The Archives of Pennsylvania: A Glimpse at an Editor's Problems

From the summer of 1848 to October, 1852, Lyman Copeland Draper, long-time (1854-1886) Corresponding Secretary of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, resided successively in Philadelphia, Leverington, and Roxborough, Pennsylvania. Before moving to Philadelphia he had already become widely known for his collection of personal papers of the pioneers of the “Old Border” of western Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1846 he issued a circular describing his collection of more than five thousand manuscripts gathered for his contemplated Lives of the Pioneers, and distributed it widely in an effort to uncover more manuscripts.¹ He made repeated trips into the western regions to gather material and to interview surviving Indian fighters and their descendants. By 1851 he had more than doubled his collection—notably by the acquisition of the papers of George Rogers Clark—and had expanded his original plan for a single volume into a series of twenty biographies and western histories.²

An indefatigable researcher, Draper sought information from other historians and antiquarians. He exchanged documents, notes, and data with Francis Parkman, Jared Sparks, George Bancroft and Brantz Mayer. When Samuel Hazard took over the task of editing the Pennsylvania Archives, Draper wrote him for information on the old Indian fighter, Samuel Brady. Draper’s inquiry elicited no new leads on Brady material, but Hazard gave him an intimate view of some of his problems in his new task. Within a few years Draper himself, attempting to gather material for the State Historical Society and to edit the Wisconsin Historical Collections, came to have a fuller appreciation of Hazard’s problems.

University of Wisconsin

William B. Hesseltine
and Larry Gara

¹ Circular dated Jan. 1, 1846, in the Lyman C. Draper-Wisconsin Historical Society Correspondence, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
² Lyman C. Draper to Maj. John Redd, Jan. 11, 1849, in the Draper Manuscripts 10NN6, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
Lyman C. Draper Esq.

Dear Sir,

Your favor of yesterday which I have just had the pleasure to receive, discloses to me the mystery which otherwise, (after all my conjectory I was unable to unravel) to whom I was indebted for a copy of Mr. Mayer's discourse rec'd yesterday from a place or P.O., of which tho' in Pennsa., I had never before heard. I am truly very much obliged to you for it—from the glances I have been able to take of it—it will be exceedingly interesting to me, especially at the present moment—when I have before me, so many documents respecting Thomas Cresap—some of which may not place him in quite so favorable a light as Mr. Mayer does, at least so it appears to me, from the hasty inspection of the address relating to him.

Now for a reply to your queries. When the first vol. of the Archives will appear? When I came here I found all the papers put up in bundles—labelled—but by no means indicating their true contents—either having been put up carelessly or deranged by the frequent examination of visitors—so that my first duty appeared to be to open & arrange into years—then to open each document & from a hasty inspection—to throw aside those which were evidently not necessary to the publication. Upon examination still further—I found that a great many were recorded in the Col. Rec. & of course would be printed with them—this was a very tedious & uninteresting part of the work—& rather mortifying too as from their no. it appeared

3 Samuel Hazard to Draper, in the Draper-Wisconsin Historical Society Correspondence. Samuel Hazard (1784–1870) was a Pennsylvania editor and antiquarian. From 1828 to 1835 he edited the weekly *Hazard’s Register of Pennsylvania* which printed public documents, Indian history, biographical notes, meteorological tables and other miscellaneous information. He also edited the *United States Commercial and Statistical Register* (July, 1839, to June, 1842), in which he published much useful economic data. Hazard’s most important historical undertaking was the editing of the *Pennsylvania Archives* (12 vols., Philadelphia, 1852–1856). *Dictionary of American Biography* (DAB).

4 Brantz Mayer (1809–1879) was a lawyer and historian active in stimulating interest in local history. He was a founder of the Maryland Historical Society and served as its president from 1867 to 1871. The pamphlet which Draper sent to Samuel Hazard was *Tah-Gah-Jute or Logan and Captain Michael Cresap; A Discourse by Brantz Mayer; Delivered in Baltimore, Before the Maryland Historical Society, On its Sixth Anniversary, 9 May, 1851*. Mayer defended Cresap from the charge of murdering the family of the Indian leader, James Logan. Draper had furnished Mayer with most of the material for the speech. *DAB*; Bernard C. Steiner, “Brantz Mayer,” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, V (1910), 1–22.
likely to interfere with a plan I had formed in my own mind for the arrangement into subjects—as well as abridge the interest which they would impart to the archives—as it would be unnecessary to print the same matter twice. I had to select these & they form several large bundles. By these operations, I had left, a mass which I had considered from first inspection as probably suitable for publication—these I of course had to read over more carefully to decide upon them—add to all this—that just when I supposed I had gone thro’ with this labor—by hunting in some of the other offices—I came across a considerable quantity especially Revolutionary correspondence the examination & arrangement of which occupied several weeks. So that I think I have gotten thro’ these preliminary steps—& am now arranging them into vols & making occasional notes of reference, as these are all manuscript—it is impossible to say how many vols they will make (probably 5 or 6)—& as the first vol. will perhaps not be put into the printer’s hands till all are ready—it may be two months first having already occupied me since March. They will embrace from 1682 to 1783—by law, but as the Colonial Records will come down to 1790—I may also arrange the archives to that date. I have been disappointed in not finding as many of the early period as I expected—many have no doubt been lost or carried off, & others mutilated. Respecting the periods of the Indian wars, & the Revoln there is an interesting collection. In short the two works will form a most interesting mass of historical matter. The first vol. of Colon. Records is now in press upwards of 600 pages printed & the vol. will be out in the course of a few weeks & bring them down to betw 1740 & 1750—of course the Col. Rec. will embrace the revolution—including the Committee of Safety’s minutes whh will supply the absence of legis. documents for several years.

I do not remember to have met with any thing respecting Brady—but there will be a good deal respecting the early frontier settlements. If you come up here I can show you what they are tho’ in the time

5 Draper had a long-standing interest in the frontier spy and Indian fighter, Samuel Brady. He collected considerable Brady material and visited the site of Brady’s famous leap over the Cuyahoga River. In 1848 Draper announced his intention to publish a life of Brady as the first of his series of pioneer biographies. The book, like Draper’s other proposed biographies, never materialized. For Brady material see the Draper MSS 1-16E passim, 59J249-282, NN4. See also Draper to William Croghan, Apr. 18, 1850, in the Draper MSS 10J197, and for Draper’s thoughts on Brady’s leap, see the Draper MSS 5S232.
present—when I am making the final use of them—it will not be quite so convenient as some time before would have been—but I will help you as much as I can. But as your work will probably not require them for some time—it is quite probable the early portion may be printed in time for you. You will find me at Harris Hotel whh is the best here—or at the Secretary's office. You do not say when you expect to set out on your Western tour—\(^6\)—I shall probably be here two months yet. I have made but two visits to the City of a few days each—in one of which I found your first letter under my office door—but being so long after its date & then you were moving—and not knowing how a letter would reach you—I did not send a reply—whh must be my apology—as well as my haste while in the City.

You have I suppose seen the articles in my Register respecting Brady—\(^7\) taken from a western paper—if not you'll find several in Vol IX—if upon a review I meet with any mention of him I will make a note of it for you. If you go to Blairsville from whh the articles emanated you may probably learn of some material from the Editor of the "Record."

I have concluded to arrange the Archives entirely chronologically—as they contain documents entirely omitted or only referred to in the Col. R & as my first plan was deranged—I think this will make the reference from the Records to the archives more easy—& vice versa—

I have thus written more than I intended—& in great haste. Hope you will be able to decipher it & find the information desired—with this object it is written for yourself alone & wish you so to consider it.

Very truly

Yours

SamHazard

\(^6\) Draper was making plans for his eighth major trip into the West in search of frontier material. Between October and the end of 1851 he went from western Pennsylvania across southern Ohio and Kentucky to Missouri where he obtained the major part of the literary remains of Daniel Boone.