PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF IOWA.

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III.

In the former articles on the subject of Public Archives, the writer gave a brief sketch of the archives, the method of handling, classifying, etc., of the offices of Governor[1] and Secretary of State.[2] In this article is presented the office of the Auditor of State.

The office of the Auditor of State was established January 7, 1840, and designated "Auditor of the Territory." The constitution of 1846 provided for the continuance of the office under the title of "Auditor of Public Accounts." The constitution of 1857 continued the office under the titular head of "Auditor of State."

From the nature of the business transacted by this branch of the State government, the documents are not generally considered so valuable historically as are the documents in some of the other branches. This, in part, is true, but a large number of documents are in themselves of great historical interest. The business of the different State departments has been so closely connected that documents in the office of Auditor must be found to corroborate facts gleaned from other departments. Thousands of documents in this department, however, have no connection with any other.

To a student of history the growth of the State is more clearly portrayed in this department than in the others. For example, the tax lists in the early forties of the then organized counties were written out on a few sheets of foolscap, the totals of each county amounting to only a few dollars. At present the collections by the same counties are counted by the thousands and tens of thousands. We find that the documents for any one year in the earlier history of the State are numbered by hundreds while for the same period of time at present there are thousands. This growth of the State is also clearly portrayed by the increase each year in

[1] ANNALS OF IOWA, Vol. X, pp. 166-193, Oct., 1911.
[2] ANNALS OF IOWA, Vol. X, pp. 273-319, Jan.-April, 1912.

the number and amounts of the claims filed and paid and by the character of the claims.

The number of documents now on file in the Hall of Public Archives from the office of the Auditor of State is far in excess of that from any other branch of the State government. The total number of documents is estimated to be 700,000 and the bound records 1,000. These have all been examined and classified in the manner shown by the outline of classification following.

One of the main objects aimed at in the classification of the documents is the reduction to the minimum of the time and labor required to find a certain document, by any one seeking information. This can best be accomplished by classifying them, first by divisions, these into sub-divisions, and so on until the lowest sub-division is the subject. This in turn is arranged in chronological order and then either by numbers or in alphabetical order according to the character of the documents. In this manner the great mass of documents is eliminated from the course of the investigator and comparatively few upon the subject remain with the document sought.

It may be appropriate here to repeat that the proper care and preservation of Iowa archives was first proposed by Charles Aldrich, founder of the Historical Department of Iowa; that Dr. Benjamin F. Shambaugh, under direction of the Board of Trustees of the Historical Department, after an exhaustive investigation, made a report upon the subject and recommended a plan of handling and of classification; that thereafter the execution of the plan was transferred to the Executive Council, whose secretary, Hon. A. H. Davison, designed the cases, receptacles and folders now in use; that the working force under Mr. Davison was organized and for two years directed by Hon. John H. Kelley. The writer has been in charge since Mr. Kelley retired and has endeavored to develop the system of classification.

Our work has been referred to by nearly all writers on the subject of public archives in America, usually with commendation. In a field still new, but of recognized importance, initial steps have all been vital, and credit in Iowa is due those who took them.