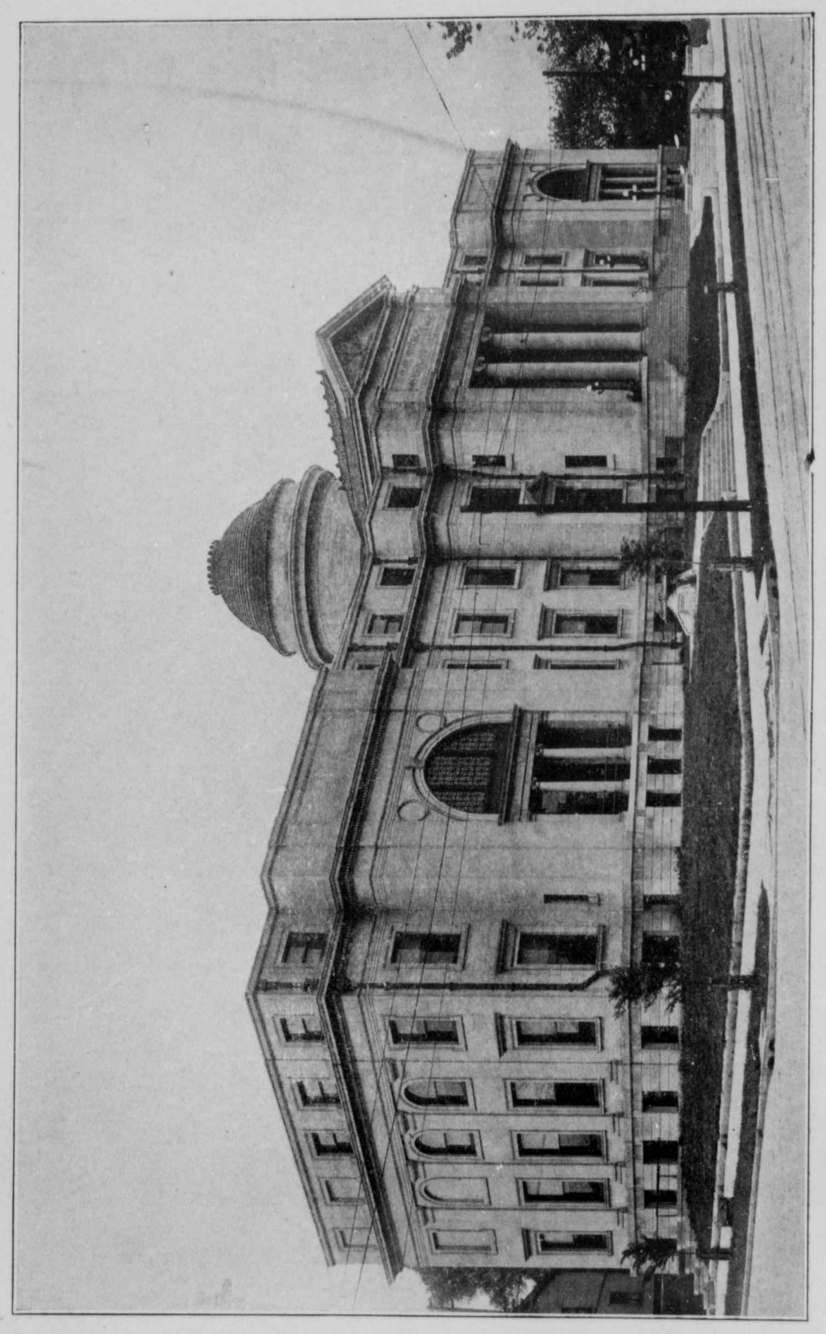

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PRINCIPLES OF CLASSIFICATION OF ARCHIVES.[1]

BY ETHEL B. VIRTUE.

[In pursuing her work as an assistant in the Historical Department, Miss Virtue, who has the responsibility of indexing the Public Archives of Iowa, carried out, at our request, an extensive investigation of the science of administration of Public Archives. From the results of this investigation she prepared this paper for the conference of archivists held during the last meeting of the American Historical Association. Because the proceedings of the Association are necessarily delayed in appearance, and because of repeated requests from many sister states for immediate access to Miss Virtue's paper, we are courteously allowed to publish it in the present number of the ANNALS.—EDITOR.]

The science of archives is indeed a mere infant in the family of modern sciences and her underlying principles are far from being fully developed. In many respects she resembles her sister science of library theory and practice but in others she is very different. Nowhere is this difference more plainly seen than in principles of classification.

The modern library has developed a system of subject classification, which has made the contents of its shelves easily accessible to the average reader. But the close application of a similar system to collections of archives has not met with success. A strictly logical arrangement was tried in the

[1] "The Public Archives Commission of the American Historical Association is engaged with the preparation of a 'Primer of Archival Economy for the use of American Archivists.' Knowing of the good work that is being done for the archives of Iowa by the Historical Department of that State, the Commission invited Miss Ethel B. Virtue to present a paper on 'Principles of Classification for Archives.' She presented this subject at the sixth annual conference of archivists, held under the Commission's auspices in the Auditorium Hotel, Chicago, on December 31, 1914. She showed that the system in use in Iowa follows the sound principle of classifying the archives with respect to their origin, as advocated and practiced by the best archivists of Europe, where the business of arranging, cataloging and administering public archives is an accepted profession of a high order. Miss Virtue illustrated her able exposition of the technical phases of her subject by a goodly number of charts, which gave a clear idea of the different steps in the process of the Iowa scheme. I am very glad to certify my appreciation of her paper and the value it will have to others who are interested in the subject.

VICTOR HUGO PALTSITS, Chairman,
Public Archives Commission."

New York City,
January 28, 1915.