THE BRITISH PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE AND THE MATERIALS IN IT FOR EARLY AMERICAN HISTORY.

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FORTY-FIVE years ago, when I was first appointed, our Public Records were dispersed in several Record Offices, scattered over various parts of London and elsewhere,—in the Chapter House at Westminster, in the Tower of London, the King's Mews at Charing Cross, at Carlton Ride, in the Rolls Chapel Office, Chancery Lane, in the State Paper Office in St. James's Park and other places too numerous to mention. Parliament had some ten years before, in 1838, had their attention drawn to this important subject, when the Act now so well known as the "Public Record Act" was passed. It recites that "Whereas the Public Records are in the keeping of several persons and many are kept in unfit buildings, and it is expedient to establish one Record Office and a better custody, and to allow the free use of the said records as far as stands with their safety and integrity and with the public policy of the realm," and then it goes on to enact that "the Records belonging to her Majesty be in the custody of the Master of the Rolls." The State Papers were by Treasury Minute dated 8 August, 1848, to be transferred to the Public Record Office on the death of the Keeper of State Papers. This took place in 1854, but it was not until the year 1862 that the entire contents of the State Paper Office were, on the demolition of that office, removed to the Record Repository in Fetter Lane.

A magnificent pile of buildings, the construction of which was commenced in 1851, has consequently been erected on what is called the Rolls Estate bounded on the east by

Fetter Lane, and on the west by Chancery Lane, and our Public Records have been collected together into a permanent home in this absolutely fire proof Repository, which although not yet finished, probably will be in another five or six years, as the works are now in progress toward completion.

An elaborate "Guide to the Principal Classes of Documents preserved in the Public Record Office, by S. R. Scargill Bird, F. S. A. of the Public Record Office" has lately been printed by the British Government. Mr. Scargill Bird in his Introduction says, "The Public Records of this country have been said to excel all others in age, beauty, correctness and authority! For a period of well-nigh 800 years they contain in an almost unbroken chain of evidence not only the political and constitutional history of the realm and the remotest particulars with regard to its financial and social progress, but also the history of the land and of its successive owners from generation to generation and of the legal procedure of the country from a time to which the memory of man runneth not to the contrary." This Guide is an exhaustive summary of the contents of the British Public Record Office, the oldest and most valuable record in the National Archives being "Domesday Book." As an example of the enormous bulk of the National Archives it will be sufficient to say that one class of documents alone, the Close Rolls of the Court of Chancery, comprise considerably over 18,000 rolls, whilst the Coram Rege and De Banco rolls, which are also numbered by thousands, are frequently of huge size, a single roll of the Tudor or Stuart period containing from 500 to 1,000 skins of parchment.

Before proceeding to dwell upon the materials for Early American History in the British Public Record Office, I should like to give a slight sketch of the history of the State Paper Office in which these "materials" were originally deposited.

The State Paper Office, or as it was originally called the "Office of her Majesty's papers and records for business of State and Council," was established by Queen Elizabeth under the Great Seal in 1578. It was first erected because through the often changing of the Secretaries of State the papers began to be embezzled, and it was thought necessary that a certain place should be appointed for them and a fit man chosen for registering and keeping them in order and to be tied by oath for the secrecy and safe-keeping of them. Applications to consult and make use of the State Papers by the public were originally very rare, and granted only to a favored few. There is evidence that Evelyn, Burnet, Le Strange, Collier, Strype, Chalmers and other writers of bygone days made use of the materials in the State Paper Office by special permission. But so religiously were these State Papers guarded that in 1775 Lord North, the Prime Minister, solicited "the King's approval to have free access to all correspondence in the Paper Office," and as late as 1854 I well remember no one under the rank of a Privy Councillor was allowed access to any of the Libraries or rooms in the State Paper Office, where the State Papers were kept. In fact that Office was the Library of the Secretaries of State, all of whom had sole control of their respective Documents whether Home, Foreign, or Colonial, the Home Secretary having the sole power of appointment of Officers to the State Paper Office. On the death of the last Keeper of State Papers, in 1854, all this was changed, the State Paper Office was consolidated with the Public Record Office in accordance with the Treasury Minute of 1848, and the State Papers were all removed as before mentioned to Fetter Lane in 1862, the Office in St. James's Park was pulled down and the space utilized for part of the present India Office. Those who are interested will find an exhaustive introduction to a Calendar of Documents relating to the history of the State Paper Office, in an appendix to

the thirtieth report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, which I was instructed to prepare in 1869.

It was in the State Paper Office that I had my first experience of official work and became acquainted with its contents, and it was there, in 1848, that I had the honor of being introduced to the Honorable George Bancroft, then American Minister at the Court of St. James. Mr. Bancroft was making researches among our State Papers for his History of America, and it was he who led me to take a special interest in our Colonial State Papers by asking me to assist him in his researches, until I became I verily believe as deeply interested in the discovery of any new documents as he was himself. I well remember bringing to his notice for the first time a "Report of proceedings in the General Assembly convened at James City in Virginia July 30, 1619," and his pleasure in reading it. This was the first Assembly ever held in America, and, although Mr. Bancroft knew very well that such an Assembly met about that time, he did not know the exact date of their meeting, and had not until then been able to discover any documentary evidence about it.

For nearly forty years, I enjoyed the friendship of Mr. Bancroft, and, although some time before his death I only corresponded with him at intervals, he never omitted to show his regard for me whenever an opportunity occurred. I know he had manuscript volumes of transcripts in his Library I had made for him which comprised more than ten reams of paper. One of his last acts of kindness was to recommend to the State of North Carolina that I should be employed to assist the Secretary of State in collecting together all the documents in the British Public Record Office relating to the Colonial history of that State.

All the materials for early American history, or nearly all, were about the year 1830 transferred to Her Majesty's State Paper Office at Westminster, a handsome building situated at the corner of Duke Street, and facing St. James's Park,

and it was not until the year 1862, when the site of the State Paper Office was required for the India Office, that the former Office was pulled down, and the State Papers were removed to Fetter Lane. The State Paper Office had not been built more than about thirty years, at an expense of £60,000. I well remember some two or three years before, four cabinet ministers of Lord Palmerston's Government coming on a visit of inspection to see whether the State Paper Office could not be made in some way available as a part of the newly projected Foreign and India Offices, and the intense excitement of the officials of the State Paper Office as to the result, but the fiat came forth, the birthplace of my official life was doomed, and I in conjunction with my colleagues drifted to the Public Record Office in Fetter Lane.

The inception of early American history dates naturally from the Charters or Letters Patent from the British Crown under which the original States of the Great American Republic were settled, and these are to be found enrolled on the Patent Rolls, and therefore never were deposited in the State Paper Office but almost invariably copied, and very frequently certified copies are to be found in the Colonial Entry Books. I may here remark that I believe all these original Charters are in English, with the exception of Maryland which is in Latin. Rather more than twenty years ago, on 21 December, 1869, as doubtless many will remember, the late Mr. Charles Deane read a paper of the utmost value for research and historical accuracy before the Massachusetts Historical Society on "The forms in issuing Letters Patent by the Crown of England, in connection with the Massachusetts Charter." I had the privilege of assisting Mr. Deane in his labors at that time, and I remember consulting my learned chief, the late Sir Thomas Duffus Hardy, than whom there was not a higher authority in this Kingdom on the procedure of granting Letters Patent. Mr. Deane has so ably embodied all the information he obtained

in his exhaustive paper, that I will only in this place give two deviations from "the forms in issuing letters patent" which have come to my knowledge since Mr. Deane's paper was read. On 24 June, 1665, King Charles II. commanded "That this pardon pass by our Great Seal by immediate warrant without Privy Seal or Signet." Again, Queen Anne, on 1 July, 1702, directed a Privy Seal "which for this purpose will serve as well as a broad seal," and it would not be difficult to find other departures from the usual procedure.

All the Colonial State Papers in the British Public Office relating to very early American history have already been printed and published at the expense of the British Government under my editorship. These consist of three royal octavo volumes of between 700 and 800 pages each, down to the end of the year 1674, or just one hundred years from the date of the "Supplication" of Sir Humphrey Gylberte, Sir George Peckham, Mr. Carlile, Sir Richard Grenville and others to Queen Elizabeth, "to allow of an enterprise by them conceived at their charges and adventure to be performed for discovery of sundry rich and unknown lands." I am now engaged upon a fourth volume, which I hope to complete by the end of this year, nearly half of which will contain an Addenda of early and valuable documents beginning with the "Supplication" above mentioned, and will include, I expect, the years 1675, 1676 and 1677, and a very full and in many respects new account of Bacon's rebellion in Virginia.

But I have not yet given an account of the subdivisions of our series of early Colonial State Papers and how they came to be made. There are three series, viz:—Colonial Papers and Colonial Entry Books, which date from the earliest period down to 1688, the date of our revolution. These are in course of being calendared, and as before stated are printed and published down to 1674. This series consists of seventy-two volumes of original papers and one

hundred and ten volumes of Entry Books. From 1689 to 1783 there are two further series, viz: — America and West Indies and Board of Trade, the former series being the correspondence with the Secretary of State and emanating from that Department, the latter as the title implies the correspondence with and papers of the Board of Trade. Now previous to the year 1768, when George III. appointed a third Secretary of State for the American or Colonial Department, which Office was however abolished in 1782, but re-instituted twelve years later, when a Secretary for War was appointed who had also charge of the business of the Colonies, there were only two Secretaries of State, one for the Northern and one for the Southern Department, and the affairs of the Colonies devolved upon the elder of these two Secretaries who had therefore charge of the correspondence with the American Colonies, and this series of America and West Indies contains the correspondence in question.

With respect to the Board of Trade series there are no papers anterior to 1660, and for this solid reason that a "Council for Trade and also a Council for Foreign Plantations" was not created until the end of 1660. It is said that Cromwell seems to have given the first notion of a Board of Trade. Twelve years later however these Boards were united, but in 1782 they were abolished, and in 1786 the Board of Trade as at present constituted was formed. Although it would seem obvious that the nature of the papers in these two series of America and West Indies and Board of Trade would be very different, the one as relating chiefly to matters of the internal government of each particular Colony, the proceedings of Council and the Legislative Assemblies, the other as referring to matters of trade, shipping, imports and exports, &c., still this is not the case, for more frequently than not the letters of the respective Governors to the Board of Trade relate circumstantially and in much detail all that had taken place in their respective

Colonies, whereas those to the Secretary of State are of the most meagre description. Whether this was the reason for fresh instructions being given to the Governors I am unable to say, but certain it is that more than once they were instructed to send duplicates of every letter written to the Secretary of State and to the Board of Trade, so that at particular periods such duplicates are to be found in both of these series.

The "Colonial Papers" down to 1688 are arranged and calendared in chronological order without reference to the Colony, but after that date the papers become very numerous and they are bound in separate Colonies, but always in chronological order. Between 1689 and 1783, a period of nearly one hundred years, there are upwards of 1,500 bound volumes, containing the unbroken history, or nearly so, of each of the original States of the American Republic. Hundreds of these are to be found in the America and West Indies series and hundreds in the Board of Trade series. In those Governments which were immediately under the crown of Great Britain, all the documents relating to each particular Colony will be found chronologically arranged and bound, or rather I should say the chronological arrangement is subservient to the date the document was *received*, not written, and very frequently to the date when it was *read* by the Lords of Trade. In the constant searches I have had among these Board of Trade papers I have found this arrangement exceedingly inconvenient and perplexing. I will give one example only; the Law Officers of the Crown reported on certain Acts passed in South Carolina in 1730, but because this report was not *read* at the Board until 1734, four years later, it is placed in that year; the mischief of such an arrangement is obvious as a searcher would scarcely prosecute his search four years beyond the date he ought to find the document, unless he was well aware of this peculiar arrangement. With respect to the Proprietary Governments a search is more

tedious because there is a separate series of Board of Trade "Proprieties," where all those documents are to be found mixed up together, though in chronological order, so that you have to search through probably half a dozen volumes, instead of one, to enable you to find the special documents relating to the particular Colony you are in quest of. No sooner however does the British Government take over the government of a Proprietary Colony than it immediately becomes a Royal Government under a distinct and separate series, as North Carolina from 1720 and South Carolina from 1730. I think the system adopted by the Lords of Trade in the reigns of William and Mary and Queen Anne is worthy of great commendation, for so complete are the cross references on the endorsements of the original papers of that period and in the "Entry Books," which contain letters *to* the Governors, their Commissions, Instructions &c., &c., that after studying the system it is not difficult to trace all that took place in any matter of importance which came before the Lords of Trade. There is another series of Board of Trade papers called "Plantations General," which as the title implies refers to the Plantations in general, being Reports and Representations of the Lords of Trade to the King and Privy Council and other Departments of the home Government on the state and condition of more than one Colony, frequently on all of them, circular letters to the several Governors on all kinds of subjects, additional instructions, and in short on all matters which concern the Plantations in general and cannot be assigned to any one Colony in particular. Perhaps the most valuable of the Board of Trade series are their Journals, which consist of upwards of one hundred volumes, commencing with the year 1675, down to the dissolution of that Board. One regrets but too often the meagre entries on subjects one is most anxious to know all about. When however persons interested in the matter in controversy, such for instance as the advisability or otherwise of confirming

a certain Act, are summoned before the Lords of Trade the account is generally pretty full and satisfactory. One thing must not be forgotten that these Journals most distinctly give an account of all that came before their Lordships, even, as is too frequently the case, if the Governors' letters and other papers in connection therewith are only "read."

It will perhaps be as well to state the relative proportion of volumes for each Colony.

NEW ENGLAND numbers 51 vols. in Board of Trade series and 5 vols. in America and West Indies series.

MASSACHUSETTS, dated from 1741, numbers 90 vols. Board of Trade and 15 vols. America and West Indies.

NEW HAMPSHIRE, from 1691, numbers 22 vols. Board of Trade and 10 vols. America and West Indies.

NEW YORK 123 vols. Board of Trade and 33 vols. America and West Indies.

NEW JERSEY, from 1702, numbers 38 vols. Board of Trade and 14 vols. America and West Indies.

RHODE ISLAND, CONNECTICUT and PENNSYLVANIA are in Proprieties.

MARYLAND numbers 32 vols. Board of Trade and 6 vols. America and West Indies.

NORTH CAROLINA in Proprieties, up to 1730.

SOUTH CAROLINA in Proprieties, up to 1720.

NORTH, CAROLINA, from 1730, numbers 42 vols.Board of Trade and 17 vols. America and West Indies.

SOUTH CAROLINA, from 1720, numbers 145 vols. Board of Trade and 25 vols. America and West Indies.

VIRGINIA 93 vols. Board of Trade and 45 vols. America and West Indies.

GEORGIA, from 1732, numbers 53 vols. Board of Trade and 16 vols. America and West Indies.

PLANTATIONS GENERAL 60 vols. Board of Trade and 39 vols. America and West Indies.

TO AND FROM GOVERNORS IN AMERICA, 1743–1761, 13 vols. in America and West Indies.

MILITARY CORRESPONDENCE, EXPEDITIONS, ORDERS IN COUNCIL, &c., &c., about 250 vols. in America and West Indies.

Besides these fifteen hundred volumes, which include an almost unbroken series of the Journals of Council and Assembly of each Colony, which by the way I have reason to believe are far from complete on your side, we have a fine collection of the Acts of Assembly which were periodically transmitted to the British Government by the several Governors; these Acts are all certified and were sent over under the Great Seal of the Colony, but sad to relate the seals have been removed for convenience of binding, as frequently notified on the Acts themselves. This series of Acts consists of one hundred and eighteen volumes, and although I regret to say many of the earlier Acts are missing still it is a grand collection, and from the date of the commencement of each series it is generally unbroken and complete. It may perhaps appear strange that with two or three noteworthy exceptions we have no record of Grants of Land—the only three exceptions being New York and North and South Carolina; the Grants in New York date from 1665 and are contained in one large volume, those in North Carolina from 1725 to 1771, and those in South Carolina from 1674 to 1765, in a somewhat similar volume. Nevertheless it must be remembered that each Governor had special clauses in his instructions as to the granting of land, one clause being that every grant was to be registered in the Surveyor General's Office in the Colony, and therefore when the Governor referred to these Grants of Land, which was very seldom, he would send home simply a list of the names to whom the Grants were made with the number of acres. This is certainly not generally known, or at all events remembered, in the United States, for I have had scores of queries on this subject to which I have scarcely ever been able to return satisfactory answers.

It is almost needless to observe that in our Great National Establishment the British Museum are preserved among the magnificent collection of manuscripts, very many

valuable papers relating to early American history. But these it will be remembered have for the most part been acquired by gift, legacy or purchase from private or official persons, and although of the highest value and importance they are essentially of a somewhat different character from our Public Records. Our Public Records have never been out of official custody, and as is well known, any Public Record copied, stamped with the office seal and duly certified by an Assistant Keeper of the Public Records, is by the "Public Record Act" admitted as legal evidence in a Court of Law in this country just the same as the original would be. This is certainly of the highest importance, not only to the legal, but also to the historical and literary profession, as showing incontestably the undoubted authenticity of all documents in the British Public Record Office.

As may readily be imagined, it is not always easy to decipher the crabbed and peculiar handwriting of many of these early papers. Occasionally those who have attempted to copy them have fallen into most singular blunders. I will only quote two or three to be found in "New York Documents," Vol. III. The word "rendezvous" has been transformed into and copied "landing on." Again, "There are no soldiers" has been copied instead of "there are 100 soldiers," a serious mistake; and in a translation from the French M. Hertel is made to say, "I arrived in alarm," when what he really did say was, "I arrived at the army."

I know of no Government official who seems to have occupied so much time in trying to keep himself well informed of the condition and character of our Colonies as Sir Joseph Williamson, as evidenced by the mass of notes and minutes in his own handwriting, most difficult to read—neither do I know of any public official less accurate. This is the more to be wondered at as he is known to have been most painstaking in the numerous official employments which he held at various times, some of which were of the highest trust and importance. Not only did he fill the

Offices of Under Secretary and Secretary of State in the reign of Charles II., for a considerable time, but he also took a prominent part both at the Congress at Cologne and in the Treaties of Nimeguen and Ryswick, and at last became Keeper of Her Majesty's State Papers.

But Sir Joseph Williamson was not the only Government official who was at times inaccurate.

There is an Order of the Privy Council dated 23 February, 1703/4, appointing Dudley Digges a Member of the Council of the *Island of Virginia.* Again, Mr. West, the Counsel at Law to the Lords of Trade, in a report dated 10 May, 1725, on certain Acts passed in Pennsylvania, speaks of that Colony as *an Island*, while the Duke of Newcastle, himself Secretary of State in the reign of George II., called New England *an Island*, so that even Members of the Government in those days do not seem to have troubled themselves very much about the geographical position of our Colonies.

It was not unusual to reward public men of distinguished ability with seats at the Board of Trade and Plantations — Locke was in the first place appointed Secretary to the Lords Commissioners in October, 1673, with a salary of £500 per annum, and his ten years experience of Colonial Affairs must have materially added to his usefulness at that Board. Twenty-two years later, in 1695, he was appointed one of the Lords Commissioners. Waller, Prior and Newton were likewise appointed to a similar office, while Addison became Under Secretary of State, Pepys Secretary to the Admiralty, and Steele held the office of Commissioner of Stamps besides other appointments.

I well know how many invaluable publications have been issued by the various historical societies in America, but these are I submit but so many chapters of a History, fragmentary as it were and incomplete. It is some fifty years since the State of New York published the 11 vols. 4to of their *Documentary History*, but only quite recently that North Carolina published under the editorship of the Hon-

orable W. L. Saunders, Secretary of State, the ten royal 8vo volumes of their Colonial Records, Mr. Saunders just living to complete his task. These latter volumes are a monument to the Secretary's fame, and the correct elucidation of the Colonial history of his native State. I know of no more masterly summing up of the different periods in the history of North Carolina than the able introductions prefixed to each volume of this work. I may add that the Legislature of South Carolina has lately voted money for a similar work which is now going forward rapidly towards completion.

I have made a life-long study of these Colonial Records of which I have given so very imperfect an account, but I shall be well satisfied if I succeed in rivetting the attention of so learned and discriminating a body of scholars as the American Antiquarian Society to the carrying out a scheme I have had at heart for the past thirty years—which is earnestly to urge upon the respective Governments of those States of America which have a history from their first settlement, to obtain at the earliest opportunity complete copies of their invaluable records in the British Public Record Office. The advantages of so doing cannot be overrated, and I venture to say from my own long experience that the cost would soon be repaid, inasmuch as American students of their own history, instead of being obliged as they are now, frequently at great inconvenience and always at considerable expense, to employ Agents in this country to make searches and copies for them, would be able if copies of these records were within their own reach, to do this themselves or at all events to employ those with whom they are personally acquainted to assist them in so congenial a work. In illustration of my remarks I may perhaps be allowed to say that there is scarcely a writer of history in your Great Republic whom, during the past forty years, I have not had the honor of assisting in a greater or less degree, and I am even now proud to number my American correspondents by the score.

MEMOIR OF MAJOR-GENERAL THOMAS HARRISON.

BY CHARLES H. FIRTH.

THOMAS HARRISON was a native of Newcastle-under-Lyme in the County of Staffordshire. His grandfather Richard Harrison was mayor of that borough in 1594 and 1608. His father, also named Richard, was four times mayor of his native town, viz.: in 1626, 1633, 1643 and 1648, and was an Alderman at the time of his death. Contemporary authorities agree in describing the second Richard Harrison as a butcher by trade, and the register of the parish church of Newcastle states that he was buried on March 25, 1653. The same register also records the burial of his widow "Mrs. Mary Harrison, of the Cross," on May 18, 1658.

Thomas Harrison, the future regicide, was born in 1616. "Thomas Harrison filius Richardi, bapt. July 2"[1] is the entry in the baptismal register of the parish for the year. His father then resided in a house opposite to the Market-Cross, which was pulled down some years ago and replaced by shops.

Of Thomas Harrison's early life little is known. He was probably educated at the grammar school of the town, or of some neighboring town. He does not appear to have been a member of either University. After leaving school he became clerk to an attorney, Thomas Houlker[2] of Clif-

[1] For all facts derived from the register of Newcastle-under-Lyme, and for all extracts from the records of the borough I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Robert Fenton, of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

[2] Thomas Houlker died on Sept. 8, 1643. His brother-in-law Richard Smyth, recording in 1660 the execution of General Harrison, adds the words "once my brother Houlker's clerk" (Obituary of Richard Smyth, pp. 21, 52). Sir John Bramston, in his autobiography, states that his relation, John Bramston, was "putt to an attorney a clerke, but when the wars began his fellow clerke, Harrison, persuaded him to take armes" (this is that famous rogue Harrison one of the King's judges) (p. 21.)