty-eighth.

Paul Powell
SECRETARY OF STATE

Otto Kerner
GOVERNOR

AMERICANA IN MICROFILM

A series of micro reproductions of British Records Relating to America. Selected by the British Association for American Studies under the general editorship of Professor W. E. Minchinton of the University of Exeter.

New Releases—

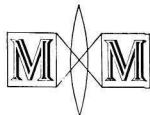
The Letters of Dr. Joseph Priestley, F.R.S.

James Currie's Journal of a Voyage from North Carolina to St. Martin in the French West Indies during 1776.

Selections from the Dalhousie Muniments in the Scottish Record Office.

Letters relating to the history of the Mississippi Valley Trading Company (1874–1878).

The selected correspondence of Sir George Buckley-Mathew (1807–1879).



Complete listings, with brief descriptions of the contents of each archival holding from:

MICRO METHODS LTD., East Ardsley, Wakefield, Yorkshire, England.