

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

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## EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

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### SUNDRY UNJUST BURTHENS.

The above is the heading of an editorial for the *Annals of Iowa*, prepared by Charles Aldrich, its editor, and the founder of the Historical Department of Iowa. His thought was upon the then recent appropriation for the completion of the Historical Building, a contribution toward housing an institution devoted essentially to administration of the historical, memorial and art interests of the State.

### SUNDRY UNJUST BURTHENS.

It has been the fortune of the Historical Department of Iowa to carry certain burthens which should entitle us to a consideration we have never received. We refer to the appropriations made for the erection of the Historical Building. We have constantly, ever since the collections were transferred to the west wing of the new building, been held and considered to be asking, like Oliver Twist, for more. The moneys that have been appropriated for this prevented us from receiving our just share of money for the increase of our Museum, and for the purchase of books, and for other expenses, which we have been unable to meet from the limited amount that has been assigned to the Department. Were the writer to ask for additional funds, the economical senator or representative would say, "Just look at the thousands you are getting for the building!" We have taken occasion sometimes to tell them that while we are glad to see the appropriations for the construction of the edifice, the charging of them against this Department is a sort of starvation and checking of efforts which should be promptly put forth, not only to increase the Museum, but to increase the Department in other directions.

We have always regarded the Museum as the most important adjunct to this Department, aside perhaps from *The Annals*. The Museum needs or should have two or three thousand dollars a year, for the following reason: It is the most visited and most prized and the most valuable exhibit which has been placed before the masses of our people. The State University can make a much more attrac-

tive exhibit, but it is in a way a sort of exclusive affair, devoted largely to the interests of the students. This is all right, and we would not reduce the growth of the State Museum at Iowa City for any consideration. But the thousands of people who come to Des Moines should also be considered in the work of building up a Museum. It is unjust that the only resource for increasing the objects in the Museum is that of solicitation—begging, as Mr. Thwaites of the Wisconsin Historical Society phrases it. All of the historical organizations in the middle west with which we are acquainted are constantly making additions to their collections in this direction. We are not informed whether this is done by solicitation wholly or mostly, but we presume that some money is invested in this direction. We cannot but regard it as unjust to the people living on the farms throughout our State, that our Museum is not constantly replenished with something fresh in the direction of objects of interest. The policy has seemed to be to charge the Historical Department with the appropriations for the completion of the building, and to withhold additions to our resources with which to purchase.

Explanation of the meagerness of funds for the purchase of materials and the performance of the work of the Department itself shows the attitude of legislators at that time. Considered from every view-point except that of the Curator, who bore the responsibility for practical results, it was correct. Mr. Aldrich's thought was only of the flying years with their opportunities, and of the passing of men and materials. Theoretically the State should have provided for herself, in a single act, an appropriate edifice, a complete staff of workers and an ample support fund. Practically, however, only part at that time was possible.

But the burthens with which Mr. Aldrich felt his work was saddled, namely, the carrying upon its account, so to speak, the expenditures for the building, are felt by his successors. Appropriations for the work have ever been attenuated in consequence of those for the building. With the meager funds, it was only the admixture of extraordinary zeal, ingenuity and the very life of the founder, and of a philanthropy on the part of individual sponsors of the work and of the Board of Trustees, that sustained it for many years. To collect and store materials was necessarily the highest purpose during the building operations. But it is equally important at the

present time to make accessible the materials accumulated and accumulating. What was wise or expedient throughout the years of building—the skimping and starving of the soul of the work that its body might be housed, is wisdom no longer. At the present time when demands for building are removed, a reasonable compensation to the administrative account may be expected so that practical results may be multiplied.

If, for instance, each allusion to the subject of the navigation of the rivers of Iowa which is known to exist among our collections, could be placed before an Iowa editor, a proper consideration by him of the subject might reasonably be expected as a matter of mere hours, whereas if the same person now desire to give the subject such consideration, he must first devote perhaps weeks to the discovery of his materials, and thereafter digest them.

Inquiry was recently received as to whether there was published at the proper time a notice of an ordinance authorizing the use of the public streets of the city of Ottumwa by the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. The publication preceded the construction by months; it may be said years. The inquiry laid upon us not only the duty of having at hand a file of the newspapers reasonably expected to contain the record, but of making search therefor. The information when found, served a material purpose in the determination of substantial interests of one of our largest cities and one of our greatest corporations. Had our early newspapers been indexed, as we hope they will be in the near future, much time and expense might have been saved the applicant for this information. Under present conditions the best we could do was to furnish the bound volumes of newspapers, with office room in which to make the search.

Inquiry is from time to time made as to what is contained in the personal letters and documents in our keeping. Professor Dodd, in his preparation of studies on Jefferson Davis, travelled from Chicago to Des Moines, and searched for some days among the manuscripts of this Department. He read line by line in order to know whether our collections contained anything touching his subject. The identical material had

been searched within two years by different applicants and for different purposes.

Mr. Oswald Garrison Villard, editor of the New York Post, in the preparation of his book on John Brown, caused an assistant to visit us, who remained some days examining our John Brown materials in a similar way. Like uses are sought of the museum objects illustrating past life in the State. To groups of valuable objects or documents, the busy public is entitled to as quick and complete access and use as is afforded in any business or record office.

Where a valuable object exists, but is not in our possession, it is our duty to the public to secure and preserve it. Procuring and making useful the materials illustrative of our history are possible only with funds, and these sufficient for the most diligent and effective effort seem now for the first time reasonably to be expected. There is prospect then of securing many additional materials relating to the development of Iowa; the thorough indexing of Department publications, of newspaper and document files now in or that may be added to the collection, at least up to and including the period of the Civil War, and the placing of such index ready to the hand of the busy searcher who may reasonably demand the maximum of results from the minimum expenditure of his time and money; the publication of some of the valuable original manuscripts now in the possession of the Department, making the material more readily available; the acquisition, preservation and display of such specimens as exemplify all animal or plant life within the State; the acquisition and proper treatment of source materials upon Iowa municipal and county as well as state history; the stimulation of and assistance toward enterprise for preserving and marking sites within the State having historic, scenic or scientific value; the circulation of information, material objects and other source materials into all localities within the State, and the further stimulation and assistance toward local historical studies; the entertainment by this institution of patrons, students and scholars, who augment our collections or enhance their value; the collection of art objects within the scope of our work and the stimula-

tion of interest in and the use of these. It is impossible to obtain these objects without adequate funds.

The sundry burthens, then, borne by the administrative element of the Historical Department of Iowa, ought now at the first opportunity to be removed. With our building in advance of that of nearly every other State, and our collections in some respects excelling all the rest, the other step toward success, namely, provision of modern and adequate administrative machinery must next be made. On the whole with a smaller biennial appropriation than heretofore, a work which has the approval of the general public and is deemed useful by the practical patron, can be made the indispensable instrument of benefit to all as the founder intended it to be. It should very soon result in instant and accurate response by the Historical Department to all appeals for historical and archive information concerning Iowa and the Middle West.

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#### ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND HIS CLIENTS.

The appropriate relations of attorneys-at-law to their clients, to adverse parties, and to the public, is a subject that often perplexes moralists and philosophers. The many phases of the subject are illustrated most interestingly in the career of Abraham Lincoln as a lawyer in Illinois.

Chroniclers relate that even when the technicalities of the law gave to flinty-hearted claimants or litigants a definite advantage he would now and then make tremendous appeals to the sensibilities of jurors and by sheer eloquence sweep them away from their moorings of contract and secure the equity that humanity demands for the orphan or widow or a friend caught unwittingly in the nets of adverse circumstances. His biographers tell us of his frequent refusal to accept a retainer from any one of high or low estate whose case was bottomed on fraud or smacked of trickery. Tradition deals with various instances when he summarily dropped causes in the midst of trial on discovering that he had been grossly misinformed as to essential facts or had been hoodwinked by his client respecting any questionable transaction.

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