

HISTORICAL BOOKKEEPING BY QUADRUPLE ENTRY¹

Local historical societies suffer from the need of a simple method of keeping historical records and the method adopted by the St. Louis County Historical Society is planned to fill this need. It is easy to apply, and may be learned in a few hours by any intelligent person. Any inquirer for historical information in the territory covered by a society using this method is able to find relevant facts on any subject under inquiry if they are included among the records in the possession of the society. The system is like a first-class modern index in a book, although its scope is much wider. The record deals with the past and the present. Current events of all kinds are entered. Facts relating to persons and events of the past are constantly being assembled and these are noted from day to day in the appropriate places. Documents are preserved and indexed. There are four classes of entries, which are so fully cross-indexed that nothing is lost or buried. As now developed, this type of bookkeeping satisfies the purposes of counties or cities having a population of 250,000 or less. The cataloguing of historical libraries, museums, and pictures is a supplemental work to be taken up where necessary.

Mechanically the bookkeeping requires a set of metal or wooden boxes with sliding frames in each box. There may be as few as four to begin with, but they should be of the type that may be added to at will either perpendicularly or laterally

¹One of the distinctive achievements of the St. Louis County Historical Society, which has its headquarters at Duluth, Minnesota, is the system of "historical bookkeeping" worked out and successfully administered by its president, the Honorable William E. Culkin. It is believed that his description of the system, herewith published, will be read with interest by many local historical workers who are concerned about the proper preservation and administration of records. *Ed.*

as need arises. The four kinds of entries are (1) chronological, (2) personal, (3) subject records, and (4) accessions. The records are kept in Manila folders, each with a tab on one edge. When a folder is used for the bookkeeping it is placed upright in the proper case with a notation on the tab of the folder showing what it deals with. The folders are held upright by sliding contrivances that can be bought with the cases.

The chronological entries in the index are simple to make. A folder is set apart for each year in the county history. Cards are placed in the appropriate folder for any year outlining briefly the main events of that year. When such a chronology has been completed an inquirer may turn to any year in the county's history and at once find out what took place in that year. As the folders are arranged in the order of time, this chronology needs no special index.

Personal entries constitute an important group. The names of all persons—living or dead—whose achievements are being recorded are entered separately in folders, one to a person. In the folder relating to a given individual all facts available about him or her are preserved. These may be preserved in many different forms, such as letters, autographs, photographs, genealogical documents, biographical sketches, and newspaper clippings. Folders containing such materials are of real interest. Such a biographical record is open to all names, with no line drawn between those of special importance and the others. In time, doubtless those of real importance will stand out and be recognized. This group needs no special index, as the names are arranged alphabetically.

Subject records comprise the third series of folders of the quadruple entry bookkeeping. This series needs no special index—though one may be convenient—because the subjects are filed alphabetically. A separate Manila folder is used for any subject of interest to the people of the territory in which the society is specially interested. There is no binding

formula. The subjects mount gradually to several hundred. Some examples are agricultural development, altitudes, local authors, banking, bench and bar, Boy Scouts, census reports, churches, minerals, mining, museums, lumbering, the fur trade, flora, fauna, the French régime, the British régime, railroads, the World War, the American Revolution, Indian lore, Kiwanians, Rotarians, racial groups, societies, manufacturing, missionaries, old settlers, public lands, exploration, and libraries. Each society would of course work out the details of its own subject entries.

Under any subject record, any historical fact or any development relevant to the subject is recorded by means of newspaper clippings, travelers' tales, or any information in whatever form it may come. The index of personal entries may here be supplemented, for under the appropriate general heading among the subject records a store of information about individuals may turn up.

"Accessions" are in a special sense the documentary possessions of the society. They are old narratives in print or in writing, papers read at the society meetings, old deeds and wills, and the like, as well as pictures and all other articles of historical value. A folder is set apart for each accession, which is numbered in the order of its receipt. In the case of a document, the accession may be kept in the folder. Where the accession is a large volume or a large framed picture or a museum article, a memorandum of it goes in the folder and the accession itself is placed in an appropriate place. Each accession has its own number stamped upon it permanently, and this number is also noted on the tab of the folder. When the accession does not lend itself to such an inscription a tag is attached to it with the number indicated and a brief memorandum. Notations give the history of an accession, the time when it was received, and by whom donated or from whom purchased. In the front of this group of folders there should be two indexes. One of these is a list of the accessions in

numerical order, in which each is described. The other index relates to the persons, places, things, and events recorded in every accession. Such indexes are always open to additions and are constantly enlarged as accessions are received.

Cross-indexing is of much value and is easily done through the four groups of entries described. It is evident that facts entered in any one of the groups often may have a bearing on an entry or entries in the other groups. Cross-indexing is done on cards about three by four inches in size. An illustration of this method may be given. Assume that the personal record contains a folder relating to John Smith; this contains his photograph, a biographical sketch, newspaper clippings about him, his autograph on an old letter, and other similar items. It appears that he wrote an article on "Early Settlers," which was not published. He opened the first farm in the county in 1832. His article on "Early Settlers" is Accession Number 116 of the society. To cross-index place a dated card in the personal folder with these notations: see accession folder 116; see subject-folder "Agricultural Development"; see year 1832. Then a card is placed in each of the folders indicated referring back to John Smith's personal folder. Thus the bookkeeping guides one to the materials on John Smith and his relation to his environment. Search may open other lines of information on a given topic, such as agricultural development. If the subject is still living he will be anxious to add to the record. If he is dead, his descendants or friends often will be glad to add to it.

All papers and other items received by historical societies should have noted on them by stamp or otherwise when and from whom received. Such notations, which are essential, become more and more important as time passes. Other memoranda in reference to a paper or article of importance should be made. A supplemental notation on a card should reveal when the paper was written, by whom, and the occa-

sion of it. As to museum items, these are of little value to the public unless accompanied by historical memoranda. Newspaper clippings should carry the date of publication and the name of the paper. The system of bookkeeping here described does not contemplate the mounting of such clippings. Notations are made on the clippings, which are then filed. In all well-organized historical societies such notations are deemed essential, but in many societies this noting is not carefully done.

Cataloguing supplements the bookkeeping, but is not necessary until the collections have become sizable. The fields usually in need of cataloguing are (1) the library, (2) the collection of pictures, and (3) museum articles. Local historical libraries for most jurisdictions should exclude all books except those relevant to the territory covered by the society, and therefore they should be small and select. Catalogues of pictures and photographs are convenient for reference. Catalogues of museum items are necessary for reference. These catalogues may be made up in card index boxes of small size for handy reference. But the bookkeeping should carry in proper form and place references to the books in the library, to pictures, and to museum articles. All this is easy and not at all complicated. In fact all historical societies have methods of record-keeping. The method described in this article is thought to be orderly and better than those in use in some jurisdictions, and therefore it is recommended.

Each of the four classes of entries is kept in a separate box or boxes, with the sliding frame attached to the front. On the front an appropriate card is fixed showing what is in the box. The boxes are set in tiers. After accumulated material has been arranged in such boxes, the current work can probably be kept up with little effort in most localities. An hour devoted to the task on each working day will do wonders. This plan is not only useful for regularly organized societies but would be very useful for counties or cities without such

societies. Some official or clerk might be made a county historical record-keeper and a set of record boxes be kept in a public vault open to appropriate contributions.

This plan, worked out by the undersigned, is not patented, and so it is available without cost to any society that wishes to use it. Filing boxes can be bought from dealers or made of wood by a cabinet-maker. Since historical records become more and more valuable as time passes, they should be kept if possible in a fireproof building. The St. Louis County Historical Society uses this plan and it issues this description for the consideration of those historically-minded. It will welcome suggestions in reference to the plan.

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