

Indiana Historical Society

GENEALOGY*

By ANNA POUCHER

A hundred or more persons taking advantage of an opportunity to meet for the first time in a State Genealogy Conference, a steadily increasing patronage in the Genealogy Section of the Indiana State Library, and other "signs of the times," seem to offer substantial proof that there is no dearth of interest in the subject of genealogy in the state of Indiana.

Mr. G. B. Utley, of the Newberry Library, addressing the conference last December, called attention to the importance of Indiana as a field for genealogical research. The strategic geographic position of the state made it not only a pathway in the early migrations of the pioneers, but a lodging-place as well. Few states have a more important or more interesting early history than Indiana, and interwoven with its history as a state, we find the history of its families. Many of these family names have been prominently identified with the history of the growth of the nation itself. With each passing year, we will find the genealogist turning with increased interest and expectancy to the annals of Indiana.

Records are the basis upon which successful genealogical research is founded. While a certain amount of information may be handed down "by word of mouth," it is only to the written or printed word that the ancestry seeker can turn with any feeling of security.

The library in the Genealogy Section of the Indiana State Library represents the largest single collection of its kind in Indiana, and one of the largest in this part of the country. Its main object is to afford the people of Indiana a source of information to which they can appeal in their efforts to establish connecting links in their family history. Since this is a library for the people of the state and its main purpose is to serve, we feel no hesitancy in calling attention to some of its needs.

The better acquainted we become with the material in the Genealogy Section, the more we are amazed at the wisdom

* This article by Miss Poucher, librarian of the Genealogy Section of the Indiana State Library, is reprinted from the *Indiana History Bulletin* (Vol. XII, No. 6) of March, 1935.

and foresight with which selections have been made in the past. How could "book committees" working in the eighties or earlier, foretell that the books of their choice would in 1935 be counted absolutely essential to any reputable genealogical collection? This same wisdom and foresight has continued through the years until it can be safely said today that the library in the Genealogy Section of the Indiana State Library is fundamentally sound.

To continue building on this foundation, or to maintain so admirable a standard set by those in the past, is one of the chief concerns and aims of the Genealogy Section.

Possibly in no other section of a library is the material so uniformly expensive as in a genealogical collection. Prices are often prohibitive. A sum sufficient to purchase a half dozen books in some other part of a library, may cover the cost of merely a single volume of some important genealogical work. For this reason it is necessary to exercise the greatest care and discrimination in selection. Often one must let slip by an opportunity to buy "while the buying is good" and frequently one fears to make a decision lest something more needed present itself later.

Since the opening of the genealogy room as a separate section, the public has been commendably generous in its contributions to the shelves. Many gifts from individuals have been received. Patriotic and pioneer organizations have become interested and are adding not only books and manuscript material, but subscriptions to periodicals, and are even considering projects. The spirit with which these gifts have been offered leads us to believe that they will increase as people become more acquainted with our needs.

We would like to call particular attention to family histories. The value of a compilation cannot always be measured in dollars and cents and often a manuscript of a few pages is of as great practical use as some large publication, and both are equally welcomed. We have recently received some very important family histories, whose purchase price would have been out of the question. In the preparation of the noteworthy D.A.R. records which are being compiled in the various counties in Indiana, provision is made for placing one copy in the State Library. We wish a similar plan might be followed in the case of family histories. Aside from the value

of the book to a patron, it might mean the book's own preservation. Books owned by individuals are subject to many vicissitudes, but by placing a family history in the library, the family will have at least one copy for the use of future generations. A gift of this kind means also that another book is added to the library, since the price of this family history can be applied to some other purchase.

Locality is the foundation store for genealogical research, and it was upon this basis that the Catalogue Department devised the system of classification which has shelved the genealogical material so satisfactorily. The arrangement of the material on the separate states is geographical, each state followed by its county and town records, and county and town records furnish one of our most dependable sources of information. The splendid Indiana collection of county histories remains shelved in the Indiana history room, easily available from the Genealogy room. These are in constant use. In regard to the local histories of some of the other states, there is much material yet to be desired—Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont (we have recently acquired the five volumes of the *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, a fine addition to local history in Vermont), Delaware, the Carolinas. Many county histories of Ohio and Illinois are lacking, and as the western states become older, we find our need increasing for more of their local records.

The history of early Indiana families is so closely linked with that of the history of Kentucky families, that it is to Kentucky records that we must constantly turn for connecting links, and yet in proportion to the number of requests received along this line, our material seems sadly inadequate. Would not some one like to help us build up this particular corner in the room?

On account of the lack of records, little can be done in the tracing of an ancestry in foreign countries. We hope some time to have such compilations as the Harleian Society Publications, dealing with Parish registers and Visitations of the heralds in England. We covet other works, especially illustrative, on the subject of heraldry. But for the present, we realize that these constitute merely a "pipe dream," although we are sustained by the hope that later they may become a reality.

These are some of our needs—so varied that we sometimes find ourselves wishing that we might have an old-fashioned donation party.

The material in the Genealogy Section is of such a nature that obviously it cannot be circulated. It is a reference collection which the public expects to find on the shelves. Consequently, more particular attention is paid to that patron who does not have access to the library. Copying is done to a certain extent, and the effort is made to put the patron in touch with records on the shelves.

After all, this quest for an ancestry is a cultural undertaking, and Indiana is to be congratulated upon having reached this stage in her development.

We have been taught that a workman is no better than the tools he has in hand. With the rapidly spreading interest in family histories in Indiana, we have faith to believe that the people of the state will coöperate in the proper maintaining of its chief source of genealogical information.