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THE PUBLIC DOCUMENTS OF INDIANA.

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"HISTORY is past politics; politics is present history." These oft-quoted words of Freeman emphasize the importance of the official publications of a state in preserving the records of present politics so that they may be crystallized into accurate history in the future.

Public documents have been the source, largely, from which all history has been written. The records of courts and governments being the most complete, unbroken and voluminous of all sources, have been especially tempting to the historian. Thus history has been emphasized on the political side. The meager sources of the social and industrial life of a people have been neglected. The labor of bringing the scattered facts of social and industrial progress into anything which approaches completeness has discouraged the writer of history, and he has turned to the public documents as his source, and has written from them the record of politics and government. It is not at all strange that very little of the real life of the people has found its way into our histories. The public documents have in the past told little of the social and industrial life. The same is true of all states and countries, but grows less and less to be the case with the progress of humanitarian government. When governments establish agencies which are devoted particularly to human welfare, they have a source of information from which valuable reports may be compiled and real history written.

In common with progress all over the world, this state is fast developing a new kind of public document. The history of this state at the present time, if written from the public documents, could be

devoted quite largely to the social and industrial progress of mankind. The advance of government activity into fields of social and economic thought will make it still easier in the future to study the history of man as a social being from the records of the state's activity.

There is a popular belief, unfortunately widespread among scholars themselves, that public documents are dry and uninteresting. They are often treated as so much junk and denied shelf room even in some otherwise progressive libraries. As a matter of fact, public documents are usually clear, well written, and contain material which can not be obtained from any other source.

The public officer is in a fortunate position to know the field in which he is engaged. He is at the source of information. He knows the problems; he knows the demands which are made upon him; and he knows, too, the difficulties of administration. From his experience and observation he is able to give careful, unbiased reports. Who, for example, in the state has information concerning charities at all comparable with the secretary of the board of state charities, or of health conditions, comparable with the secretary of the state board of health? We might go down the whole list of public officials with the same conclusion that the public officer is in a position to know best the condition of the field in which he works. The public document is, or should be, the exposition of this knowledge to the public.

In his admirable pioneer work, "The Official Documents of Indiana," published in 1890, Judge Daniel W. Howe said:

"I presume that most persons look upon 'official publications' as belonging to that class of books which are characterized by James Russell Lowell as 'literature suited to desolate islands.' I admit that they are not as fascinating as the latest novel, but I affirm that there is a great deal of valuable and interesting reading in them. The books enumerated in this catalog contain information which is indispensable to one who wishes to be familiar with the history of the state. They contain a great deal upon many topics of interest to the educator and student. They show the record of Indiana from a beginning in the wilderness to the front rank of states—a record splendid in war and in peace."

When Judge Howe wrote this judgment of the value of Indiana's

official publications, those documents contained only a small part of the human interest which may be found in them at the present time.

We have had marked advances in government activity since 1890. New phases have been developed, and the increased interest taken by the people in the affairs of the government has tended to promote an intelligent interpretation of the state's activity through official reports.

A glance at the list of new offices created since 1890 and an examination of their reports will show the marked advance of educational and social activity in the state's work. Some of those created since 1890 are, the labor bureau, library commission, factory inspector, railroad commission, state entomologist, state veterinarian, food and drug commissioner, state board of accounts, state board of forestry, free employment bureau and tax commission. The work of the state board of health, board of state charities, state geologist, state statistician, state library and others has been largely increased, making a progress along educational and industrial lines unparalleled in the history of the state.

The public document of to-day is different from that of 1890, when Judge Howe declared its value as historical material. It is more educational and reaches some of the most human phases of life. It is not now merely an official record, but a record of social, economic and educational progress. While not yet as absorbing as the "latest novel," the majority of documents will repay the most careful study. The future historian will find in them a wealth of material from which to tell the tale of progress.

Great as is its value, however, this material is largely inaccessible. It is a rich store of knowledge of the affairs of Indiana without an index. It takes patience to go through the many volumes in search of a connected story of any particular thing.

Judge Howe did a notable service in describing the official publications of the state from the beginning to 1890. The state library has since cataloged the documentary journal, and the catalog was published in 1899. The catalog of the state library, published in 1903, brings the catalog of documents down to that date. Since that time there has been no published catalog, the card catalog of the state library being the only check list of the documents since 1903.

Valuable as are these lists and descriptions in blazing a way

through the mass of material, they are of small service in research on any particular topic. For example, take the report of the state geologist. The catalogs merely state that for each year given a report was issued. It is merely a check list to show that the required duty of making an annual report had been complied with. What the investigator needs most is a cumulative index of all such reports, so that he may locate a particular topic in the report of the state geologist, superintendent of public instruction, governor's message, or in any other state document. Such an index should be provided. It would make the public documents live again to tell the past experience of the state government in all its activities. It becomes increasingly important with the advance of such activities.

Documents which are merely office records of a regular yearly routine do not need such an index. Their contents being identical from year to year, all that is necessary is a check list to show that the volume was issued and published for each year or biennial period. Few documents are, however, of this nature. Those which are most useful contain data and discussions on the pressing problems of the time, and as those problems change from year to year, the contents of the reports are always changing. Take the report of the board of state charities as an example. The work of the board is always progressing into new fields. As old problems are solved, new ones arise because of the growing complexity of society and an awakening humanitarian interest. An index to each detail of the reports and bulletins of the board would be invaluable. Likewise with the other reports which are issued for educational purposes. The one pressing need for historical purposes is an index covering all the documents of the state, including the special reports to the legislature made by officers and committees.

With these general statements concerning the use of public documents as historical material and the need of a subject index, it will be useful to consider the character of the present state documents. These documents are published separately. Some of the reports are later bound together in the documentary journal, but of late this unnecessary duplication of publication seems to be going out of favor and the number has been cut to the minimum. The documentary journal does not contain all of the reports. Some of those which are most educational are omitted and published only

in separate form. It is in this form that they attain the widest usefulness.

For many years the number of documents issued was fixed by law without regard to the present demands. The legislature in 1909 passed a law giving the commissioners of the public printing, binding and stationery the power to fix the number of all documents. This was a wise provision, which allows the money appropriated for the purpose to be spent on those publications which fill a real public need. It is subject to the danger, however, that meritorious publications may sometimes be turned down for reasons which do not have the public interest in view. A wise policy which takes account of the public service of good official documents will, however, be possible under this law.

The state publications may be divided roughly according to our general classification of the powers of government into legislative, executive and judicial documents. [For a fuller description of the present state documents, see the *Public Library Occurrent*, March and June, 1910, published by the Public Library Commission, Indianapolis.]

The published legislative documents consist of the journals of the house and the senate, legislative bills, rules of the two houses, the legislative and state manual, the report of the legislative investigating committee and special reports made from time to time.

The journals are the records of the proceedings of the General Assembly, and are indispensable in tracing the history of any legislation. They must, however, be always used with care. They are hastily prepared, are not printed from day to day, and no opportunity is given for correction.

The legislative bills are preserved in the state library. The originals for the years since 1859 are on file, and bound volumes of printed bills since 1899 are kept. The legislative reference department has recently completed an index of all bills introduced in the sessions of 1905, 1907 and 1909, thus making it possible to quickly trace the history of legislation during those years.

The legislative and state manual has been issued biennially since 1899, except for 1901. It is devoted to information concerning the

state officials, biographies of members of the legislature, party platforms, rules of the two houses and the constitution of the state.

In 1901 it was provided that a committee of one senator and two representatives should be appointed by the governor, after the November election, to visit the institutions and offices of the state and report on their needs. The provision for this committee was an intelligent attempt to get at a scientific basis for appropriations. Special reports to the legislature are not common in this state. We have had few commissions working through the recess of the legislature, such as are found in other states. When such committees work on specific problems their reports are invaluable. The use of this method to promote good legislation should be encouraged.

The foremost executive documents are the messages of the governor. It would be safe to say that an impartial history of the best political thought of Indiana could be written from the files of the biennial and special messages of the chief executive. The governor is intimately in touch with the conditions of the state, and all sources of information are open to him. His recommendations for legislation invariably point the way to better conditions. The state library has collected separates of these messages and bound them in two volumes. An index to the regular messages down to 1850 was recently published by the legislative reference department, and a card index has been made for the regular, special and veto messages since 1890. As soon as practicable this work will be carried to completion.

The reports of the auditor of state, including the report of the insurance department, bank department and building and loan department, the attorney general, state treasurer and secretary of state, need no special description. The material contained in them is uniform from year to year.

The report of the superintendent of public instruction touches some of the most important phases of social life. The administration of the educational affairs of the state places the superintendent in an ideal position to determine the needs of the schools. An experienced educator in so fortunate a position to observe every phase of the educational system, and charged with administrative duties

which make his observation intensely practical, is able to make a report which goes to the heart of the educational problems.

Two other elective offices produce reports of a scientific educational character, namely, the state geologist and the chief of the bureau of statistics. The primary purpose of these offices is educational. To each, however, has been attached certain administrative duties. Thus the geologist appoints the state mine inspector and deputies and the natural gas supervisor, and the chief of the bureau of statistics has charge of the state free employment bureau and licenses private employment agencies. The report of the state geologist deals with the natural resources of the state; the statistician's report is a census of social and economic facts. Both are exceedingly valuable.

We hear much in these days of government by boards and commissions. It is not a new form of government, but the extension of government activity has brought it more prominently into use. The board system has been the accepted form for the management of institutions for a long period, and is in almost universal use in this country. Commissions have come into use largely through the increased regulation of business of a public service nature. They fill their best function in those matters which are judicial or semi-judicial, affecting property or personal rights; thus the fixing of rates of railroads and regulation of their service are judicial in their nature, hence a commission is deemed the best form to insure fairness. In Indiana there are eighteen boards of trustees having general charge of different educational and charitable institutions. Each board makes an annual report, which sets forth statistics of the work done and the financial conditions of the institutions, together with the report of the president or superintendent in charge. There are seven examining boards to license practitioners in the following subjects, namely: Medicine, pharmacy, nursing, optometry, veterinary medicine, dentistry and embalming. Only the first two publish reports.

The character of the history of this generation, when written by the impartial future historian, will be much affected by the public documents issued by the officers and commissions which deal with the social and economic life of our people. The reports of the board of state charities, state board of health, state board of agri-

culture, state board of forestry, state board of accounts, railroad commission, labor commission, factory inspector and tax commission cover pretty well the field of social and economic progress. Most of these offices and commissions have been organized within very recent years. They represent the growth of government activity in protecting the public in the increasingly complex life of to-day.

The state entomologist and state veterinarian deal with diseases, respectively, of plants and animals. The state has wisely provided for conservation by this plague and pest prevention work. The summary given in the reports is highly instructive.

The report of the commission of fisheries and game is the most widely distributed of all state documents. A large part of the people are interested in this field, and the report is of high grade for practical and scientific purposes.

The reports of the state librarian and the public library commission and the bulletins of each are published for the special use of librarians. These contain book lists, special bibliographies, news notes and articles on phases of library work and development. The state library bulletin contains frequently lists of special historical material. The establishment of a department of Indiana archives and history in the state library has done much to promote the collection of state and local historical material. Information concerning this material may be found from time to time in the publications of the state library.

With the mention of two other reports of officers, namely, the adjutant general and the custodian of public buildings and grounds, the list of state documents is complete. In addition to the regular reports, the proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science and the Horticultural Society are published by the state.

Little need be said concerning the judicial documents of the state. They consist of the reports of cases decided in the appellate and supreme courts. These documents are published primarily for lawyers and judges. It is a mistaken notion, however, that they contain nothing of interest to the layman. Legal cases, when stripped of legal formality, have an intense human interest. That interest increases as the courts adapt themselves more and more to a social

and economic basis for their decisions within the strict letter of the law and constitution. Court cases are now an essential check in the writing of history. The decisions affect so much the scope and validity of statutes that no fact can be stated with certainty concerning any law until the decisions of the supreme and appellate courts have been examined.

In this discussion of the state documents no attempt has been made to point out defects in any document or series. That there are many defects and inaccuracies can not be doubted. Change of officers and methods, difference in classification and in time periods, and the degree of liberality of financial support by the state are some of the conditions which affect the completeness and accuracy of reports. Like all historical matter, the state document needs careful analysis and collateral support.

The public documents of Indiana have been neglected in spite of the admirable provisions made for their distribution. There is a prejudice against them as dry, uninteresting material. They doubtless are dry to the average reader who seeks entertainment, but to the student of social welfare they are a source of living information. They should be studied for the light which will be thrown on the true history of the state, and for the effect which their critical use will have in their improvement through the interest which the public official sees manifested in his work.