Descriptive Index of the Pennsylvania Board of Canal Commissioners' Records with Allied Records of Canal Companies Chartered by the Commonwealth. By Hubertis M. Cummings. (Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs, Harrisburg, 1959, iv, 235 pp.)

The Bureau of Land Records in the Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission hold an extensive collection of manuscript and printed records relating to the Pennsylvania Canal, the Canal Commissioners, and allied endeavors in internal improvements. Fortunately these materials have been carefully preserved and now this Descriptive Index to them provides a valuable working tool for the historian of transportation technology, the business historian, the biographer, and the student of administration in government. Dr. Hubertis M. Cummings, a Research Associate in the Bureau of Land Records, has painstakingly indexed these primary sources, indicated the several kinds of records involved and, by careful selection, given typical examples from the various categories.

The bulk of the papers are those of the Pennsylvania Board of Canal Commissioners, 1825-1859, held by the Bureau of Land Records. These are organized into three major groups: (1) the records and papers filed by the Board's successive secretaries; (2) the Superintendents' papers; and (3) maps drawn by engineers and cartographers during surveys and construction. Without question, the Board's records and papers are the most significant and useful. At the center is the twelve-volume Canal Commissioners' Journal, from the time of the Board's first appointment in May 1825 to completion of its work in 1859, along with a comprehensive internal Index. Here is found the correspondence between the Board and its engineers—Benjamin Wright, James Geddes, Canvass White, William Strickland, Nathan S. Roberts, and Moncure Robinson, to name just a few. Here one can trace Board decisions on locks, aqueducts, and towing paths as well as the appointment and service of virtually every official associated with the Pennsylvania Canal. The remainder of the Board's papers are organized by Divisions—Delaware, Columbia & Philadelphia Railroad, Eastern, Juniata, Allegheny Portage Railroad, and Western—and in each there are materials relating to Damage Claims, Contracts (for rails, locomotives, bridges, and locks, for instance), and Reports and Miscellaneous Documents. From these, the student can trace the construction problems en-
countered, the kinds of solutions tried, and the key individuals and companies involved. Among other things, one is struck by the heavy reliance on British suppliers of iron and locomotives for the railroads—reflected in the correspondence with representatives of Losh, Wilson, and Bell of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Murdock Aitkin & Co. of Glasgow, and Jevons & Sons of Liverpool. Similar, but not as extensive, are the papers relating to the connecting (or lateral) portions of the Canal, again organized by Divisions—Beaver, Erie Extension Canal, French Creek, Susquehanna, West Branch, North Branch, Gettysburg Railroad, and Wiconisco Canal.

The Superintendents’ papers are the archival records of the undertaking and deal with the exploration, construction, and operation of the canals and railroads which formed the Pennsylvania Canal. They are organized by Division and then by Commissioner or Superintendent; unfortunately, the files of the superintendents whose last names began with the letters T to Z have disappeared, so there is this gap. Finally, the maps and profiles represent cartography not only at its best in the early nineteenth century but also give details illustrative of the physical structure and routine operation of the facilities.

The final portion of the Descriptive Index analyzes the allied records held by the Division of Public Records of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Among those mentioned are the papers of James Dunlop Harris, the Canal engineer; photographs of the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company; official records of some thirty-eight transportation companies incorporated between 1791 and 1866; Delaware & Schuylkill Canal Navigation Records; Pennsylvania Railroad Company Canal Papers; and the Schuylkill Navigation Company Papers.

A heavy debt of gratitude is owed to both the Department of Internal Affairs and Dr. Cummings for having prepared this Descriptive Index. It is as complete as it needs be, is reliable, and has already made the work of at least one student a little lighter.

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