

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

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Guide to the Manuscript Collections in the William L. Clements Library, compiled by Howard H. Peckham, Curator of Manuscripts. (Ann Arbor, Michigan. University of Michigan Press; London. Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1942. Pp. xvi and 403.)

No person who has used the Clements Library but has been amazed at Mr. Peckham's intimate acquaintance with the minute detail of the great mass of manuscript collections under his charge. As to the importance of these collections it need only be said that any modern student of the history of the American Revolution if doomed to be marooned on a desert island with one great source repository in his chosen field would undoubtedly choose the Clements Library to share and to solace his exile.

Mr. Peckham goes about his work in characteristic fashion. The various collections are listed by name in alphabetical order. Each one has a brief and business-like introduction explaining the provenance and nature of the material, followed by an alphabetical list of the authors of letters and documents in the collection. There follows an appendix containing a topical and chronological list of the collections, and one with a short summary of the maps in the manuscript collections, by Mr. Lloyd A. Brown. The index of 111 pages includes the name and title, with dates, approximate or exact, of each letter writer. There are also a few geographical entries. This index in itself is a valuable aid to research quite independent of the collections indexed in it. American historians are under deep obligation to Mr. Peckham for fashioning for them so valuable a tool as this volume. The University of Michigan Press has brought it out in a format worthy of the excellence of its contents.

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Preliminary Reports of Subcommittees on Records Administration, prepared by the Interdepartmental Committee on Records Administration sponsored by the United States Civil Service Commission. (Washington, D.C. August, 1942. Pp. v, 77.)

Recognizing the need for an exchange of ideas between government employees engaged in records administration, and the need for an organization of such persons for the purpose of studying and promoting good practices in this field, last year the Civil Service Commission sponsored a group of discussion meetings out of which grew the Interdepartmental Committee on Records Administration. After its organization and objectives were estab-

lished, this committee divided itself into seven subcommittees to study and to report upon specific phases of records administration. The preliminary reports of six of these subcommittees have been completed and published by the Civil Service Commission.

These reports should be an effective means of bringing the experiences and practices of various agencies to the attention of all persons engaged in mail and files work. Whether or not they will be effective depends upon the number of people who read them and the amount of active interest and creative thought that they provoke among those people. The records of the federal government stand sorely in need of better and more effective administration. Such reports as these can point the way towards the needed improvement: It is the employees who are individually charged with responsibility for operating file rooms and mail rooms in the government who must achieve the final results. If these reports will cause each person who reads them to make one improvement in the services for which he is responsible, no matter how small each improvement may be, they will have earned their way countless times.

In these times of emergency it is extremely difficult and often unwise to attempt the outright installation of a wholly revised records program. Most of the records systems in Washington were inadequate in peace times. They have been seriously ruptured by the tremendously increased requirements of the war. As a result, most of the employees of records offices are occupied in repairing individual breakdowns rather than in the orderly installation of an over-all program of records administration. Under skillful administration, however, these two objectives can be sought together and can be achieved together. If the records administrator of an agency has carefully mapped out the ultimate program which he plans to install, he can make each job performed by his staff, regardless of its immediate purpose, a step towards the final establishment of that program. In work of this type the combined reports of the subcommittees on records administration is particularly useful.

Of the seven subcommittees, the reports of only six were completed in time for this publication. These reports are titled: Receipt, Distribution, and Dispatch of Communications; Preparation for Filing, Filing Procedures, and Search and Charge-Out Systems; Classification Manual and Terminology; Retirement and Disposal of Federal Records; Space and Equipment Standards Including Forms; and Personnel Training and Standards. The seventh report, on organization and administration, will be included in a later publication of the committee. In preparing these reports the subcommittees examined carefully into the detailed practices of several of the more progressive government agencies.

I found the report on Receipt, Distribution, and Dispatch of Communications particularly lucid and informative. It is true that few, if any, systems can be transplanted bodily from one agency to another. The underlying principles

of the systems discussed in this report, however, will, if analyzed in the light of each individual's requirements, promote profitable thought and disclose useful applications.

The report on the Classification Manual and Terminology is particularly helpful to operating officials in agencies having long established central files. The classification systems in some of these files have been in operation so long that the original principle upon which they were based is too often forgotten in their day to day use and maintenance. This report discusses the underlying principles, advantages, and unique characteristics of several of the more commonly used systems of classification and codification. It is not a critical review, but the inadequacies and fallacies of several systems are readily apparent to a critical reader.

The problem of office space is of paramount importance in Washington at this time. The report provides for an attack on this problem from two angles: (a) the reclamation of space by the retirement and disposal of inactive and valueless records and (b) the proper utilization of space by the application of sensible standards. The complex and generally misunderstood regulations governing the disposal of government records has caused most records officers to put off such projects until tomorrow. The subcommittee's report on this subject can be instrumental in overcoming this mental inertia and in breaking a log jam of obsolete and inactive records of almost unbelievable proportions.

The personnel of the subcommittees of the Interdepartmental Committee on Records Administration obviously expended much time and thought on these reports. They can be of great value to the government at a time when there is critical need of independent records administration. They will not be of value unless they are read, studied, and translated into practice by the persons responsible for records administration. A careful reading of each report is recommended.

LT. (j.g.) W. GRANT BOYER, U.S.N.R.

The Navy Department

Emmett J. Leahy, "Records Administration and the War," *Military Affairs*, VI, (Summer, 1942), 97-108. Also separately issued by the National Archives as Miscellaneous Processed Document No. 43-3.

An important by-product of the war is its stimulation of administrative reforms which should have taken place years ago. "Records Administration and the War" urges a systematic program of records management in the interest of greater efficiency in the war effort. It is sad that one must "cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war" to gain acceptance for an obvious aid to better administration in peace or in war.

Mr. Leahy begins by stressing the tremendous volume of federal records, the value of about five percent thereof as the "memory" of the government, and the fact that systematic management of records has lagged far behind

other phases of public administration. While every agency has some sort of filing system, if this system is not designed as a working tool adapted to the functions and organization it serves, it becomes a burden rather than an aid. Great effort may be spent in filing, tracing, and cataloguing the ninety-five percent of useless records, while the vital five percent are unaccounted for. The reviewer recollects a federal office where the burning of the central files was a cause of great delight to the operating officials. Effectively used, records are essential in co-ordinating and providing continuity to administration. But if records are inaccessible, badly arranged, and cluttered with "junk," administrators will try to get along with what they have in their desk drawers, sometimes with damaging effect.

Systematic records management begins with the elimination from current files of inactive material of permanent value, which should be turned over to the archivist of the United States, and inactive material of no value, which should be disposed of as waste paper. Mr. Leahy points out the need for preventing new accretions of valueless files by establishing categories of items to be withheld from files, and categories to be eliminated at specified intervals. Most agencies, however, have large volumes of material the probable reference use of which is uncertain, and this material generally accumulates in warehouses, congestion being dealt with by the renting of additional warehouses. Mr. Leahy suggests the continual review and analysis of files to eliminate material as it becomes valueless.

The article goes on to discuss the uses of microfilming, to reduce the physical volume of bulky records, to insure against the loss of vital documents, as a duplicating process, and to speed administrative action. It is necessary to guard against indiscriminate microfilming of records which are subject to early revision or which do not warrant preservation.

The third and most vital phase of records administration is the planning of a mail and records system to implement and expedite the organization's work. If such a system is made really effective, it will be possible to eliminate the duplication of files which exists in many agencies because executives do not trust the central files to provide the papers they need when they need them. Mr. Leahy suggests the establishment of branch files to serve each operating unit of sufficient size in an organization. While these branches would be under centralized technical direction, they would aim to give service tailored to the needs of the operating unit, and to develop into administrative reference rather than merely files units.

In discussing each phase of records administration Mr. Leahy continually emphasizes the need for trained specialists in the analysis of records from an archival point of view, in the editing and arrangement of microfilm material, and in the development and operation of mails and files service which is fully adequate to meet present day administrative exigencies. Mr. Leahy suggests that each federal agency have a records officer, whose rank and professional

status would parallel that of a budget officer or personnel director. The duties of the records officer would be essentially of a planning, directing, and investigating nature, so that if he were charged with direct supervision of mails and files operations, he would need thoroughly competent unit heads. Mr. Leahy complains justly against the tendency to use the files as a "waste basket" for misfit and incompetent personnel. The reviewer would add the remark that if really adequate records service is to be established on a firm basis, it is necessary to raise the classifications (and required qualifications) of many types of mails and files positions, and to provide the means for a professional career in records work.

Throughout the article Mr. Leahy stresses the relation between records and the administrative processes which produce them, a relation which is unfortunately not appreciated by many administrators. The records officer must have a good working knowledge of administrative technique, and he must operate closely with administrators and management planners, since procedural and records problems are closely interrelated. Likewise his subordinates must have sufficient knowledge of their agency's program and methods of administration to give the service executives require. This need must in many cases be met by in-service training.

Records management is a broad enough field for a book rather than an article, and within the space limitations it is only possible to hint at the areas involved. This, Mr. Leahy has done in such a way as to show incisively the close relation between good records administration and good general administration, and to convince the general reader that mails and files work is not dull as ditchwater nor is it a field for mental weaklings. It is hoped that he will use the present article as the basis for a much fuller treatment of the subject.

COMSTOCK GLASER

Federal Security Agency

Annual Report of the Public Archives Commission, State of Delaware, by the State Archivist for the Fiscal Year July 1, 1941 to June 30, 1942. (Dover, Delaware. Hall of Records, 1942. Pp. 35. Processed.)

This unpretentious little volume makes it clear that within the scope made possible by his extremely modest appropriation and staff, the state archivist of Delaware is carrying forward an intelligent, vigorous, and effective program for the protection and preservation of the archival resources of the state and local governments for which he is responsible.

Officials in charge of record groups throughout the state of Delaware are being made conscious of the importance of proper methods of records maintenance and administration. Useless records are being destroyed after due examination to determine their value, and noncurrent records are being accessioned. It is interesting to note that archives of the state government are being placed in the Hall of Records which are of a type which will make it

possible for the state archivist to be of service to state and local governments, as well as to the genealogists who traditionally haunt depositories of state and local records.

In one respect, this report as well as similar ones now issuing regularly from state archival depositories, is disappointing. Archivists employed by the federal government are now scanning such reports with special interest, looking for an inkling as to ideas or attitudes on the part of state archivists concerning the vast quantities of federal or quasi-federal records now accumulating in the states. Perhaps in so small a state as Delaware there is less reason for the state archivist to be interested in this situation than is the case elsewhere. The fact remains that frank facing of the problem of what to do with the vast quantities of federal records which are being created in the states at an ever accelerating rate cannot be much longer postponed, even though it is admittedly one of the most puzzling of all the administrative problems posed by our federal system. These records, although they result from activities of the federal government, are frequently by their very nature of equal or greater usefulness to state and local officials than to officials of the federal government. For this reason the search for a broadly conceived policy in regard to the handling and disposition of these records, including a decision as to the physical location of the depositories where they should finally come to rest, would benefit from the study and suggestions of state archivists throughout the country.

HERMAN KAHN

The National Archives

Pichardo's Treatise on the Limits of Louisiana and Texas. An argumentative historical treatise with reference to the verification of the true limits of the provinces of Louisiana and Texas; written by Father José Antonio Pichardo, of the Congregation of the Oratory of San Felipe Neri, to disprove the claim of the United States that Texas was included in the Louisiana purchase of 1803. Published for the first time from a transcript of the original manuscript in the Mexican archives; Translated into English by Charles Wilson Hackett, Ph.D., and Charmion Clair Shelby, Ph.D., and annotated by Charles Wilson Hackett. Volume III. (Austin, Texas, The University of Texas Press, 1941. Pp. xxii and 623. \$6.50.)

Between 1808 and 1812 in that blessed nineteenth century when all men in general and Spaniards in particular had plenty of leisure and used it well, Father Pichardo set himself to compile a million word treatise on the question of the boundary between Spanish Mexico and French Louisiana. In his leisurely way he accumulated and cited at length vast bodies of source material upon his subject. This third volume is especially noteworthy for materials on the route of De Soto in the Mississippi Valley region. Another extensive section of this volume justifies the boundary line of D'Anville's map and deals with Franco-Spanish transactions from the time of La Salle to 1803.