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Mr. Leon DeValinger

[0:00:00]

Mr. DeValinger

The work at the Octagonal school house was progressing. I planned a small adjacent building as service building to provide a furnace room, compressors for the air-conditioning system, public washrooms, a tool room area for mowers and other equipment needed to keep the grounds in condition. The electrical switchbox and all of the utilities of that nature so that none of this would be put into the old school house in order that it might be preserved as it was originally.

As I said earlier we used all possible document resources, photographs, letters, copies of maps as well as the recollections of school teachers who had been there and some of the students. The work was going on in the meantime; I was collecting such furnishing as would have been used in the school room. These of course, were quite primitive and a far cry from the oriental rugs and fine furniture of the 18th and early 19th century that had been used in other restorations of ours.

Due to the Peterson Administration, I was not able to complete the final furnishing although I had obtained a number of them and had planned it. And had consequently, I did not attend the opening day of the school. Other restoration projects going on or in the works at the time were the acquisition and restoration of the Prince George's of chapel at Dagsboro, Delaware. The Episcopal Diocese of Delaware had neglected this historic church in later years, the bishop was not sympathetic and the members of the congregation and prominent Episcopalians in that part of the state came to us and wanted us to do something toward its restoration.

I pointed out that it could not contribute state funds for the restoration of their building. And like the experience earlier with the old Presbyterian Church in Dover, they came back later and said that they would deed the property to the state for the use of our commission if we would acquire the property and restore it. This was brought before our public archives commissions and that work went forward.

As an all of these projects, there was a lot of careful historical research involved and the careful architectural study of the building. With that accomplished, I put part of our workforce on the restoration work at this early chapel or missionary outpost because it should be pointed out that

this chapel was built by the congregation of the Worcester County, Maryland, one of the boundaries between Delaware and Maryland had not been decided.

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After the Mason & Dixon surveys, this chapel was found to be in Delaware and there was no longer a chapel at east of the church in Worcester County Maryland. There was a considerable amount of termite damage in the old church, so it was necessary to take up the floors, and strengthen the beams and support the gallery and all of these structural problems that had to be solved. While we had the floor up, we excavated part of the church under the chancellery council. And looking at first for any archeological artifacts but the final result was a room which would accommodate the heating plant and the utilities that are necessary to be placed in a public building.

We also restored the east wing of the building, which had been there originally according to early drawings that we located. This was constructed of matching bricks and the obtaining of wood that would -- what I mean to say is old heart pine for the replacement of damaged portions of the wood work and the structural members had to be found and placed in the building. We also put in the barreled ceiling in the chancellery. There were many details in restoring this church and it was going along well when my forced resignation under Peterson stopped my work on the project. Later, when I made a visit through there, I was dismayed to see the way the pew arrangements had been treated and some of the other work was done something that should never have been done in a restoration.

Now, let's skip on to another building that was acquired and that was the Lowber, L-O-W-B-E-R, house in the town of Magnolia next to the firehouse. This fine brick, 18th century building was built by one the early settlers in that community and contains some excellent woodwork and paneling. It was a good example of a rural brick house in an area which had frame buildings for the most part. It was dated by the brick work in the eaves at the south end. We had to wait a considerable time before we could get the money to purchase this house which had been offered to us and in which there was a lot of interests for its preservation. I was never able to do any more than acquire it as one more historic property in the list of those that could be eventually restored and opened for visits.

There was more that can be told about historic restoration and I think when I said earlier that we had acquired about 33 houses...

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...buildings and sites that speaks well for our contribution toward historic preservation and also toward building a tourist industry in Delaware.

And now, I'm going to back pay some more attention to the state archives which was our basic organization. We had gotten moved into the Hall of Records on May 1st of 1939 and had developed our system, as I told, one national recognition, but by the time of Governor Boggs had come into office, we were very much crowded. He badly needed space. I talked to Governor Boggs about it, he was sympathetic, he came over to the Hall of Records, and could see how we were piled up. He wanted to do something for us but it didn't get done. We continued to amass records after World War II with the expansion of government and our accelerated program of bringing in records from the county seats in the city of Wilmington as well as from the many state agencies. Our conditions became so crowded that we went to the extreme position of renting garages, putting steel shelving in them and shelving some of our less important records in them. We had also acquired the old police station north of Dover which had been the Delaware building at the sesquicentennial in Philadelphia and we used this for temporary records storage.

After the World War II, we had acquired underground casemates or areas underground at Fort Dupont at Delaware City, and Fort Miles, and Lewis. There we installed air-conditioning at Fort Dupont in a fault in the area there -- the underground area, and the steel shelving with the record center boxes maintain temperature and humidity control there. At Fort Miles, the air-conditioning was already in place as that particular casemate has been used as a communications headquarters dealing World War II at Fort Miles. So it was made in order for us.

Again, we moved in the steel shelving, boxes of records. We were doing two things. We were alleviating a terribly crowded condition at Dover and providing dispersal for micro film copies of records that we have made us security copies. They asked me a question about micro filming and the weeding out of records, I would say that we were continually weeding out under our public records examiner system, our records management as we call it.

And as I said earlier, not this session but the previous one, Mr. Wilcots would go to the public office and meet the person in-charge and survey the records that were causing the problem for them. And he would then bring back his report. And he and I would go over to survey, and I would determine which records would be kept permanently, which semi-permanently, and which would be authorized for disposal. And those authorized disposal would be disposed of at that time so that we wouldn't be handling records or groups of records that we knew would be of no value to us. We just got rid of them right away, for example, second or third copies of invoices and things of that nature. You also brought the question of quantities of micro film that we did. Toward the end of my administration, we were doing about 25 miles of micro film a year, both 16 and 35 millimeter.

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That would be as they say stretched in the end. That would be from Dover to Odessa. So that gives you some idea. I've forgotten now how many thousand cubic feet of records we were handling a year but it was considerable. They were in my annual reports, which I wrote and published during my administration. These give you some insight into some of our record problems. And as I said a few minutes ago despite these peripheral storage areas only two of which were really suitable for records namely the two undergrounds.

I became very much impressed with the merits of underground records storage and study the problems. It was especially important since we harkened back to the experiences of World War II and what had happened to records in Europe under bombings. And then we realized that we had gone way beyond the aerial bombs of that conflict and we're faced with atomic and hydrogen bombs and what the impact would be of them, and what we should be thinking about of the security of our vital records for our citizens.

So I begin a serious study. I went to Washington and talked with colleagues there in the records management work and they showed some of their newest installations at Suitland, Maryland and told me of others that they had. I had occasion to be in Kansas City at a meeting so that I took a side trip to Hutchison, Kansas, and went down in the salt mine there, some 620 feet and saw the work being done there. They were taking the coal out of the salt out of some of the galleries and some of the ones that had been exhausted they had been converted to record storage areas. Of course, this had very little implication or application,

either one, for us except that it did demonstrate the lack of humidity that was available in the salt mine. And it was an interesting and curious operation.

I also looked into the record storage at Iron Mountain, where an iron mine had been converted to record storage using the exhausted galleries. And although, I didn't go to New England to see one there, two officers of that organization up there came to Delaware to see our installations at Delaware City in Lewes because they were interested in acquiring surplus forts and doing the same thing we were doing but doing it commercially.

And then in 1968, I had an opportunity to go to Sweden. I was exchanged to Sweden from Wilmington, which is a sister city of Kalmar, Sweden. I first went to Stockholm and went to the royal archives there, looked at Delaware records, did some research, and then did inquiries about their new archives structure. And they very obligingly explain what they were doing and took me to see what had been completed. They had taken over an island in the river at Stockholm, just off the bluffs of that part of the city, along the river. And there they had drilled deeply into this island into the bedrock...

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...and installed a series of galleries. As I recall there were about 12 or 15. And there in these galleries, there are steel shelving where the storage of their records was installed. There was all possible precautions that's being taken, huge revolving doors, several kinds of safety attachments and the equivalent of a drawbridge to get from the mainland to the island. This was a very interesting installation and I saw applications of it for us.

When I had the opportunity to digest and think over all of the things seen, this is why we're doing underground records storage, I worked a plan and included that of the Mormons of which they had drilled into the Wasatch Mountain beyond Salt Lake City *[inaudible]* **[0:21:18]**.

And coming up with accumulative answer, we didn't have any mountains in Dover we drilled into or any deserted mines because the gallery is already right or in hill side into which it could be built. We did have on the north side of the Hall of Records at low filled in area, which at one time had swampy. And the thought occurred to me, why not dig this out and line it with concrete of sufficient thickness and then cover it over at

the steep – at the split level and let that be our underground records center.

I pursued that by getting funds from the state planning office for a feasibility study. We employed consulting engineers that came up with their studies. They came in with two plans; one which was the minimum requirement. Then there was the maximum requirement which would have walls and a structure that will withstand a certain type of nuclear bomb. And then there was an immediate plan. We selected the immediate plan but the foundation was built strong enough so that it would export a building on top of it, if at a later time, it was necessary to add more space to the Hall of Records.

Meanwhile, across from the Hall of Records to the west, a building is built known as the Townsend Building, name Senator John *[inaudible]* **[0:23:34]**. And the Townsend building needed more parking areas than the land surrounding it would permit so the state planners required us to surf us over this proposed underground record center of ours to provide adequate parking *[inaudible]* **[0:24:02]**. This wasn't horrible. This meant that our buildings would be doubly strong that will support the weight of 170 parked cars. So that we were finally able to interest certain members of the legislature. And in Governor Carey's term funds were made available and we began the constructions. First, the final detail is the plan for the building and then the construction of it. And first, there had to borings taken from the areas which had earlier during it was swampy to see whether water problems would develop.

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But fortunately, we didn't have those problems. We were going along very well on schedule when strike occurred. And we were tied up for months because of it. And as the strike went on, you could see our cost increasing also. So we were delayed all the way along the line. Finally, the work was drawing to a conclusion. I had worked out the requirements of the steel shelving, the transfer of certain facilities from the Hall of Records to the underground, such as a fumigation chamber, the shredder and bailer, things of that sort that are necessary for record setting.

Steel shelving went out for bid, and it was being put into place and we were planning which groups of records would go in there. All through these, I was working closely with Mr. Roy Wilcots who was our public records examiner. All was going well. It looked like we completely moved in but in the meantime the Peterson Administration has moved with this

cabinet system which was supposed to save \$7 million. Of course, like most of these plans, it didn't save anything. And shortly thereafter, Delaware experienced this Black Monday *[inaudible]* **[0:26:52]** legislature, so was the terrific deficit we had in the state.

This planning was all, either in his head or in his theories which didn't take me into account the actual government. As a matter of fact, the man had never had a basic for the routine government. He decided then that it was politically expedient to retire me. He wanted to pay off a debt with some of his political friends. And I was relegated to the old State House with the title of State Historian. Well, I had always been serving in the capacity of a state historian. My official title was State Archivist and when the museum came into being, I was Director of the Delaware State Museum. And then, when we established our trust fund for historic preservation, I was director of historic houses and buildings.

So, this is merely another hat that I had already worn through the years. Someone else came in and went through the mechanics of shuffling the records from some of the records from the Hall of Records in the underground, closing out the subsidiary record centers we had and centralizing them all in the new underground record center. This was contrary to the overall plan that we had. The two centers at Delaware City and at Fort Miles at Lewes should have been retained but they were filling up the new building very rapidly.

The new building had a capacity for a 25 year period. But it's filled the capacity already because people who didn't know what they were doing rushed in to fill it up. This gives an insight into a quick on at that many details are left out this early. But this does give an insight as to the records administration in our state. We had one which was acknowledged among professional archivists and records manager to be one of the best small installations in the country.

Not long after I left, the professional started designing. First, Ms. Virginia Duvall *[phonetic]* **[0:29:59]** who is in charge of...

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...a research at the Hall of Records. Then this is Mary Mullick *[phonetic]* **[0:30:05]**, the curator of the Johnson Collection and Building. Then the next year Mr. Roy Wilcots. In place of these people, employees have been put in who have had little or no experience. For example, the man who succeeded Mr. Wilcots had work in the Hall of Records in the

research room but he had never had one day experience in record planning. So that although, I do do not know exactly the status for the day, I have to move out of here and I am going to process to some of them by saying that to reestablished the commission, and take it out of the hand of the politician and the commissioners because the commissioners have worked hard through the years has largely been dissipated by the politicians.

This was a thing that our commissioners and all of us who were interested in historic preservation in Delaware struggle so hard to avoid. We did this. We were a non-partisan commission. Those three democrats and three Republicans who were on our commission through the years didn't permit the politicians to enter into *[inaudible]* [0:31:58]. And it was because of that we were successful. But that's all gone by the board and now, we have a non-professional staff, just the politicians.

I'm very sorry to add on this dismal mood but I hope that just as patriotic societies rose in 1905 to save Delaware's records and our rich cultural heritage that summer of rules will raise at this time to reestablish our state archives and the sections of the state museum historic houses and buildings and thereby, take them out of the hands of the politicians. The commission system proved itself through the years and the cabinet system is rapidly becoming discredited and an unbearable financial burden to our citizens.

Unfortunately, most of the people of this state think that their Division of Archives and Cultural Affairs is being administered properly. When I call it the Division of Archives and Cultural Affairs, I'm using the correct legal designation. The present one they are using was established only by executive order and was meant to subordinate the position and purpose of the State Archives, the parent organization.

There are indications of legislation introduced in our general assembly, and in the message from Governor Tribbett that perhaps under reorganization there may be the opportunity to reestablish our former public archives commission. Let us hope that this will be done and that competent, trained, experienced people will be placed in-charge. That's the conclusion of my remark. Mrs. Button, I want to make a correction or an oversight while...

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...we have the opportunity in listing the people who resigned in protest. I unfortunately omitted the name of Mrs. Gladys Pardee, P-A-R-D-E-E, who was in-charged of the...

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