

The Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau

A Century of Service

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Plaque in Assembly Chamber honoring Charles McCarthy.

Preface

In 2001, the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) completed 100 years of service to the Wisconsin Legislature and the citizens of Wisconsin. Created in 1901, the LRB was the first agency of its kind in the nation to provide professional, nonpartisan drafting and research services to a state legislature. Over the years, it has served as the model for similar offices in other states, as well as the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. During its first century of service to the legislature, the LRB has supported the legislative institution by providing research, drafting, and library services and providing the general public with information about the legislature, the legislative process, and government in general.

The legislature commemorated the LRB's 100th anniversary at a reception held in the Senate Parlor on October 3, 2001.



Charles McCarthy and his staff, 1906. (State Historical Society, #WHi (X3) 49904)

The LRL was housed in several locations in its early years. Initially it occupied rooms in the south wing of the old capitol. The fledgling agency suffered a major setback in February 1904, when the library was destroyed in the capitol fire. It was temporarily located in the renovated north wing of the old capitol during construction of the new capitol. When the north wing of the old capitol was razed in 1913, the LRL was relocated to the fourth floor of the new capitol's south wing, in an open space that later became a hearing room. Finally, when the present capitol was finished in 1917, the LRL moved to the second floor of the north wing, which would be its home until 1989.

The LRL as a National Model

The LRL was a pioneer in legislative service when it began in 1901; by the time it had found permanent quarters in 1917, almost every state in the union had created some sort of legislative service agency. Many used Wisconsin's LRL as a model. When the U.S. Congress was deciding whether to create a similar service at the federal level, McCarthy traveled to Washington to urge Congress to do

