

HOUSE.....

.....No. 58.

REPORT AND RESOLVE

RELATING TO THE

PUBLIC ARCHIVES

OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Jan. 26, 1838.

Ordered, That so much of the Address of His Excellency the Governor, as relates to the arrangement of the papers in the public archives, be referred to a Special Committee of this House, to consider and report: and

Messrs. SHATTUCK, *of Boston*,
SAWYER, *of Bolton*, and
WADSWORTH, *of Duxbury*,

are appointed.

L. S. CUSHING, *Clerk.*

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The Committee to whom was referred "so much of the Address of His Excellency the Governor, as relates to the arrangement of the papers in the Public Archives," beg leave respectfully to make the following

REPORT:

The value of the records and documents in the archives of Massachusetts, has long awakened a lively interest in those, who, by their historical researches, have been brought to an acquaintance with them; embracing as they do, the several periods and forms of our past government. Many of them have been deposited, for several years, in the fire-proof room belonging to the secretary's office, and the rest in other parts of the state house. Though these papers were filed with usual care, for the purpose of business, yet with reference to historical investigation, it was supposed, that they might be more safely and conveniently arranged. In accordance with this supposition, entertained by many who appreciated the fair fame of the Commonwealth, His Excellency the Governor called the attention of the Legislature to the subject, in January, 1836. Soon after this time, a peti-

tion was presented in relation to the same matter, by the Massachusetts Historical Society. On the 11th March, 1836, the Legislature passed a resolve, authorizing the Governor to appoint some individual, who should spend his whole time in preparing the public papers to be bound; with tables of contents in each volume, for convenient reference and safe preservation. Such a resolve was renewed April 16, 1837. The office was conferred on Rev. Joseph B. Felt. He commenced his services April 26, 1836, and has continued them to the present time, subject to the supervision of the secretary of state. The committee have examined his labors, and are highly gratified with the result. He seems to be eminently qualified for the office, by his general education, historical knowledge, antiquarian taste, and patience in investigation, and to have discharged his duties with good judgment, and great fidelity. The papers assorted, arranged, and bound during the first year, were as follow :—

Colonial papers,	2	volumes,	from	1629	to	1720.
Ecclesiastical	“	2	“	“	1637	“ 1739.
Estates	“	1	“	“	1636	“ 1671.
Indian	“	1	“	“	1639	“ 1705.
Inter Charter	“	3	“	“	1689	“ 1692.
Judicial	“	1	“	“	1640	“ 1658.
Maritime	“	1	“	“	1641	“ 1671.
Military	“	3	“	“	1643	“ 1680.
Political	“	1	“	“	1638	“ 1700.
Revolution	“	1	“	“		1689.
Usurpation	“	4	“	“	1686	“ 1688.

It will be perceived, that these papers are classified into subjects, and arranged into volumes chronologically.

Each of the above 20 volumes has a table of contents, describing the substance of every paper, placed according to its date, and preceded by the page where it is to be found. Five of them also, have full alphabetical indexes of all the names, and principal things which they contain. The following volumes have been prepared during the last year.

Commercial papers,	1	volume,	from 1686 to 1714.
Foreign relations,	2	“	“ 1658 “ 1758.
Hutchinson's corres- pondence,	3	“	“ 1741 “ 1774.
Hutchinson's MS. 2nd volume of his history,	1	“	“ 1691 “ 1750.
Indian papers,	3	“	“ 1705 “ 1775.
“ conferences,	1	“	“ 1713 “ 1776.
Indian treaties,	1	“	“ 1645 “ 1776.
Letters,	6	“	“ 1692 “ 1774.
Literary papers,	1	“	“ 1645 “ 1774.
Maritime “	1	“	“ 1672 “ 1694.
Muster rolls,	3	“	“ 1710 “ 1755.
Pecuniary papers,	1	“	“ 1629 “ 1694.
Speeches, messages, &c.	3	“	“ 1702 “ 1774.
Towns papers,	1	“	“ 1629 “ 1686.
Travelling, &c. “	1	“	“ 1644 “ 1774.
Treasury “	3	“	“ 1707 “ 1757.

The whole amounting to 32 volumes. Tables of contents are prepared to 4 only of these volumes, as it was thought most expedient first to arrange and bind as

many as possible during the year. Beside preparing these volumes, Mr. Felt has assorted in a general manner, all the remaining files and papers down to 1775. These are on the following subjects, and will probably make the number of volumes specified against them.

Agriculture,	1	volume.	Manufactures,	1	volume.
Colonial,	3	“	Maritime,	5	“
Ecclesiastical,	3	“	Military,	12	“
Estates,	5	“	Pecuniary,	4	“
French neutrals,	2	“	Social relations,	1	“
Legislature,	2	“	Taverns, &c.,	1	“
Journals,	1	“	Towns, &c.,	5	“
Judicial,	7	“	Trade,	4	“
Lands granted,	2	“	Miscellaneous,	2	“
Laws,	1	“			

It is supposed, that these sixty-two volumes may be prepared and bound in the course of another year. The whole will then consist of one hundred and fourteen large volumes, averaging about four hundred MS. pages, each page containing, in many instances, several documents; and supplying some of the richest contribution for history, and being easily accessible.

Mr. Webster has remarked, that “nobler records of patriotism exist no where than in the New England towns.” The records of the Commonwealth are not only the reflection, but oftentimes the very source of such light and patriotism, and deserve a higher compliment, if possible, than that just quoted from our eminent statesmen. To preserve them is, and ever should be, alike the duty and pleasure of her citizens. Mr. Felt, in a communication to the committee, says, “Among the methods for

perpetuating the honorable name of the Commonwealth, where can be found a greater, than the provident keeping of such records? It may have costly monuments of stone or marble, or brass, to commemorate some of its most noble deeds.—It may have its public improvements to multiply its resources; its institutions of charity to relieve physical and intellectual necessities; of literature to shed the light of knowledge; and of corrective discipline to preserve our fire-sides from lawless outrage; and such benefactions to bespeak its wisdom and its worth. Still, can all these bring us to so near an interview with it; afford us so intimate an acquaintance with its character, or so animated a personification of its motives, manners, and deserts, and thereby furnish us with the information, inducements, and ability to give a salutary impulse to its advancement,—as the written narrative of its doings? The ark of Israel was kept with much cost and great vigilance; and yet, what was that, compared with the scroll of the covenant, which it contained? It was no small gem in the crown of Darius, that “search was made in the house of the rolls,” and the decree for rebuilding Jerusalem was there cautiously deposited. A similar honor has ever rested, and always will rest, on the brow of such law-givers, as provide for the benefit of their archives. By making a suitable arrangement of their historical documents, they do much to aid in embalming the memory of the Commonwealth, to enlarge its respectability, and keep alive and spread abroad the beneficial knowledge of its character and institutions.” In these sentiments the committee fully concur.

The manner in which these papers are arranged has already attracted the attention of other states. New

Hampshire and Rhode Island have copied our example, and are arranging their papers in the same way.

The committee are of opinion, that it is highly expedient that all the papers, dated prior to the revolution, in 1775, which are now generally assorted, should be particularly arranged and bound like those already completed; and for this purpose it is necessary, that the same appropriation as was made last year, should be again provided for by this Legislature.

In connection with the subject already presented, your committee have been forcibly reminded of the fact, that the public are not generally aware of the large mass of printed and manuscript volumes, documents and papers, under the care of the secretary and other public officers of the Commonwealth. A particular description of them, which would serve, in some considerable degree, as an index, to be consulted by any individual, wherever residing, would be exceedingly valuable to the community.

Your committee would, therefore, recommend, that such a description be prepared by the secretary, under direction of the governor, and submitted to the next Legislature. They report the accompanying resolve.

All which is respectfully submitted in behalf of the committee.

LEMUEL SHATTUCK, *Chairman.*

Boston, March 21, 1838.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-Eight.

R E S O L V E

Relating to the Archives of the Commonwealth.

Resolved, That the sum of two thousand dollars is hereby appropriated to be expended by the secretary of the Commonwealth, under direction of his excellency the governor, in providing for the preservation and security of the papers and documents in the archives of the Commonwealth; and that a warrant be drawn accordingly. And the secretary of the Commonwealth is hereby instructed, under direction of his excellency the governor, to prepare and submit to the next Legislature, a detailed description of the books, manuscripts, and documents, in the public archives.

