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Public Documents as a Commercial Factor*

By W. R. Reinick, Chief of Public Documents, Philadelphia Free Library

The day of estimating the work of the library by the number of books circulated, a majority of them fiction, is rapidly passing, and it is now being recognized by librarians and boards of trustees, that too great a value has been placed upon circulation, while the reference work of the library is often neglected. A business firm or an investigator, by finding one item relating to his particular line, might be led to make a new invention, start a new line of trade, or send goods to another locality, resulting in increased business and giving additional employment which, although statistics along these lines are almost impossible to obtain, would be, in most cases, of far more value to mankind than the reading of hundreds of works of fiction.

The official publications of the various governments, states and cities constantly contain articles of great value to the industrial and commercial world, but until recently these have not been appreciated, due, no doubt, to the unsystematic manner of their publication, and the still more important fact, that no serious effort has been made to bring these publications to the notice of those who would obtain the greatest results from them.

It seems unnecessary to give the reasons why a collection of documents should be a very important factor in the commercial life of a city, as the very collecting of reports by the special libraries gives

conclusive evidence of their value. The following show some of the problems such documents often help to solve.

In order to properly take up a new commercial line, or endeavor to enlarge the amount of business transacted by a firm already established, the business man should, in order to judge properly, as to the right course to pursue, examine the ground thoroughly, note the supply of raw material close at hand, and cost of transportation, if the factory is at a distance from the source of supply, so that this will not eat up the profit; the labor market, cost of food, rent of houses, and numerous other items all have to have careful consideration, especially as the trend of legislation today is to increase the amount of money paid to labor; also, as to the articles manufactured, he wishes to find out where the best markets are for his wares, what opposition he is likely to encounter in entering new territories, modes of packing, length of credit to be given, customs duties, protection of patented articles in foreign countries, effect of the climate on the goods he intends to sell, and many other points.

A firm engaged in the manufacture of electric and gas lamp posts, should be able to obtain illustrations of those in use in other cities of the world, their selling price, and any criticism as to their durability, adverse or favorable. This data might also enable the firm to suggest improvements, which would give more satisfactory results.

*Read before the National Association of State Libraries Kaaterskill Conference, June, 1913.

A house selling goods, which would come under the regulations of the pure food and drugs acts, national or state, wants, in the shortest possible time, access to publications containing rules and regulations, stating the manner in which goods must be labeled to be sold in a certain locality. If they write to Washington, or the capitol of the state to which they want to ship goods, and wait for the report, it often means that the sale is lost, as a purchaser, who is in a hurry, will cancel the order and buy from a nearby house.

A company engaged in making clothing generally has a large number of rolls of cloth on hand, and, if these contain wool, they are often attacked by insect life. Writing a letter requesting a remedy, and waiting a number of days for the reply, means a loss of goods and money which could have been avoided if the firm, within a few hours after the discovery of the ravages, could have obtained a report giving the necessary remedies.

The documents which seem to have the least practical use (according to the jokes about them) are the weather reports. But quite a number of persons wishing to go away for their health, or invest in lands for agricultural pursuits, or to change their habitations, have come in with the folders issued by land companies, railroads, etc., describing the new location as a paradise on earth, able to return five dollars on every dollar expended within the year, with testimonials (like patent medicine companies) with beautiful illustrations of homes supposed to be located there, describing the even temperature all year around, rain when you want it, the railroad station at your door, a beautiful river and superb shade trees. The intended victim by referring to these much abused weather reports, and also the agricultural and geological reports gets a true idea of things. These publications give cold facts of the actual conditions of the location so beautifully described and illustrated in the folders, and will most likely state that there is a dirty little stream in the spring, drying up in the summer, that the climate is very hot in summer and cold in winter, with rainfall once in a while, when the stream overflows and carries everything to destruction, that the nearest railroad station is forty miles away, with trains once a day. The intended investor or new inhabitant has his eyes opened to the true condition of affairs, and is enabled to save his health, time and money.

A firm gives out a rosy statement of certain mines asking investors to come in, often using quotations from official reports changed or only partly quoted, so as to read as though their scheme was the only one in the land in which to invest. The investor, by using documents will often

find the true facts about the fabulous rich mines, to be that the mine has been practically worked out, leaving only the skimmed milk.

Documents furnished a company with scientific and statistical facts, by which it will be able to start an entirely new industry, giving employment to a large number of persons directly and many more indirectly besides providing a nutritious meat at a price very much below that of cattle.

A promoter, by using the reports on turpentine, organized a company to engage in the manufacture of naval stores in which he has been very successful.

The geological maps of a certain district, by showing the value of the clay beneath the top soil, increased the value of a piece of land, formerly used for farming, many fold.

An engraving company, through documents, was enabled to ascertain whenever a bond issue was being considered, and by writing at once to the city, state or government having the floating of a loan under consideration, obtained a number of orders.

Representatives of foreign bodies are constantly using documents for reports to be published in their own countries for the use of investors and immigrants.

The monetary value of these documents to the commercial world cannot be given in figures, because one is seldom able to follow up the use made of the data collected by the investigators, but the results of any one of the above is surely of far more value than the circulation of a large number of volumes of fiction.

During my twenty-one years of experience in document work and in contact with investigators, I have come to know the real value of documents, but the further question arises, how may we make them of greater value to the community, at the lowest possible expenditure of money, consistent with efficiency? The following suggestions are offered:

First—A collection of documents, to be of commercial value should be located in the business portion of the city, and open to the public in the evenings.

Second—The assistants should, whenever possible, besides having a general knowledge of the collection, take up some special study using the documents wherever they are able, and if possible, have a working knowledge of one foreign language. A person asking for information on a subject studied by one of the assistants, would be assisted by this one, and thus obtain better results.

Third—Bibliographies and finding lists should be compiled and distributed and also noted in the newspapers.

Fourth—From time to time, workers en-

gaged in particular lines, should be invited to come to the library to listen to experts speak upon their subjects, who would emphasize the value of data in order to obtain the best results. At the same time, the library would display in cases or upon tables material bearing upon the subjects of the talks, and the workers, hearing of the value of books and seeing the quantity of valuable publications at their disposal, would gradually recognize the value of the volumes to them personally and make use of them in their daily work.

Fifth—A bulletin should be issued, daily, if possible, giving a list arranged by subjects of all current reports and the papers contained in them, which the library receives; also when the article is of value, a notation of the particular point mentioned in the paper. These bulletins could be made on the multigraph or some other similar machine, and sold at cost, and between time the machine could be used to do the printing needed by the library, or, this information could be printed on cards, and all cards on the subject selected by them be supplied to firms, etc., at so much per card, as is done by the Library of Congress. By this card system the firms subscribing and also the library, could at once place the cards in their catalogues. There are many firms who would gladly avail themselves of this privilege if the library would undertake to supply the index. Dod's building reports only note when bids are requested, but in many cases we could give the information as soon as a bid was contemplated.

Sixth—In order to obtain the greatest possible results, particular stress should be

given to the efficiency of the directors and of assistants, especially where they are to come into daily contact with this commercial world. The report of the Joint committee of the National municipal league and the National civil service reform league, upon "The selection and retention of experts in municipal office" is of special value in this connection as it recognizes that the bureau directors should be protected against removal except for just cause.

It is hardly necessary to say that the document as a commercial factor can be made of increasing value, as anyone, who has at heart the uplifting and advancement of mankind, by looking round is able to see where hundreds, yea thousands would be in a better position, if they had a greater knowledge of the business in which they are engaged. A glance at the history of the world will at once show that advancement only comes to those, who by their capability to acquire and properly use knowledge, prove their power.

Today, the library which had the foresight to collect documents, when they were looked upon as junk (as they still are by some) and were easily obtainable, can now see the difficulty which other libraries and especially some of the special libraries, are having in having to pay sometimes quite large sums for volumes to complete their sets, or often failing to do so altogether, and can look with pride upon its own collections and complete sets obtained with little money, now ready to be made of value to the commercial world. This demand will further increase with the growth of commerce with South America when the Panama Canal is completed

Select List of References on Pensions for Mothers, Motherhood Insurance, Etc.

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Alaskana

Description of the Library of Judge Wickersham, Delegate in Congress from Alaska

By Hugh A. Morrison, Library of Congress

The duties of a member of Congress are as diversified as they are multifarious, hence unless the member is endowed with a more than ordinary stock of energy, he confines his activities to those duties of unavoidable variety and to the distribution

of seeds which are expected to bring forth a generous crop of those votes which insure a retention of his name upon the Congressional rolls.

A notable exception to the usual rule is Judge Wickersham, delegate from the ter-

ritory of Alaska, and now serving his third term in such capacity. The reader doubtless is aware that a territorial delegate in Congress has all the rights, privileges, and duties of a member except that of voting. Judge Wickersham spent his early days practicing law in the state of Washington, and in 1900 was appointed federal judge for the third division of the territory of Alaska, serving two terms. Last August he was chosen for his third term as representative of that vast domain in Congress and he has constantly given his time and attention to matters pertaining to the welfare and advancement of that far-off possession of Uncle Sam's. Probably no member of the present House enjoys a wider circle of friends, nor is there a member whose record for integrity and devotion to duty is higher.

More than thirty years ago the Judge became interested in the accumulation of a library touching particularly upon the history of the Northwest Territory, and his interest in the work has never lagged. Dating from the earliest days of the establishment of that territory, he has copies of almost every document printed touching upon its acquisition, as well as countless works descriptive of its resources and possibilities. In fact, within this collection is, in many instances, the only copy known to be in existence containing data of priceless value. Since his entry into Congress as the duly accredited representative of Alaska he has carried on an exhaustive search for a similar historical material relating to that territory, dating from long before its purchase from Russia in 1867. He has now about completed the accumulation of more than three thousand books and documents containing, so far as the Judge is able to ascertain, everything that has ever been published or enacted into law, in any way affecting the territory. This work has entailed endless toil in searching the various departments for data, and in many instances he has, after the exercise of almost incredible patience in searches carried on in book stores, come into possession of works that will be in-

valuable to the completion of the history he seeks to accumulate. Within this collection is every Congressional document published since the territory was acquired, touching even remotely upon affairs of her concern. Copies of every law, proposed or enacted, is to be found in this vast mass of data. In addition he has, at a very great expense, accumulated more than five thousand photographic views of the scenery, development and points of greatest interest throughout the territory, which, arranged in massive and substantial albums, will become a most attractive feature of this vast library. It should be also said that the Judge has been most ably and faithfully assisted in this work during the later years by his secretary, Mr. G. A. Jeffery, who went from Washington state with him as his court stenographer upon his elevation to the bench, and has been in direct charge of Mr. Wickersham's office during his incumbency of the territorial delegateship.

About one year ago the writer was invited to assist in the work of cataloging and collecting the documents. The catalog is finished on cards and is now being prepared for printing.

It may be well to give here the method of compiling and binding this collection. About twenty-two hundred volumes were necessary, many of them having but one or more pages of matter relating to Alaska. These pages were extracted and placed together in volumes by subjects, and in this manner the size of the collection has been reduced to about five hundred volumes.

When this collection is completed and has been systematically indexed, it is the intention of the collector to present it to the public library of Fairbanks, his home city.

There is little question that not a state in the union will be able to boast of a more complete history of itself than will this far-off land, which within only recent years has been regarded by many of our people as almost uninhabitable and a burden to the United States.

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