THE SURVEY OF FEDERAL ARCHIVES
IN PHILADELPHIA

With Particular Emphasis on the Records of the Mint
and the District Court

The Survey of Federal Archives in Eastern Pennsylvania was organized in April, 1936,¹ as a unit of the WPA Survey of Federal Archives, a nation-wide Federal project for which the National Archives was sponsor. The immediate purpose of the survey was to report on the general content, condition, quantity, and location of Federal records, with some attention to material of historical importance. The ultimate purpose was to group these reports with those from the other thirty-three regions into which the country was divided, abstract and edit them, and finally issue an inventory of the Federal Archives in the states. This is still in preparation by the staff of the Survey.

The supervisors of the project, as deputies of the National Archivist with the right to examine all records other than those of a confidential nature, proceeded to arrange the personnel of relief workers into groups, each of which was placed in a government depository. Although few of these workers had received training in research, most of them were competent and showed satisfactory ability to work under the supervision of men chosen on the basis of their training in historical research.

During the period of time in which the Survey operated in Eastern Pennsylvania, approximately two hundred thousand linear feet of records were examined and over fifteen thousand separate reports made upon them. This material, dealing with agencies of the Federal Government in one of the most important states of the Union, has yielded unusually rich results. Although historical societies and scholars have been busy in this section for years, many of these records have never been brought to light before. In a few cases the officials

¹The National Director of the Survey of Federal Archives is Dr. Philip M. Hamer, Chief of the Division of Accessions of the National Archives. From its beginning to July 31, 1936, Richard Heathcote Heindel was the Regional Director for Eastern Pennsylvania; from August 1 to December 31, John Pitts Corry was Regional Director; from January 1, 1937, to June 30, 1937, Richard B. Morris was in charge; since that date to the present the project has been under the direction of James L. Whitehead.
themselves had forgotten, or had never known of, the existence of their most valuable records. It is to the credit, however, of Federal offices here that most of the records were found to be in good condition, care being exercised as to their order and protection.

The most valuable records appeared, quite naturally, in Philadelphia, and it is with these only that this article concerns itself. It is believed that the reports on this material, as they appear in the inventory, will be of great value inasmuch as it is the only comprehensive survey of such records now in existence. Since it is impossible in the space of a few pages to discuss the value of the records of all agencies which have been surveyed, the purpose of this article is to call attention to a few examples of the most valuable records that have been found. The two agencies which will best serve this purpose are the Mint and the District Court, both at Philadelphia. Several others, however, cannot be completely omitted: Frankford Arsenal, Schuylkill Arsenal, the Customs Service, and the Naval Home.

Frankford Arsenal manufactures small arms and their accessories and ammunition, and most of the records there pertain to the technical problems involved. These would be of value for a study of the procedure in supplying the army with its necessities. For the period of the World War there are thousands of contracts for supplies and the accompanying correspondence, not only for Frankford Arsenal, but for scores of others opened temporarily for the duration of the war. If they were in the hands of a tireless and ambitious scholar these records might yield good results, particularly in studies of advances in science and technique as well as the methods of fulfilling the needs of the army.

The agencies in Philadelphia in which the most important records were found are considered to be: The United States Mint, the Philadelphia office of the Bureau of Customs, the District Court, the Navy Yard, the Naval Home, Schuylkill Arsenal, Frankford Arsenal, and The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

State records have not been neglected, of course, as evidenced by the Pennsylvanica Archives in nine series published during the period 1852-1935. In addition there is the Report on the public archives of the City and County of Philadelphia by H. V. Ames and A. E. McKinley which appeared in the Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1901, Volume 2. Neither of these works touches Federal records. In 1913 the Librarian of Congress issued a report entitled "Archives of Government Offices Outside the City of Washington" (House Document, 62 Cong., 2 sess., no. 143), but this is far from satisfactory since it is based merely on a series of questionnaires sent to custodians of the archives. The WPA Historical Records Survey is at present making a thorough survey of State and local records.
Schuylkill Arsenal probably contained a greater volume of material than any other agency surveyed. Most of it is composed of contracts and requisitions for supplies, the possible source of an extensive study of the activities of the Quartermaster Corps. Of special interest are the records dealing with the problems of supplying American troops in Cuba and the Philippines during and after the Spanish-American War. The relations of this Division of the War Department with Cuban and Philippine railroads and business houses are of great importance. The Civil War period furnishes even more interesting records. Here can be found a large part of the story of the cooperation between the United States Government and both northern and southern railroads, the use made of captured southern mills and factories, and the whole problem of clothing the army. It is quite possible that interesting information could be added to the much discussed question of Civil War army contracts. In addition to this very important material there are letters and business papers concerning western army posts, western and southern roads, Indian affairs, skirmishes with the Mormons, the acquisition of California, the Gold Rush, and the problem of the Maine boundary.

The Customs Service retains in almost perfect condition a complete file of correspondence from 1794 to the present. It is one of the most valuable collections in their possession, and its value is doubled when one recalls that in 1833 the office of the Secretary of the Treasury and a large part of its records were burned. In fact, an order was issued requesting that the records at the various ports be kept intact for that reason. The information which can be found in this correspondence is unusually large, dealing as it does with all sorts of customs regulations, smuggling, immigration, and wartime problems. These letters, together with the hundreds of boxes full of passenger and cargo manifests, constitute one of the finest collections surveyed. The great mass of cargo manifests, both foreign and domestic, serves as an excellent basis for any number of studies of the commerce of the United States and the part played by the port of Philadelphia.

The Naval Home unexpectedly offered some of the most interesting material of the whole Survey. The records concerning the inmates are of little value, but there are still housed there the records

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4 The officials of the Bureau of Customs were very generous in donating a large number of valuable old periodicals and government publications to the library of the National Archives.
from the first real Naval Academy in this country. The history of this early school can be traced quite easily in the correspondence and regulations concerning it. Training for the navy was at first given on board cruising ships by navy chaplains and after 1816 by schoolmasters on fourteen vessels containing twenty midshipmen each. This was unsatisfactory and Secretaries of the Navy long saw need for a change. By 1840 there were in existence rather inefficient schools connected with the navy yards in Boston, New York, and Norfolk, and with the Naval Asylum in Philadelphia. This last school proved to be so much better than the others that it was decided to close all but the one, this decision making the Philadelphia school the only naval school of great importance in the country. However, teachers were still on duty at Boston and Norfolk in 1844, the year before the Academy was finally established at Annapolis by George Bancroft. It would be most enlightening to study these records for the subjects taught, the discipline demanded, the requirements and standards, and the student personnel.

In addition to these five agencies it must be pointed out that the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Interior, Labor, and Justice, as well as the Departments of Navy, War, and Treasury, contain very important records in such subdivisions as the Weather Bureau, the Soil Conservation Service, the Food and Drug Administration, the Bureau of Animal Industry, the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Mines, the offices of United States Attorneys, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and numerous others. And in future years the records of such emergency units as the Works Progress Administration, the United States Employment Service, the National Youth Administration, the Federal Housing Administration, and the National Labor Relations Board, will become more and more valuable as an indication of efforts to cope with the tremendous economic problems of the day.

Probably the most valuable single collection which the group surveyed is that of the United States Mint in Philadelphia. Here is to be found a collection which is indispensable to the historian writing a comprehensive history of the Mint in its relation to financial, economic, political, and diplomatic affairs of the United States. This

*For a detailed treatment of this school see James Russel Soley, *Historical Sketch of the United States Naval Academy* (Washington, 1876), 7-62.
important work has not yet been undertaken, and the Mint records will undoubtedly give a new perspective to many questions which have not been fully explored. Except for an occasional mention of one or two less important documents in the works by Evans and Stewart, the material evidently has never been used. Facts concerning the Mint and its affairs have been obtained by most historians from the Annual Reports of the Director of the Mint, which are usually mere summaries of each year’s activities. It is very necessary to supplement these with the hundreds of account books, dating from the establishment of the Mint in 1792 to the present, and the thousands of letters covering the same period. Particularly important are two periods: 1792 to 1835 and 1835 to 1873. Until 1835 the Mint at Philadelphia was the only one in existence in this country, and the records for that period are, as a result, concerned with questions of policy which never appear in the more routine correspondence of later years, particularly after the establishment of the Bureau of the Mint in 1873. Until that year, the Philadelphia Mint directed the coinage of the whole country, the three mints established in 1835 assuming the character of branches.

From the records of the Mint one can trace the history of this institution from its beginning as a small, relatively unimportant office

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7 These reports from 1792 to 1827 appeared in the American State Papers, Finance; from 1819 to 1856 they appeared in the Congressional Documents; and since 1857 they have been issued as a part of the financial reports of the Secretary of the Treasury, and also in separate form.

8 There are several convenient sources or guides from which the laws concerning coinage may be studied. In 1910 was issued the compilation of A. T. Huntington and R. J. Mawhinney, “Laws of the United States Concerning Money, Banking, and Loans, 1778-1909” by the National Monetary Commission as Volume II of its publications (Senate Document, 61 Cong., 2 sess., no. 580). A guide to the statutes covering the whole period from 1792 to 1926 may be found in Watson’s work, and a collection of the laws themselves in General Instructions and Regulations in Relation to Transaction of Business at the Mints and Assay Offices of the United States and the Coinage Laws (Washington, 1908).
to one of the most important of our Federal agencies—from one which depended on Europe for supplies and methods to one which now lends its own help to foreign mints of less power and ingenuity.

In the first years of its existence there was much complaint of the inefficiency of the Mint which was answered quite heatedly, and usually very well, in such letters as that of January 12, 1798, from Henry Voight, Chief Coiner, to Elias Boudinot, the Director. In the course of his letter Voight states:

The mint work was originally constructed for a steam Engine, to be the impelling power for the mill work, in case it was found that Dollars should be made; it was no error of the Director [David Rittenhouse] that horses were employed, they only were protemporary till it should be found more convenient to erect a steam Engine; for he knew perfectly well, that horses were insufficient to make Dollars to advantage; but towards the time when Dollars were to be struck, he (the then Director) was fearful of the expenses; because too much fault had already been found, with the expencies that had been; and therefore he declined. For all the calumny against the mint, there is nevertheless as much work done therein, as in any one in the world, in proportion to the power therein applied; those who have seen Mints in Europe will testify the truth thereof (except he be a prejudiced Englishman).9

One of the principal problems which beset the Mint around the turn of the century and long after was the difficulty of securing copper for coinage. Gold and silver could be had in sufficient quantities, but the copper had to be imported, mainly from Matthew Boulton in England. There are scores of letters which passed between Boulton and Mint officials dealing with the copper trade, seemingly almost always an expensive one. The Philadelphia Mint was not wholly satisfied with Boulton, in spite of the fact that Thomas Pinckney, in a letter of April 3, 1795, to the Secretary of the State, had recommended Mr. Boulton for his “method of detecting counterfeits of the coins of his manufacture which appears ... to be ingenious and sure” and as a man of “a fair character and ... considerable capital.” In an attempt to find other sources for copper Sweden was approached. The reply in 1794 stated that little hope for a low price could be given but “... as we are desirous of a direct trade to America, the Minister of that Country may fully depend on our integrity, without the least apprehension about our taking any undue advantage, at his expense. I am persuaded that the English Merchants get themselves well paid in every respect; a trial therefore with us, would easily shew to what account it would turn out. Our West India Company

9 The word “Englishman” was crossed out and “Person” written above.
send yearly about two or three ships to St. Bartholomew—by the same opportunity any quantity wanted for America might be sent..."

The possibilities of copper in America, however, were not left unexplored. Hamilton in a letter of January 25, 1795, states that he had "made inquiry concerning the copper of which an offer was some time since made for the use of the Public by the proprietors or Managers of a Mine in New Jersey." And on July 5, 1796, Henry Voight, in answering charges against him for leaving the Mint without permission, has this to say:

But Sir I did not go altogether on my own account in the country you will remember, Sir, that I spoke to you concerning good copper, for alloying Gold of which Copper I went in search of and should have got some, and would have brought some with me to make the Experiment, if that I could of staid two days longer, for obtaining it, as I found Hands rather scarce to search for the same, contrary to my expectations....

Such efforts were more or less of a failure, and Boulton continued to sell the Mint most of its copper, usually in the form of planchets struck in his own mill. The Mint bought not only his excellent metal but machines of various types which he manufactured in partnership with James Watt. In fact Boulton used his connection with the Mint to advance his own business in steam engines, as evidenced in the following letter:

London, June 8th, 1799

Elias Boudinot

Sir

... If you are acquainted with any of the adventurers in the Schuyler Mine I will thank you to inform them that I and Mr. Watt, my partner, have erected all the Steam Engines upon the Cornish Mines, the Newcastle Mines & all the deep mines in England; & that we draw great quantities of water from the depth of 200 Fathoms or from any other depths wanted; & consequently can keep the Schuyler mine dry; and as I am concerned in Copper Mines and Copper Smelting Works I should be glad to contract with them for all the ore their mines produce. ...

Your most obliged & obedient Servt.

Matt. Boulton
of Soho

The Napoleonic wars made the problem doubly hard for the Mint. In a letter January 30, 1801, Boulton presses for payment, saying, "... money is at these times particularly scarce more so with me just now as I have more than £10,000 lock’d up in Denmark & Norway & which is worse I am fearful of it being confiscated, as French

*This is an unsigned translation.
Politicks have influenced... Courts of Russia, Sweden & Denmark to enter a confederacy against England, the former of which has already begun to attack Mercantile property in a way hitherto unprecedented by Old Monarchys..."

The Embargo Act added almost insurmountable difficulties to the copper trade between Boulton and the Mint. It is interesting to note, in a series of letters at the Mint, that provisions were made for the trade to continue in spite of the Act, and there are indications that the War of 1812 did not stop it completely. On the excuse that the copper was the property of the state and not of individuals Boulton shipped it without fear of confiscation. The question was in doubt for some time, however. On April 29, 1811, Albert Gallatin, after consulting with President Madison, advised the Director of the Mint to suspend orders for British copper. A year later this temporary order was reversed and copper planchets on board the Ann Maria were allowed to come in without danger of forfeiture.

Just before the war with England Paul Revere offered in a letter of May, 1812, to supply "any quantity of copper ready for the impression of the cents" at a cheaper rate than that of Europe. Patterson approved but expressed fear that Revere could not supply the type of copper needed for so complicated a process as coining. In the meantime his shipment from Boulton had been assured and he refused to buy from Revere. After the war Boulton continued to supply the largest quantities of copper, and it was not until the opening of the great copper mines in the West that the Mint could rely on a sufficient amount without importation.11

This story of the relations of the Mint with England is but one of the many phases of its history that can be traced from these records. An excellent study could be made of the improvement of the Mint, not only in its scientific but its artistic methods. The center of such a study might well be the report of Franklin Peale, son of the famous artist, Charles Willson Peale, on conditions in the most important European mints of 1833. Peale was employed by the Mint at Philadelphia as a man well informed in the arts and sciences who might put his knowledge to good use in observing improvements in Europe with an eye to recommendations of Mint legislation to Congress. His

11 The question was so annoying that the expediency of prohibiting the exportation of gold, silver, and copper coins for the better protection of the nation's resources was considered by a Committee on Finance, which reported adversely January 25, 1819 (State Papers, 15th Cong., 2 sess., no. 68).
274-page manuscript account is in the Mint at present, and a study of it and ensuing legislation would be most interesting. It is too large a subject to treat here, but it is interesting to note that, although many of his recommendations were not put into effect by Congress, Peale was able to introduce many new machines and presses as a result of his trip. He eventually became Chief Coiner, succeeding Adam Eckfeldt, considered by Mint officials at present to have been one of the world's foremost coiners.

It is interesting to note how closely the Philadelphia Mint was allied with the best-known artists of the day, especially the Peales. The Director at the time, Samuel Moore, took great interest in improving the artistic value of the coins and received letters from Rembrandt Peale on the subject. Moore himself says: "In entering upon my office, I felt it to be one of my first duties to endeavor to introduce such a change in the coinage as might make it a more creditable specimen of taste and art. In accomplishing this purpose, I have received the aid of some of our most distinguished artists. . . . In the course of the present year, I hope that our coinage will be placed upon an equality with the best now executed in Europe."12

There could be an indefinite listing of material similar to the foregoing which would serve as excellent bases for numerous studies. At present, only a limited number can be pointed out. The business of prominent men, such as Stephen Girard and George Washington (whose name appears in an entry for the melting of six silver spoons), can be easily followed by means of the account books. The Mint in its early days was much more easily influenced and colored by such transactions than it is today when business is done on such a large scale. The material since 1873 is relatively hard to deal with, not only because of the ever-increasing mass but because of the fact that most information must be gathered from figures and only indirectly from letters. Correspondence concerning the policy of the government in the gold and silver controversy, for instance, would not appear in the Philadelphia Mint in as great a volume as it would have if it were still the seat of the Director. Now, of course, it is on a level with those of San Francisco and Denver, whereas before 1873 it directed the affairs of all Mints then established.

The establishment of the Branch Mints in 1835 forms another

12 Samuel Moore to the President of the United States January 1, 1836 (House Executive Documents, 24th Cong., 1st sess., no. 76).
interesting phase, especially in view of the near-scandal in 1839 which grew out of inefficient management and strained relations at the New Orleans Mint. Thomas Slidell investigated the case and reported a most unsatisfactory state of affairs, leading eventually to the replacement of David Bradford, the superintendent.\(^\text{13}\)

Out of such stormy beginnings grew the organization which as early as 1860 was giving detailed directions to foreign countries on its coinage. In the Mint is a document written by Mr. Gouge of the Treasury Department, June 6, 1860, entitled "Memorial on Gold and Silver Coinage for the Japanese Embassy." It is a detailed description of the meaning and value of a stable coinage system, written in language almost childlike in its simplicity. It is interesting to speculate on the use to which this was put by Japan, only seven years awakened from its medieval sleep but in 1860 wide awake to the possibility of new knowledge from the West.\(^\text{14}\)

Next in importance to the records of the Mint are those of the District Court. Much of the material here is of the usual sort to be found in Federal Courts but nevertheless of unusual value to the legal historian. Circuit Court Dockets and Minute Books dating from as early as 1790 and 1792 may be found in excellent condition and complete records of all criminal cases exist from 1789. Equity case records are especially important in view of the fact that the files extend, with gaps, back to 1732. Of interest in connection with these are the bound volumes of lists of lands, dwellings, wharves, buildings and stores and their assessments and duties dating from 1791. There are also six volumes containing information regarding goods illegally imported between the years 1808 and 1912 which might be of value in a study of smuggling or other special phases of trade. There are numerous papers concerning special investigations particularly during the World War when the activities of persons of German or Austrian birth or extraction were under suspicion. Of equal value are the records on the anthracite coal strike of the Scranton district from 1917 to 1920.

All of this material cannot be pictured adequately here, but it is

\(^{\text{13}}\)The correspondence between the persons involved is filled with the most violent sectional feeling; Bradford was a Southerner and his Coiner and Melter and Refiner were from the North.

\(^{\text{14}}\)It might be well to note that the Mint has in its possession a very rare book, a written account of coinage in England from 1660 to 1750. It was bought by one of the early Directors.
necessary to notice in more detail a few items. Among the bankruptcy cases, which date back to 1800, is the famous case of Robert Morris in 1801. These proceedings consist of four separate signed documents, containing seventy-nine sheets. The first document contains the answers of Morris to seventeen interrogatories, all relating to “deeds of trusts to the Trustee of the North American Land Company and Pennsylvania Property Company,” and to shares, interest, titles, and papers to land held by or with these companies in Northumberland, Mifflin, Westmoreland, and other counties. The second document contains two similar interrogatories. The third, most interesting of all, contains sixty-nine pages entitled “In account of Property.” This is divided into four parts: an account of purchases and sales of land in various parts of the country and of mortgages and notes held, effects, inventory of articles found in the rooms of Robert Morris, and accounts open on the books of Robert Morris. Most of the items show a business-like listing of actual dollars and cents or pounds and shillings owed; in one or two, however, the emotions of the man become apparent. An example is to be found under the heading “James Greenleaf.” Morris states, “This is an unsettled account and I suppose ever will be so.” In another item he laments, “Here commenced the ruin which killed poor Nicholson, and brought me to the necessity of giving an account of my affairs—but I will forbear to say more, lest I should not know where or when to stop!”

The material found in this case is of the utmost importance if one is to understand fully the last years of Morris’ life. In E. P. Oberholtzer’s Robert Morris, Patriot and Financier almost no space is given to the actual proceedings, an omission which weakens the work considerably. It is doubtful whether this material has ever been used extensively and the event looms too large in the life of Morris to be overlooked.

The second file of records which is especially worthy of attention here is that of the vice-admiralty and admiralty cases. The vice-admiralty docket dates from 1735 and the admiralty, of course, from 1789. There are three groups of cases of particular interest, the prize cases of the Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Civil War, together with the letters attached. None of the cases adds any new information to the principles of international law as then known, but

Oberholtzer evidently made limited use of this material. His principal source seems to be the Morris papers at the Library of Congress from the John Meredith Read estate.
their value is easily recognized in the number and importance of the captures involved and the procedure and information of various sorts in each case.

For the period of the Revolution there was discovered only one minute book, that of 1776, concerning prize cases. This book is of unusual value and interest in that it shows a surprisingly active American navy in the first year of the war. Eight prizes are listed in this volume. The records of prizes taken during the War of 1812 are more numerous. Among the twenty-five or thirty cases from 1812 to 1814 are twelve which concern only one ship, the privateer *Rattlesnake*, Captain David Maffet, Commander. This ship stationed herself in the North Sea and adjoining waters and was successful in crippling a good part of British trade in that section of the world. The part played by Drontheim, Norway, in these captures was important. This was the port to which the *Rattlesnake* brought its prizes to be tried. It is quite evident that the friendliness of Denmark and Napoleon was of great value to the United States in this instance, in spite of the fact that very little sympathy for Napoleon was to be found in America even during the war.

The proceedings in the prize cases of the Civil War are surprisingly dull, but the letters and documents which were captured with the ships show a number of dramatic situations and add much valuable information on conditions and problems of the Confederate States and their citizens. An interesting, though disconnected series of letters, is that taken from T. Butler King of Georgia. This prominent politician and statesman was sent by the Confederate Government on a diplomatic mission to Paris and Brussels, and his correspondence taken from the prize steamer *Calhoun*, January 23, 1862, touches briefly on this. The information concerning his mission is scanty, but several letters give important facts about his business ventures in both Europe and Georgia. It seems he dangled the visions of certain southern railroads before the eyes of European statesmen to secure help for the South, since this is mentioned in several letters. His own business interests evidently played a large part in his negotiations, particularly with reference to railroads and timber land. In a letter from Lieutenant R. Butts from Macon, Georgia, March 27, 1861, is the following:

I sometimes fear that in the multiplicity of your business upon the other side, that you cannot give that attention to our land speculations that I think the

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16 It is recalled that Norway was at that time under the control of Denmark.
matter deserves. I am certain that there is a greater opening for a princely fortune there, than any other that presents itself. Look at it here the Yellow Pine Forest has dwindled down to a narrow scope a few hundred thousand dollars will buy up all that is to be had and then would have the control of all the accessible pine timber—the buying up of what is in market would at once put up the remaining at three or four prices.

In addition to letters of this sort there are many letters from members of King’s family expressing interesting opinions on the war. It is remarkable how often it is pointed out in these as well as other letters, that the Northern debt was running beyond all endurance and that the war would soon end because of it. Not once is it hinted that Southern debts were even more burdensome, although there is some complaint about the taxes, which, it is insisted, are “cheerfully paid.” Such letters as these, although they do not serve as the basis for any startling revision of the history of the period, serve as admirable supplements to sources already known. They have the value of the dramatic but are probably not so valuable to the specialists as the great numbers of cases tried in the Philadelphia courts.

At present the Survey in Pennsylvania is complete in respect to the actual examination and reporting of records. But a large and important task is still under way. Many of the records needed sorting, arranging, and indexing before any extensive research by the scholar could be attempted. This is now being done in a number of cases, in addition to the abstracting and copying of some of the more important records. This, however, will constitute merely a secondary result. The principal object is to present in published form a detailed guide to all the Federal records in Pennsylvania. It is to be hoped that this inventory will soon be made available.

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