MATERIALS AVAILABLE AT THE STATE ARCHIVES

By Henry Howard Eddy and Frank B. Evans*

Within the next few years the William Penn Memorial Building will be built in Harrisburg. This new building will provide for the state archives facilities which have long been needed. As members of the Pennsylvania Historical Association you can properly take pride in the success of the protracted campaign to secure quarters adequate to house and service the official records of the Commonwealth. The influence of this Association and of the letters sent by individual members has helped make possible the successful outcome.

Now that adequate quarters are assured for the future, the question which naturally arises is: just what research materials are available at Harrisburg? In the limited time available, we shall attempt to indicate the nature of our materials, the sources from which they came, and the processes by which we continue to acquire records. We shall not, of course, attempt a summary of the 1959 published Guide to the Research Materials of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. That Guide you already have at hand.

The core of the early official records of Pennsylvania has long been available in print for use by scholars. It was in 1836 that Peter du Ponceau, prominent member of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and of the American Philosophical Society also, addressed to the legislature a memorial which read in part:

In every respect her [Pennsylvania's] history is full of interest and will become so more and more. It is therefore of the highest importance, that the authentic

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records from which that history can be deduced should not be lost to posterity.

What du Ponceau proceeded to urge was the publication at public expense of the fundamental archives of Pennsylvania, and the result of his proposal was the series of sixteen volumes which we all know as Colonial Records. Contained are the charters, the successive frames of government, with the minutes of the Provincial Council, of the Council of Safety, of the Committee of Safety, and those of the Supreme Executive Council running up to 1790.

Happily, publication of official records drawn from Pennsylvania's archives did not end with Colonial Records. Fifteen years later, in 1851, another notable message to the legislature urged further printing of certain historically valuable public records then reposing, inactive and in some jeopardy, at the office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth in Harrisburg. This second message resulted in the twelve volumes known as the First Series of Pennsylvania Archives, edited by Ebenezer Hazard. Historical scholarship has been fortunate in having had available for the past century those twenty-eight volumes which print and thus preserve the strong backbone of Pennsylvania's archives. Of those volumes we can be proud and for them we can be thankful.

Those series of Pennsylvania archives are official records printed directly from originals at Harrisburg. This circumstance should be noted as a counterbalance for the tendency to feel that, for the era of the Province, Pennsylvania's archives are to be found with the Historical Society of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia; that only for the later period of the Commonwealth are archival materials to be found at Harrisburg. To think thus is to demonstrate confusion. The difference is merely that between private papers and official records. Starting her collections in 1824, long before the Commonwealth became properly aware of her own wealth of historical materials, the Society has preserved splendid groups of private papers, those of the Penns, of Logan, and of other prominent provincials, but not public records, not the official archives. With few exceptions the official archives, both early and late, have remained at the capital and most of them are now in the custody of our Commission.

It is no ponderous task to list and locate them. The very oldest of the official series, the land records, which start with the Swedes,
even before the arrival of Penn, were long with the Secretary of the Commonwealth, and since 1873 have been with the Department of Internal Affairs. The original engrossed laws, nearly complete from 1700 and published some fifty years ago as *Statutes-at-Large*, are now with our Commission. The Executive Minutes, published in *Colonial Records* to 1790 and in the Ninth Series of *Pennsylvania Archives* to 1838, are now in our custody, as are, also, further and as yet unpublished volumes of the same minutes running up to 1943. The official records, even for provincial days, are at Harrisburg. It is private papers, papers highly important for research but not official and archival, which are to be found with the Historical Society.

For official records, the archives, the pattern of arrangement parallels that established by the parent government. The arrangement must follow rather precisely the governmental framework. For example, the State Treasurer's records are segregated from those of the Auditor General and from those of the Adjutant-General and other officials. Such is the pattern which we are re-establishing for the state archives at Harrisburg. It will provide very clear documentation for the development of state government in Pennsylvania.

This pattern of arrangement which is being used at Harrisburg and by all modern archives is essentially that used in *Colonial Records* and Hazard's series of the *Pennsylvania Archives*. Unfortunately, it is a pattern which has not always been respected by later editors and custodians. There came a considerable period of lowered standards of scholarship, of over-emphasis upon the side-line of genealogy, of the publication of long series which featured chiefly the names of individuals. During this period little distinction was made between private papers and official papers, or between history and genealogy. Doubtless many of you attempted serious investigation at the state archives during that era and can testify as to how encumbered was the pathway of scholarly research.

It was only in 1945, after ten successive series of published archives had appeared and the present Historical and Museum Commission was established, that our new Commission took custody of the official records. In the years since then many changes have been possible, although much yet remains to be
done. We continue to hold many private papers, and we hope to acquire more, as historically significant collections become available to us, but no longer do we interfile private papers with archival materials. Furthermore, records of purely genealogical interest, transcripts for the most part, have been transferred to the genealogical section of the state library, where they are adequately housed and can be more suitably serviced. For the scholar these changes have brought a definite improvement.

Of course, we can claim no monopoly of research materials. Of newspapers, for example, we have none, but the adjacent and rapidly-improving state library has large files. For the years prior to 1900, there are microfilm copies of many newspapers at our Division of Research and Publications in the museum building. The statutes, the series of published executive and legislative documents, and the annual and biennial reports of the executive departments, you can find in your own libraries or with the state library. Our responsibility, as the state archives, covers only the permanently valuable manuscript records of the state government.

Our current holdings comprise what we acquired in 1945 plus additions since that date. Among the records which we inherited you will find, with limited exceptions, the original documents upon which are based Colonial Records and the nine series of Pennsylvania Archives which followed. There are also very extensive groups of related but unpublished records from state offices, notably from the Secretary of the Commonwealth and from fiscal officers such as the Register General, the Receiver General, the Loan and Transfer Agent, the State Treasurer, the Comptroller General, and the Auditor General. These we have in long series of volumes which will form a sturdy web of documentation for the development of the government of the Commonwealth.

Voluminous unbound papers from a variety of state agencies, long intermixed and mounted in chronological sequence only, have been set up anew, most notably under internal improvements. In these newly-constituted files you will find abundant material on roads and turnpikes, stream clearance and canals, and on public buildings. The subject-matter arrangement of these records has proved extremely serviceable.
The records which came to us in the past, and which continue to come to us, are almost exclusively from executive agencies. Our jurisdiction has never extended to judicial records, and but partially to legislative records. We take in records from the executive agencies, under regulations spelled out in the Administrative Code. To prevent rash destruction, the Code sets a double check: only the Executive Board (in effect, the state cabinet) can authorize the destruction of records, and the Board can authorize destruction only subsequent to receiving the approval of the Historical and Museum Commission. This requirement of approval gives us responsibility for investigating and inspecting each group of records whose destruction is proposed, and thus provides an opportunity to acquire important records for the state archives. The records whose destruction is requested are for the most part lacking in permanent value, are seldom more than routine housekeeping accounts covering transactions long over with and audited, but in going through them we now and then uncover documentation of obvious importance. Two examples will serve to illustrate what occurs.

At one time and another over the past few years, we have in investigating discovered in varied locations sections of what was once a rather large file. When combined, these chunks comprised almost complete documentation for the war damage claims filed by residents of counties of southern Pennsylvania during the decade following the Civil War. Included are claims for horses, feed, provisions, blankets, and all types of movable possessions taken, in most cases, by foraging Confederates during the Gettysburg campaign. Amusingly enough, one item frequently lugged off was sleigh bells.

This claim file, now standing surprisingly complete, covers five of the southern counties and contains affidavits which show vividly what war meant to farm and village folk living along the dusty roads of Pennsylvania when Johnny Reb marched by. It has been little worked and its potentialities remain great.

To illustrate again: some two years ago the Department of Agriculture wished to discard, but we rescued and retained, two sets of complete returns from censuses made of farms in Pennsylvania, county by county, during the 1920's. One census was taken in 1924 and the other in 1927. Covering farms as small as
three acres, these list acreage in crops, count livestock and poultry, and note the presence in the farm home of such amenities as running water, bathtubs, and radios. The entire state is covered at a period when considerable sections of the farm population were in course of leaving homesteads already marginal to become dwellers at industrial centers where economic prospects appeared more bright. The research possibilities latent in such sets of statistics are obvious.

In addition, successive transfers over the period of a decade have resulted in our obtaining remarkably complete documentation for our major penal institutions and for the beginnings of both the Department of Health and the Department of Public Welfare. The research interests and needs of the sociologist, the economist, and the political scientist, as well as those of the historian, are our legitimate concern.

When all this is summed up, we can report that the situation at the state archives is far from static, and also that our tasks are by no means complete. Our holdings start with very important official records accumulated in public offices from the days of William Penn, and we are steadily adding later records which in their turn document successive changes and the growth which came in subsequent periods. Any state archives should preserve and make available those basic official records which demonstrate the life and development of the parent government, and that we attempt to do. Pennsylvania can be proud of its present state archives, and as it expands into new and adequate quarters, it is our hope and expectation that her pride can endure and increase.