

Reviews of Books

EDWARD E. HILL, *Editor*

Washington National Records Center

The Records of a Nation: Their Management, Preservation and Use, by H. G. Jones, with an introduction by Wayne C. Grover. (New York, Atheneum, 1969. xviii, 311 p., illus. \$12.95.)

Historians seek to enlarge understanding of the worlds in which we live by showing how they have come to be. H. G. Jones, State Archivist of North Carolina, Adjunct Professor of History at North Carolina State University and Secretary of the Joint Committee on the Status of the National Archives, has done this for me in his critical history of one of the worlds in which I have lived for more than a decade. He shows how the National Archives and Records Service developed its present shape and enables me to understand the agency better than I did. I now understand, for example, what some of my associates were doing before I entered their world and how they have contributed to the development of an institution that is more complex than I had realized.

Although I have complained about one feature of the National Archives—the restrictions on access to the Truman papers—my own view, based chiefly on happy experiences as a researcher in several parts of NARS, is less critical than Jones's evaluation, which is based on a broad study. He finds a tragic flaw in its history, in its loss of independence in 1949 whereby it became subordinated to the General Services Administration, an agency that deals with such things as working space, supplies, excess property and motor pools, as well as historical records. He assumes that the potentials of the institution would have been more fully realized if it had remained an independent agency responsible immediately to the President. Its educational and research functions would have been developed more adequately. As it is, heaviest emphasis has been placed on records management.

Much of the author's criticism of the change in status rests upon fears of possible future developments, including fear that politics will corrupt the agency. Thus he proposes the restoration of independence, a proposal made early in 1968 by the Joint Committee, composed of representatives of the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians and the Society of American Archivists. "The creation of a new, strong, independent, and professionally administered National Archives and Records Authority . . . is," he concludes, "the surest way of guaranteeing that the American story will be told and that it will be told accurately and objectively." (p. 265)

While the proposal is persuasive (although a test is needed to prove its worth), a related criticism of the management of the presidential libraries must be challenged. Jones reports that, unlike other parts of NARS, they have failed to achieve a reputation "as impartial instruments of public policy" and that "one meets with responsible criticism alleging that archivists have shown partiality and subservience in administering presidential records." (p. 170) He fails to examine and evaluate this criticism. Instead, he merely quotes a distinguished historian, Herbert Feis.

Books for review and related communications should be sent to Edward E. Hill, Archives Branch, Washington National Records Center, Washington, D.C. 20409.

But no one, including Feis, has supplied any evidence to support this serious charge. The evidence I have seen indicates that it is false.

Jones makes another suggestion about presidential libraries that deserves more respect, although it may be unrealistic. It concerns restrictions on access that are imposed by former Presidents and result from the "legal fiction" that presidential papers are private property. He calls for a President to be as bold and creative as Franklin Roosevelt when he established the first presidential library and declared that presidential papers are public property and that access to them should be governed by professional archivists guided by objective rules.

This is a rich and complex book, and I have selected for emphasis the parts that are closest to my own experiences. It deserves to be read by everyone who is seriously interested in the nation's records. Hopefully, it will help us improve a very valuable institution.

University of Missouri

RICHARD S. KIRKENDALL

FINDING AIDS

The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, comp. by the Library of Congress. 1965 (Washington, 1966. xxiii, 701 p. \$15.). 1966 (Washington, 1967. xxv, 920 p. \$15.). 1967 (Washington, 1968. xxv, 525 p. \$15.)

Think back 10 years and imagine a need to know where manuscript letters to and from Elias Boudinot were; or the correspondence of Zebulon Pike, Amy Lowell, or Ambrose Bierce; or the papers of British Loyalists, Southern secessionists, fur traders, or composers. Or which manuscripts were among the holdings of the Klickitat County Historical Society, the Park Trammell Public Library of Lakeland, Fla., or the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society of Honolulu. How, 10 years ago, would one have gone about getting such information?

The experience of the seeker of such information might have been comparable to that of a motorist of 1900 planning a trip into unfamiliar territory; a gathering together of maps and guides, a seeking out and consulting with persons known to have traveled the area, a quest for information about roads and ferries, gasoline tanks and repair places; and the certainty that no matter how much was done in advance, the trip itself would reveal much about which there would have been no way of learning except by actually making the journey.

Some repositories—State archives, historical societies, libraries—had guides or finding aids; published, typed, handwritten. There had been some systematic surveys, particularly of public records, by commissions sponsored by the American Historical Association, by the Carnegie Institution under J. Franklin Jameson, and by the depression-born Work Projects Administration Historical Records Survey (perhaps 90 percent unpublished and now mostly forgotten).

Then in 1961 the National Historical Publications Commission published, under the editorship of Philip M. Hamer, *A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States*. This volume described in summary the holdings of some 1,300 repositories in all of the United States. At once it became, and has remained, the Rand McNally of the researcher.

The next year there appeared the first of a series of blue, city phonebook-size volumes, *The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, 1959-61*. A second appeared in 1964. Since then they have appeared at the rate of one a year.

VOLUME 32, NUMBER 3, JULY 1969

The most recent volumes each reproduce about two thousand catalog card entries, each entry describing a manuscript collection in a U.S. repository open to scholars. The 1967 volume brings the number of such collections to 20,661, representing holdings in 660 repositories.

Each repository prepares its entries in accordance with a data sheet supplied by the Descriptive Cataloging Division of the Library of Congress. The repository devises a name for each collection; dates; quantity; principal name around which the collection is formed (person, family, agency, or whatever); contents and scope; names of correspondents; description of any finding aids; restrictions, if any; information on literary rights; information about how, when, and from whom the collection was acquired; and its relation to other collections. The Descriptive Cataloging Division does the necessary editing.

If most of these entries are not the equal of those in that very model of a descriptive guide, Whitfield Bell, Jr., and Murphy Smith's *Guide to the Archives and Manuscript Collections of the American Philosophical Society* (Philadelphia, 1966)—any more than the photo-offset *Catalog* compares in design and readability with the letterpress *APS Guide*—that is all right. All over the country librarians, curators, archivists, volunteers in county historical societies, and other custodians of documents are learning to describe their collections and are becoming familiar with a descriptive form they can apply to all their holdings. Repositories whose previous efforts had, perhaps, been confined to attempts to catalog manuscripts one by one as if they were books are now describing bodies of records. NUCMC has furnished them with a guide and a goal.

The editors have learned from experience and haven't hesitated to alter their volumes, making them easier to read and to use. The changes may cause a few moments puzzlement concerning how many volumes it is necessary to use in order to get complete usage of the indexes (32,340 references to an estimated 17,000 subjects, 11,400 personal names, and 3,900 corporate bodies). The answer is three: a separate volume, published in 1964, indexes all entries through 1962; the 1966 volume, cumulatively indexes the 1963-66 entries; and the most recent volume indexes the 1967 entries.

Without pretension or ballyhoo, volunteers all over the country and a small staff at the Library of Congress have created what might be called The Great Equalizer. Scholars in Savannah or Fort Wayne are no longer at a hopeless disadvantage, insofar as learning where manuscripts are, compared with persons having access to finding aid collections in the libraries of New York, Washington, Philadelphia, or other great cities. The editor, Arline Custer, and her staff are to be congratulated. So are the Library of Congress and the assisting Council on Library Resources, Inc. Probably few grants of the council have paid and will continue to pay dividends at a rate comparable to NUCMC.

National Historical Publications Commission

LEONARD RAPPORT

DOCUMENTARY PUBLICATIONS

While Lincoln Lay Dying. A facsimile reproduction of the first testimony taken in connection with the assassination of Abraham Lincoln as recorded by Corporal James Tanner. With a biographical introduction by Maxwell Whiteman. (Philadelphia, The Union League of Philadelphia, 1968. v, 13, 35 p., illus. \$7.15.)

THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST

While Lincoln lay dying in one room of the William Peterson house, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was conducting an interrogation in another. The stenographer taking shorthand at this meeting was James Tanner, a War Department clerk who had been a corporal in the army until he lost his legs at Second Bull Run. Living next to the Peterson home, he inadvertently heeded the call for someone to record testimony. Tanner later said that seven interviews were held that night but if there were, the transcripts of only six have survived. Tanner made two longhand copies of the testimony, giving one to Stanton and keeping the other one until he presented it to the Union League of Philadelphia in 1917. Although these transcripts were not used in the trial of the conspirators, they are invaluable for anyone interested in the assassination of Lincoln and the attempt on the life of Secretary of State William Seward.

Washington National Records Center

DALE E. FLOYD

Napoleon's Dossier on Aaron Burr: Proposals of Colonel Aaron Burr to the Emperor Napoleon, by Samuel Engle Burr, Jr. (San Antonio, Tex., Naylor Company, 1969. ix, 65 p. \$2.95.)

Once again a scholar has located interesting materials relating to American history in a foreign archival depository. The depository is the Archives Nationales; the documents, eight in number, are translations of proposals made by Aaron Burr in 1810 and recorded by representatives of Napoleon I. They outline plans for French aid in support of a military liberation of the Floridas, Mexico, Texas, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Canada. European mercenaries, American seamen, and residents of the Mississippi Valley were to have done the fighting, although invasion of United States territory is not directly mentioned. The proposals, never acted upon by Napoleon, came only 3 years after Burr had been cleared of treason and misdemeanor charges for planning insurrections in the United States and Mexico.

Part I of *Napoleon's Dossier*, authored by a distant descendent of Burr, includes a brief biography of his life up to 1810. Not included, but badly needed, is a sketch setting the documents in the proper historic perspective. The transcripts (Part 2) are titled according to country, region, or topic discussed; and they comprise half the book. One note of caution: the documents are unverified transcripts of Burr's thoughts; nothing can be gained by trying to find hidden meanings in each phrase. They are general expressions of one man's persistent dreams—this is their value. Parts 3 and 4 contain, respectively, a review of Burr's life after 1810 and a suggestion that research in European archives might reveal other proposals made by Burr. There is no index; one is probably not needed, but a more detailed table of contents would have been welcome. Also included is a good bibliography.

National Archives and Records Service

ROBERT SVENNINGSSEN

REPORTS OF CONFERENCES

Concordia Historical Institute. *Archives and History: Minutes and Reports of the 9th Archivists' and Historians' Conference, 1967*. (St. Louis, Department of Archives and History, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1967. vii, 127 p.)

Beginning on a note of helpfulness and ending with the reminder that even the church lectionary sometimes abets work of the church archivist, this handy spiral-

bound volume contributes stimulating ideas and techniques applicable beyond the originating church. Indeed, the participants themselves were gathered from several denominations in the cooperative spirit engendered by August R. Suelflow of the institute.

The 120-year existence of archival machinery in the Missouri-Lutheran Synod, besides the Germanic origins, may account for a more complete and precise development of archival principles and practices than among most, if not all, other American churches. Be that as it may, any fledgling church archivist will find here definition, description, and even the humor of his task, while the more experienced may benefit by suggestion of additional facets in the role of serving the church in the world through its records and history. Indeed, the more able and systematic of the 14 papers and several workshop outlines constitute almost a manual of church archives procedures.

Lovely Lane Museum

EDWIN SCHELL

British Universities Film Council.

University Vision, No. 1, Feb. 1968. (London, 48 p. 8/6 [\$1.25].)

Film and the Historian. (London, 1968. vi, 50 p. 5/-.)

University Vision is the first issue of a periodical that will be devoted to the use of film for research and teaching in modern history on the university level. This issue contains nine short articles; five deal with the use of film for historical studies and the other four deal more with the use of film archives.

Professors and film archivists are approaching the use of the film medium from two directions. One direction, which J. A. S. Grenville and N. Pronay have followed with their film "The Munich Crisis," is to make a scholarly compilation of historical footage that gives an analysis of an event comparable to the point of view of a professor in the classroom. Another direction, which C. H. Roads has followed in using some of the film archives of the Imperial War Museum, is to encourage university students and professors to study original films as historical evidence. In addition to letting scholars individually view films, the Imperial War Museum has had a continuing program of screening such important films as "Triumph of the Will," "Victory in the West," and "The Battle of the Somme" to interested groups.

There is some general agreement that film can never substitute for the written record. Rather, it can complement research in depth in the documents and the literature. As Grenville and Pronay have rightly stated: "The existence of this film material adds to the study of recent history an additional dimension: it gives the written historical evidence a kind of eye-witness quality" (page 3). All agree that film is highly subjective material as historical evidence. The choice factor is present from the very beginning—from the choice of subject, the camera position, the cutting and editing, to the use of sound track and narration. Film, however, is no less subjective than a diary or a contemporary journalist's account of an event—just to cite a few examples. If film is to be used in the study of history, it must be used selectively and with the same critical judgment that historians bring to bear on other historical evidence.

Film and the Historian is the published transcript of a conference held at University College, London, in April 1968 under the auspices of the BUFC. The remarks make interesting reading because they bring out some of the problems that

THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST

researchers can expect to encounter in using film archives. These problems include selection of material, availability, copyright restrictions, limited viewing equipment, nitrate film, and high costs of reproduction. Also included in the remarks are lengthy discussions of "The Munich Crisis" and of a film about the Dutch Fascist leader Anton Mussert.

Both of these publications have some weak points in common. One unfortunately is their parochialism. The discussion of film archives is quite restricted to Britain. A remark that I found particularly disconcerting was: "In the National Film Archive, we are selecting for preservation not only feature films . . . but also films as records, history and scientific film As far as I am aware we are the only archive pursuing this kind of interest in this systematic way" The U.S. National Archives has been quite active in this kind of selection for many years. Another weakness is that many of the films mentioned as examples are related to military campaigns, which are really only peripheral matters in most university history classes. Finally, not enough recognition is given the feature film as evidence of social values, attitudes, and a mass national psychology.

Nevertheless, because they offer some guidelines for the scholarly use of film and outline some of the difficulties that this ever-increasing use will inevitably bring to archives, these publications should be of great interest to both historians and film archivists.

National Archives

WILLIAM J. MURPHY

"Lovingly Cultivated"

On May 14 [1940] the French Foreign Office notified us that it had begun to burn its records and advised the American and other embassies to do the same. Burning records is a tedious job. We had a modern chancery and a good furnace, which made our task easier, but the British Embassy, purchased by the Duke of Wellington in 1815, still retained its primitive heating equipment. The British also had a tremendous accumulation of confidential documents. My colleague in the British Embassy, Harold Mack, told me a little story about Winston Churchill at that time. The Prime Minister had responded to Reynaud's frantic appeal by flying to Paris on May 16, sleeping that night at his embassy. The circumstances must be remembered: Holland and fallen, Belgium was about to fall, British and French armies were virtually ripped to shreds, so Churchill had many overwhelming things to think about. But the next morning he summoned Mack to his bedroom and pointed out of his window to the superb embassy lawn which had been lovingly cultivated for generations. Now it had great scorched spots where the archives had been burned. "What is going on here?" the Prime Minister demanded, and Mack reluctantly informed him of the loss of many precious documents, realizing as he spoke that Churchill, as an historian, would be shocked. But the Prime Minister, saying nothing about the documents, grumbled: "Was it necessary also to mutilate this magnificent lawn?"

—ROBERT MURPHY, *Diplomat Among Warriors*, p. 39 (Garden City, Doubleday & Co., Inc.), copyright 1964 by Robert Murphy. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Co., Inc.