

tlers were hospitable to all comers, but especially so to these parties whose work promised to open up roads and place them in communication with populous places.

But it not only became apparent that this work had too often degenerated into mere schemes of politicians, either to acquire influence and votes, or to pay off debts already incurred, but that railroads then rapidly extending westward, would largely obviate the necessity for even genuine State roads. So the convention of 1857, in Article III, Section 30, of the present constitution, prohibited the general assembly from "laying out, opening, and working roads or highways." The summer of that year saw the last parties engaged in laying out State Roads. The legislature of 1856, however, had been so industrious in the establishment of State Roads, that it takes almost three pages in the index merely to name the various laws or sections in which they were decreed. The commissioners in the summer of that year were very active and "made hay while the sun shone," well knowing that the laws would provide for no more such roads. And so this usage—so pleasant to its beneficiaries—came to an end.

NEWSPAPER FILES.

Indicative of a valuable work that is being done by historical societies is the recently published "Annotated Catalogue of Newspaper Files in the Library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin." This catalogue is of course simply an index to the files of papers in the library of the Wisconsin Society; but it is illustrative of the kind of work that our historical societies generally are now doing. And it is perhaps safe to say that these societies do not in the broad field of their activities perform a more useful function than this of collecting and preserving newspapers.

By the general readers of text history this work is not always appreciated as it should be. Sometimes they are in-

clined to sneer at the bulky files of newspapers and refer to them as "space-filling" matter hardly worth the store room required in their preservation. But every genuine student of history knows that this "space-filling" matter is of inestimable value. What the serious and intelligent students of history demand of the historical society is not simply a collection of dictionaries, encyclopedias, texts and general histories of the world. They call for the collection and preservation of original source material—letters, manuscripts, pamphlets, newspaper files and the like. It is to meet this most obvious demand of critical historical workers that the historical societies in America have taken upon themselves the task of collecting, binding and preserving the newspapers of the country.

In this work the Wisconsin Society is a leader. Moreover, the catalogue referred to suggests this significant observation: Although a State institution, the Wisconsin Historical Society has collected vast stores of material that is of more than local interest. It collects and preserves newspapers from all parts of the United States. Like its energetic Secretary, Mr. Thwaites, the Wisconsin Society has in its growth and development long since gone beyond the limits of local history. It is eminently fitting and proper that it should do this. For after all, the local history of a State cannot be regarded as a separate and independent development. It is simply a phase of that broader development which we call American History. And in this light it should be studied and interpreted. The library of a historical society supported by the State must of necessity be a library of American History.

The lead of Wisconsin should be followed in this respect by other States. Iowa, indeed, has already made something more than a beginning in this direction. But much larger appropriations are needed to make her historical collections what they should be, that is, decidedly national or American in their scope.

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