

A New Historical Survey Proposed

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Perhaps the times are propitious in Indiana for a new historical survey, a survey of economic and business history materials. Initial inquiries among businessmen have brought encouraging responses. It may be that we are already in a movement like that which has become a cropper in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Magazine of History five years ago began a new feature, "Centennials," of the "100th birthday" celebrations of villagers, city folks, "century farms," churches, business concerns, etc. The centennial observance in 1936 of the creation of Wisconsin Territory had apparently stimulated local observances and a movement for a mammoth celebration in 1948 of Wisconsin's admission to statehood. The State Centennial with its displays of Wisconsin-made manufactures in turn "quickened interest in the State's history and brought its industrial role into sharp focus." Businessmen asked the State Historical Society to help them prepare their histories. This the Society speedily prepared to do by getting on mailing lists of important firms, collecting company printed materials, and inaugurating a Business Records Survey; first, of manufactures. David Clark Everest, "a history-conscious paper manufacturer," offered a prize of \$1,000 each year for ten years for the best manuscript on Wisconsin economic history.

The first results of the Business Records Survey of Manufactures have been announced. Forty-six per cent of four thousand manufactures filled out an inquiry form; and of these over 225 wrote that they would be willing to open their records at any time to a qualified researcher. These 225 presumably had their records under control and readily accessible or wanted the advice and help of historians. Many sent company brochures, pamphlets, and photographs—ephemerae which for the most part perish with the passing of a generation. The more substantial materials revealed and in part received virtually reorient the work of the Society. A geographically arranged file on selected (20,000 out of 65,000) firms representing many types of business now "gives an industrial picture of each region of the State and contains information about records pertinent to their business history."¹

A hint of what is going on here in Indiana may be seen in the March, 1951, issue of the *Indiana Alumni Magazine* (p. 4): "WHAT IS A MANUSCRIPT." Specific illustrations are followed with a concluding admonition—"Before you burn that box of letters or toss out that file of business records—write I.U.!" Materials are beginning to arrive.

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¹ Robert Polk Thompson, "The Business Records Survey in Wisconsin," *American Archivist*, XIV (July, 1951), 249-255. See also "Accessions, Manuscripts, . . .," in recent issues of *Wisconsin Magazine of History*.