A New Home for Our National Archives

LONG-NEGLECTED PAPERS TO HAVE SAFE CARE AT LAST IN CAPITAL

by

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LIKE long-neglected family papers suddenly achieving value because of connection with past glories, the original documents of the history of the United States now are coming into their own. Stored for well over a century in, figuratively if not literally, attic and cellar, they shortly will have a new home, designed and constructed especially for them.

As compensation for dusty corners and musty rooms, it will be one of the finest structures in the nation's capital. The National Archives Building is nearing completion, and in the early part of 1935 the business of separating archives from just plain records should be under way.

SITUATED AT the apex and dominating the Federal Triangle, it is the latest of the white limestone Government structures to take shape. Following the same modified classic design, it is considered the finest example of architcture in the group. Rising slightly above its neighbors, it features a Corinthian colonnade, fifty-two feet high, extending around the four sides. Facing on Pennsylvania and Constitution avenues, between Seventh and Eighth streets, it occupies the space once covered by the famous, if smelly, old Center Market.

On the first floor will be the showroom, a great semi-circular exhibition hall, its half dome rising seventy-five feet above the floor. Here visitors may view the most interesting and impressive items in the collection.

The remaining space on the first floor will be the offices of the archivist and his staff, while research rooms, for the use of the public as well as Government officials, will be provided on the second floor.

ABOVE ALL THIS will be the actual home of the archives, two and a half million cubic feet of stack space with a possible extension to another three million.

Nature in the raw will have no place in the Archives Building. Solid walls will prevent any ray of sunlight from entering the stackrooms, small incandescent lamps, to be lit only when in use, taking the place of natural light. Fresh air will be admitted only after it has been properly washed with an alkaline solution to remove the possibility of acid contamination. The air-conditioning equipment will pump 330,000 cubic feet of this treated air into the building each minute. A humidity standard of fifty-five per cent. in the storage rooms and forty-five per cent. in the workrooms will be maintained at all times, with an even temperature of 70 degrees in winter and 80 degrees in summer.

ALL METAL within the stacks will be coated or non-ferrous, to eliminate the presence of paint, which might injure the papers. The concrete columns will have tile and non-ferrous metal coverings so that no abrasive dust may get into the air.

The final erection of a storehouse for the nation's records climaxes agitation that started in Congress in 1810, when the House of Representatives appointed a committee "to inquire into the state of the ancient public records and archives of the United States." The gentlemen serving with this group discovered most of these "ancient public records and archives" of the then very young nation stored in the attic of the twenty-five room structure "west of the President's house," which was the home of most of the important Government establishments of that day. Having found the documents, the committee apparently considered its duties well fulfilled, for nothing was done about them.

PROVISION FOR the care of these papers traveled the rocky road of Congressional investigation and resolutions, prompted by the best of intentions but ending nowhere. Presidents Hayes, Arthur, Cleveland and the first Roosevelt undertook to hasten action, but their efforts were futile.

In 1908 the American Historical Society, in an effort to speed up legislation, made a survey of the disposition and condition of these valuable documents, and found Treasury Department papers dumped on the floor of a warehouse in boxes, bundles and loose, Pension Office records out in the courtyard, and papers of the House of Representatives thrown in boxes and stacked wherever space could be found.

THE NEW ARCHIVES BUILDING

The long years of agitation had fruition during the Hoover Administration, when a National Archives Building was included in the great Federal building plans approved by Congress. Provision for an Archives Commission came in the present Administration. The principal function of this body, composed of Government officials, will be to decide the question, "What is an archive?" The task of separating from the tons and tons of papers that have accumulated during the life of the nation those which have sufficient importance to deserve delicate treatment and a permanent home will be no sinecure.

Undoubtedly the richest store of archives will come from the State Department, which has long served as a catch-all for documents without a home. In a carefully guarded basement room are some 850 treaties, dating back to an Indian treaty made in 1722 and including one negotiated in 1795 by Gen. Anthony Wayne with certain Indian tribes and signed by George Washington.

OTHERS OF PARTICULAR historic interest are the French alliance of 1778; the treaty with Great Britain that marked the end of the Revolutionary War; the treaty of Ghent of 1814; international agreements bearing the seals and signatures of Napoleon, their Catholic Majesties of Spain, the Czars of all the Russias, the Dey of Algiers, and Menelik, King of Kings of Ethiopia; and the Kellogg Pact, signed by representatives of fifteen nations.

In the State Department collection are the tokens of esteem and friendship sent by foreign rulers, consisting mainly of exquisitely finished swords of rare design and workmanship. Unique is the royal whale's tooth presented by the last monarch of the Fiji Islands in 1870 with the hope of securing the assistance of this country in holding his tottering empire.

Official copies of acts of Congress, Constitutional amendments, Presidential proclamations, executive orders and announcements all have found a final resting place in the gaudy old State, War and Navy Building.

Papers relating to the actual administration of the State Department date from the first official instructions to our ambassadors and ministers, written by Thomas Jefferson. Stacked away in steel cupboards are hundreds of volumes of diplomatic correspondence which will be invaluable to historians delving into the true story of our international relations.

The Treasury Department has lost many of its oldest records in various fires, but it still will be able to add to the archives collection the vouchers of George Washington for expenditures from 1775 to 1784, including those for the winter at Valley Forge.

Busy with national defense, the War Department has not greatly concerned itself with keeping tab on the records of past wars. Its files, however, contain many originals of the chronicles of our fighting men, beginning with the Revolutionary War reports of Gens. George Washington, Anthony Wayne, Nathanael Greene and Lafayette, and the sea records of John Paul Jones. The papers of the Confederate Government and Grant's correspondence with Lee also are included among its records. Many of these documents are without the signatures, which have been cut off by enterprising clerks and "research students" and sold to autograph collectors.

INTERESTING among the War Department's records are the archives of Alaska during the time that it was a possession of Russia. These papers, in the Russian language, date from 1802 and became the property of the United States in 1870.

Records of the other departments are to a great extent of a routine nature, but in such subdivisions as the Patent Office and the Land Office the researcher will find a fertile field. The vast collection of old titles in the latter bureau date back 250 years to some Spanish land grants from the office of the surveyor-general in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Much credit for preserving some of our more valuable archives from deterioration or destruction goes to the Library of Congress. In carefully guarded cases it keeps the originals of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Its material relating to the formation of the nation is invaluable to the historian and in many cases its collection of documents from the public archives has been supplemented by those from private individuals.

MUCH EFFORT has been put forth by the library to secure the private papers of the Presidents, which are usually taken with him by the Chief Executive when he leaves the White House. The Washington collection is bound in 302 volumes, plus 32 letter books and 48 volumes of transcripts. Jefferson's papers fill 236 volumes, Madison's 91, while Taft and Theodore Roosevelt top the list with about 800 volumes each. Part of the Lincoln papers are in a sealed trunk which his son, Robert, gave to the library with the proviso that it be opened at a later date. The Coolidge correspondence has recently been added to the collection, and it is expected that the Harding papers will soon be brought from Ohio.

Now at last our archives, aged and hallowed by the years, the bugs and the weather, will be lifted from obscure cupboards and placed within a binding of steel and stone to be preserved for all posterity.

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New Family Car

spectacle. By a slight error he had slid her, not into second, but reverse. She lay there against the iron electric light pole. She sank over to one side under the sharp white light. The right back wheel was off, as far as they could see. After a time they drove on.

It was 12.56 o'clock. Mr. C. Bramley Taylor was still awake in his Copwood Fels residence. And Mrs. Taylor, it seemed, also.

"What did I tell you?" said Mrs. Taylor.

"He'll be here yet," persisted Mr. Taylor.

They were alluding to their argument over letting their only son, Junior, have the new family car after what he had done to the last one.

SUDDENLY HER husband sat up and smiled. Hearing a motor in the street, the driveway, the garage.

"On the dot!" he said, reopening the conversation. "On the dot."

Soon their boy, Junior, was passing the family door.

"How is it, son? Everything O. K.

"O. K., dad."

"Car go all right?"

"Absolutely wonderful," said the voice of the only Taylor heir. He meant it too. You could tell that by his voice.

"Responsibility," said Mr. Taylor, speaking up once more. "Give them responsibility and they'll measure up to it."

Saying this, Mr. Taylor turned on his side, went off to sleep, smiling pleasantly.

In his own room his son, Bramley, Junior, was smiling also. It was clear now that he would have the Taylor family car out next Friday night again. He had deserved well of his parents; he knew it.

He had kept the faith; bringing the family car home on time, intact, without a scratch or blemish. He would have her out again, without a doubt, next Friday night