THE BIENNIAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION

By S. K. Stevens

At one of the last meetings over which he presided as chairman of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in 1946, the present governor of the commonwealth, James H. Duff, leaned back in his chair and talked at some length about some of the things which he felt should be done for the betterment of Pennsylvania history. As usual, his remarks were to the point and at the same time far reaching in their conception of the need. One of the matters upon which he placed especial emphasis was the desirability of bringing together in Harrisburg under Commission sponsorship the scattered sources for the writing of the state's history. Another was the need to use this material in the preparation of historical monographs and bulletins for the benefit of the people.

Taking these remarks very seriously, the Commission, following the election of Mr. Duff as governor, requested in its regular biennial budget for 1947-49 a special fund of $50,000 to be used exclusively for a "special historical research program." Thanks very largely to the interest of the governor, this request survived the hazards which confront any state governmental agency's budget in the Governor's Budget Office and came through the Assembly unscathed. The significance of this sum may be appreciated better if it is kept in mind that the highly publicized grants from the Rockefeller Foundation for regional and local historical study made in several states are usually for amounts of about fifty thousand, spread over a five-year-period. Our fund had to be expended within two years. The special fund, therefore, posed some serious problems of administration, if it were to be utilized effectively within this two-year-period. Even though the fund was large, we could not afford to waste a penny of it on unworthy ventures.
It was decided in the beginning that there should be a judicious balance of expenditures between collection of materials and the sponsorship of writing and special research projects. It was not easy on short notice to fix upon the qualified personnel to undertake worthwhile research and writing projects of genuine value as contributions to the historical literature of the state. Fortunately, we already had in mind certain projects and certain persons fulfilling the requirements. A complete revision of the old two-volume *Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania*, compiled by the Frontier Forts Commission in accordance with an Act of Assembly in 1893, with a second edition in 1916, had long been demanded. Important new materials were available from both secondary and primary sources. The services of Dr. W. F. Dunaway were engaged to undertake this important task.

Dr. Harold Dickson of the Department of Architecture at The Pennsylvania State College had indicated on various occasions his interest in working on a comprehensive history of art and architecture in the state. This was another wide gap in the historical literature of the commonwealth, and it was decided to sponsor Dr. Dickson, to the extent of a semester and summer leave of absence from teaching, to undertake the necessary research.

The valuable study of the Pennsylvania iron industry in the eighteenth century completed by Dr. Arthur Bining of the University of Pennsylvania was published by the former Pennsylvania Historical Commission in 1937. Dr. Bining had started a similar study on the nineteenth century iron industry. He had not been able to complete this study due to lack of time for research, and the Commission decided to underwrite a year’s services for a competent researcher to aid Dr. Bining in completing this work.

A survey of the major university and college departments of history of the nation as to research projects in the form of graduate studies in the Pennsylvania field was not too fruitful. A majority of the dissertations under way were of too limited scope to constitute major contributions. The same situation was found to prevail in regard to several projects in which faculty members of institutions were interested. From Columbia University there did come notice of a projected study by Mr. William Sullivan on the history of labor in Pennsylvania prior to 1840. This project was of such scope and nature as to promise an important and
major contribution, and is being subsidized to the extent of $1500.

A small grant was made to Dr. Alfred P. James of the University of Pittsburgh to aid in the completion of his long-developed task of locating the lost Braddock papers. Small grants have been made for what might be termed secondary writing projects, including work on a biographical bulletin of Pennsylvania governors and United States senators and a survey on Pennsylvania's literary tradition.

All of the projects submitted or considered were reviewed with a committee of the Pennsylvania Historical Association appointed by President Fortenbaugh, with Dr. Roy F. Nichols as chairman. The judgment of the committee was of inestimable value in the adequate evaluation of the projects submitted for consideration. This points the way to further healthy co-operation between the Association and the Commission.

The task of collecting source material was also difficult to organize on short notice. Here again certain basic principles were early established to guide the work. It was decided that considerable emphasis should be placed upon the first-hand survey of certain important out-of-state depositories of historical materials where large collections containing sources of value to the history of Pennsylvania were known to exist. Following surveys of the material by Donald H. Kent and myself, microfilm of desired material is being ordered in quantity. Photostating has been used to a much lesser extent, because it is more costly and less satisfactory for storage and use. This work is still going on and constitutes a very important phase of the program.

Among the out-of-state institutions already surveyed are the New York Public Library, the New York Historical Society, the William L. Clements Library at Ann Arbor, the Detroit Public Library, the Indiana Historical Society Library, the Chicago Historical Society, the Newberry Library, the University of Chicago Library, the University of Michigan Library, the Public Archives of Canada at Ottawa, Laval University Archives at Quebec, Archives of the Province of Quebec, Montreal Municipal Library, College of Sainte Marie in Montreal, and the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

Visits to the Huntington Library and other Pacific Coast de-
BIENNIAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITIES

Repositories were projected for 1949, as well as surveys of archival and library depositories in Virginia and the states of the old northwest, which were peopled so largely from and through Pennsylvania. Certain materials especially needed for specific projects have been secured from the Library of Congress. Other than purchasing the microfilm of the Amherst Papers no extended effort has been made as yet to survey the Library of Congress or the National Archives.

It is impossible here to list even the major materials already acquired, but a few examples will suffice to show the nature and the value of this phase of the Commission program. From the Gage and the Josiah Harmar Papers at the Clements Library, we have microfilmed every document with any real bearing on the history of Pennsylvania. The combined collections provide an exhaustive store of sources on the history of Pennsylvania, and especially the frontier, from 1763 to 1793. No student of any phase of the history of that period can afford to ignore this storehouse of several thousand manuscript items on file.

Along with much other material, we have filmed the twelve boxes of Pennsylvania Miscellaneous Papers in the New York Public Library and are preparing a calendar of their contents. This amazing miscellany was previously almost unusable as its contents are indeed a miscellany ranging from the colonial era down to the post-Civil War era. Incidentally, this collection contained many of the originals of documents printed in the Colonial Records and Pennsylvania Archives, which later strayed from the state's official files. I might say that we are locating in every depository large quantities of documentary material which originally must have formed a part of the official records of the province or state of Pennsylvania. Returning this material to Harrisburg is in itself a major accomplishment and one of the utmost importance to the student of Pennsylvania history.

A complete microfilm of all of the famous Draper Collection at the Wisconsin State Historical Society with any bearing upon Pennsylvania is now being received in the Commission library. Of especial importance in this collection are the twenty-four volumes of Frontier Wars Ms, the twenty-two volumes in the Joseph Brant Ms, five volumes on Border Forays, and sixteen volumes of Brady and Wetzel manuscripts. Not all of our interest
is in the frontier era, however, as we have filmed at Madison the extensive collection of transcripts from early Pennsylvania labor periodicals compiled by Dr. John R. Commons during his years of research in American labor history.

Of particular interest and importance to Pennsylvania historians should be the survey of Canadian archival and manuscript depositories made by Mr. Donald H. Kent. Here again it is impossible to mention but a few "finds." Of particular significance are the Claus Papers, the seven volumes of which contain information on Indian affairs in the Pittsburgh region during and after the Revolution, reports on the St. Clair and Wayne campaigns, and related activities of the era. In this collection are the papers of St. Clair captured by the Indians at the time of his defeat and carried to Canada. The Monckton Papers, part of the Northcliffe Collection, Public Archives of Canada, include seven volumes of letters of Brigadier General Robert Monckton, commander of British forces in Pennsylvania from 1760 to 1762.

At Laval University in Quebec is an invaluable collection of material bearing upon western Pennsylvania history in the form of the official correspondence between Duquesne, Contrecoeur and Marin regarding the building of the French forts and French plans and policy for control of the Ohio. The portions of this material of key importance have been calendared. Negotiations for its filming or transcription are under way but have not met with success as yet. Much of the Canadian material located is being filmed for the Commission through special arrangement with the Canadian Library Association.

In addition to seeking documentary material, we have been locating early maps which shed light upon the cartography of Pennsylvania from the earliest times. Virtually every depository visited has contributed to this project. A careful study and selection of maps from the Library of Congress Map Division has been made. Altogether we now have on file in Harrisburg photostats of more than five hundred maps relating to Pennsylvania. The map collection program is in part connected with the plan to publish a carefully edited atlas of early maps of Pennsylvania. Of course, only a small portion of the maps can be included, but the entire collection constitutes a valuable addition to the growing volume of source material which we seek to make available in a central location for everyone interested in Pennsylvania history.
Much of the microfilm already gathered is of direct use in aiding specific writing projects such as the revision of *Frontier Forts*. Valuable additions have been made to the already sizable collection of Bouquet Papers and the new sources are of the utmost worth in the projected publication of an annotated edition of the *Papers of Col. Henry Bouquet*, on which the Commission staff is now working. The first volume will be ready for printing this biennium.

The value of the historical materials already collected can hardly be appreciated from so brief a summary which necessarily only touches the "high spots." Our surveys revealed many small but important collections of letters and documents in out-of-state depositories which contain highly worth-while Pennsylvaniana. Pennsylvanians went West in large numbers and often their papers found their way into the historical collections of their adopted states. In such collections is often found information on activities in Pennsylvania prior to migration, or letters from friends and relatives back home which contain worth-while data on Pennsylvania affairs over a wide range. A sizable amount of this type of material is finding its way into our collections.

Altogether, we have collected within the last year by film and photostat more than one hundred thousand pieces of manuscript material, exclusive of maps. This is in itself a sizable collection. When it is realized that a goodly portion of the material consists directly of documents which once were in Pennsylvania and have strayed all over the United States, it will be appreciated that we have recovered portions of the state's own archives and returned them to Harrisburg. All of the material collected is now available for use in a library set-up in the State Museum. We recently purchased the most modern type of Recordak microfilm reader. If demand makes it necessary, another may be purchased later. Within the near future we expect to issue a general guide to the Commission collections for the further benefit of those who may wish to use them.

Attention also has been given to the task of conserving source materials within the state proper and to centering their collection in Harrisburg under Commission direction. We are also vitally concerned with the preservation and proper organization of the public records of the commonwealth and its political subdivisions.
the counties. In general, Pennsylvania has been backward in preserving and utilizing its public records. These records are important not only to the government itself but also to the historian and student of Pennsylvania history and affairs. We regard as of the utmost importance to historians the reorganization of the so-called State Archives in Harrisburg, which has been renamed the Division of Public Records. In the person of Mr. Henry Eddy, I am confident, we have brought to Pennsylvania one of the best-trained and most experienced public records administrators in the country. He is the new head of this division.

The question of preservation and use of our governmental records is intimately tied in with the problems which we face in preserving those historical materials which may be termed private records. Private records include the diaries and letters of individuals, rare newspapers, and important collections of business and institutional records. Some of the oldest business concerns in America are located in Pennsylvania. The new interest in business history and in the preservation of business records demands that the state historical authority assume some responsibility for their location and preservation. Much of our early economic history cannot be written without them. The projected study of the early labor movement in Pennsylvania already has illustrated this situation. There is a serious dearth of organized business records in this second most important industrial state in the country.

The Commission is greatly concerned over preservation of early newspaper files, particularly the country weekly newspapers of the state. These newspapers are perhaps the most important single source available for community history and its relationship to the larger picture of state and national history. While valuable, the files of early newspapers in the state library and in the historical society depositories of the state are by no means complete. Many valued files have been taken out of the state in the past by institutions more aware of their great value to American history than we were in Pennsylvania. There are some thirty weekly newspapers and a similar number of daily papers in this state which are still being published after a hundred years. Many are being micro-filmed by their publishers and we hope to encourage more to film their files. So far as funds permit, we expect to add to our historical collections films of these newspapers.
We are especially concerned, however, with locating newspaper files in private hands, because these are often in danger of loss. We have found in Kansas a file of the early nineteenth century *Western Telegraph*, one of the earliest newspapers published west of the Alleghenies. I have been promised that the owner will permit us to film it. We have located other files which appear to be of great value.

Another important source for historical material is the numerous family papers and records which are held by individuals, often without much idea of their importance and which are kept purely for sentimental reasons. Conditions of living today, and especially difficulties of housing, constitute a threat to continued private holding of such material. For example, we located in Williamsport recently the complete diary or journal of Capt. John Hays who accompanied Christian Post, Moravian missionary, on an attempted journey to the Ohio country in 1760 by way of northern Pennsylvania. It is truly a priceless item and not even friends of the owner who were fellow members of the county historical society were aware of its existence. I might add that I recently affiliated with the newly organized National Society of Autograph Collectors in order to become better acquainted with private holders of manuscripts throughout the nation. We now have in process of photostating about fifty important letters of Pennsylvania signers of the Declaration of Independence held by a collector in Illinois.

In carrying out this program one very serious difficulty has been encountered. There is a limit to the use of microfilm for reducing the bulk of either public or private records. There are many original records which cannot or should not be destroyed, even after filming as a protective measure. In most cases, large quantities of records must be serviced and organized before it is possible to film them. In short, there are large quantities of governmental and historical records which cannot be adequately preserved or made useful to the cause of history unless they are housed in some suitable central location. Our historical societies and county court houses are no longer able to take care of the records of government and society. In all too many instances, even if they have space, they are not staffed with the personnel needed to care for records and make them available for use.
You will recall that our long campaign for a suitable building in Harrisburg to house the historical and public records of the state resulted in an allocation of funds for this purpose by Governor Edward Martin. The dire need for funds to improve the health and welfare institutions of the state resulted in the diversion of the sum appropriated for this building to the welfare program of Governor Duff.

Our experience during the current biennium convinces us that the time has come when this Association and other historical and patriotic groups of the state should renew the drive for a history and records building capable of meeting the needs which exist in this great commonwealth for such a structure. Large sums have been appropriated in recent years for historical restoration, acquisition of historic buildings, and historical park development. Such measures are worth-while without a doubt, but the problem of saving for posterity the public and private governmental and historical records which are in many instances in imminent danger of destruction, or which are improperly stored and unavailable to those who wish to use them, is even more pressing. Building facilities to make possible the conservation and use of our priceless records are vital to the future of Pennsylvania history. Restorations and historical parks in some instances can wait, but time does not stand still in its ravages upon our historical and governmental records. Once lost or destroyed, records and documents never can be restored or replaced.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has recommended that the Governor revive the projected William Penn Memorial Building to house the archives, the museum, and the historical materials of the commonwealth. This project, however, is a long range one. Those of us close to the problem of saving records and documents feel that the need is so urgent that a less pretentious structure, either new or reconstructed from some existing state building, might well receive very early consideration as an historical records depository.

Since my topic calls for a complete review of our program, I wish to call attention to other continuing activities of the Historical Division of the Commission which we feel will contribute substantially to Pennsylvania history. Mr. Norman B. Wilkinson has been working steadily on the revision and addition to *Writings on*...
Pennsylvania History and we have allocated funds for publishing this supplementary bulletin this biennium.

The Historical Division has continued the basic idea of the war history program in a plan to collect selected current historical materials to be used in preparing an annual historical review. Pennsylvania—1947, a summary report on the history of the state during 1947, is the first product of this program. The first experiment in an annual review, we feel it will be of great help to teachers, librarians, and others who need current information regarding the state's development.

The Commission is continuing to publish outstanding manuscripts on the history of the state which we feel are major contributions. Dr. Paul H. Giddens' volume, Pennsylvania Petroleum, 1750-1872, a source book on the petroleum story is our latest major publication. In press is Dr. Tinkcom's dissertation, Pennsylvania Politics, 1790-1802, which is another contribution to the political history of Pennsylvania. The Commission will be able to publish from funds available this biennium the work on the History of Agriculture in Pennsylvania to 1840, completed by Dr. Stevenson W. Fletcher, retired dean of the School of Agriculture at The Pennsylvania State College. There has been completed a manuscript for a bulletin containing brief but essential treatment of the lives of all the state's governors and United States senators, mentioned previously, a badly needed reference work for school and library use.

In connection with the historical marker program the Commission has issued a Guide to the Historical Markers Erected by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. This should be useful to teachers in planning tours and in directing attention to many aspects of the state's history. The current writing and research program will produce manuscripts which it will cost perhaps $30,000 to print during the next biennium. Approximately $20,000 will have been spent on publications by the Historical Division by May 31, 1949.

As to the immediate future, the Commission has asked for a continuation of the Special Historical Research Program during the 1949-1951 biennium. Additional worth-while research and writing projects can be financed, if this fund is available. We solicit the continued help of the Association in planning these
projects. I look forward to the time when our present publications and research program, coupled with a growing accumulation of source materials in Harrisburg under Commission auspices, will set the stage for that monumental history of Pennsylvania which all of us devoutly wish for and have been working toward for the last decade.