

Ohm

WORKERS SERVICE RADIO PROGRAM
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The Legislative Reference Library

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ANNCR. And now THE STATE IS YOURS, a weekly broadcast, presented regularly over this station by the Wisconsin State Employees Association. This evening's program will be conducted by Roy E. Kubista, Executive Secretary of the Association.

Roy.

ROY. How do you do, everyone. We continue our up-to-the minute review of the State Departments with a visit to the Legislative Reference Library. Our ^{guest} ~~special host~~ for this evening is Mr. Howard F. Ohm, Chief of the Library. Mr. Ohm, we have heard of the Legislative Reference Library, some of us have availed ourselves of its services, but I am sure there are many people who don't know about the workings of your department. I think you had better begin from scratch so that we may more clearly understand the work you are doing.

OHM. Alright, I'll start right from the beginning. The Wisconsin Legislative Reference Library, the first modern type of legislative reference service in the United States, was established in 1901. There is quite an interesting story connected with its establishment.

ROY. Let's hear about it.

OHM. As the story goes, early in the 1901 session a farmer member of the Legislature wandered over to the Historical Library on the University Campus in search of information on a piece of

pending legislation. There he looked over book after book but was unable to find the information he wanted. The late Dr. Charles McCarthy, then a graduate student at the University, recognized the plight of that gentleman and offered his assistance. He soon found what the legislator wanted. That was the beginning of the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Library.

ROY. In other words, Dr. McCarthy started something.

OHM. He certainly did! No sooner had word gotten around about his chance assistance to that farmer member of the Legislature than other members immediately began to seek his assistance. They thought so highly of McCarthy and the work he was doing that before the session adjourned the members had created the Legislative Reference Library as a unit in the Free Library Commission, and appropriated a modest sum for its operation. Needless to say McCarthy was chosen as its head. He served in that position until 1921 when he died.

ROY. That was, indeed, a very fascinating sidelight on the establishment of the Library. Now you mentioned a few minutes ago that Wisconsin was the first state in the Union to inaugurate such a service. How long was Wisconsin alone in this field?

OHM. Not very long, Roy. Soon after Dr. McCarthy started out in this work the idea spread beyond the state, and other states began seeking his counsel and advice toward helping them establish similar departments. As early as 1904 California followed Wisconsin in this work. Indiana and Maryland joined the parade in 1906. Six more states were added in 1907. Iowa

in 1908 and Pennsylvania and Texas in 1909. But the states were not alone in adapting this new service to their needs. Congress, after considering the advisability for several years, established the Legislative Reference Division of the Library of Congress in 1914. The American Bar Association since that time has appointed special committees to study the movement and has issued several favorable reports recommending the further development of this work. A similar committee of the American Political Science Association likewise went on record in favor of legislative reference bureaus.

ROY. I noticed that you stopped with Texas and Pennsylvania in 1909. Hasn't any other state started up such a service since that time?

OHM. Oh yes! About thirty-five states of the Union now maintain Legislative Reference Libraries or Bureaus and nine others may lay claim to some variety of legislative reference work. Only last year Michigan established a complete department.

ROY. All right, Mr. Ohm, so much for history and background. What about the organization of the Reference Library? Who makes its policies and directs its activities?

OHM. The Free Library Commission is the governing body. This Commission consists of five members, three ex-officio, the President of the University, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Superintendent of the State Historical Society and two citizens at-large appointed by the Governor for five-year terms. Under this set-up the Commission is far removed from politics. It serves as a part-time, unpaid board, meeting

but once or twice a year. However, the Commission does maintain a full-time secretary. You ask about control. Legally the Commission controls the Legislative Reference Library in all respects. Actually it has always pursued a liberal policy, giving the Chief of the Reference Library a free-hand, but holding him responsible for results. This set-up has worked very well. It has kept the Legislative Reference Library free from political influence and has enabled it to render a strictly nonpartisan service.

ROY. How much of a staff carries on the regular work of the Library?

OHM. The permanent staff of the Library consists of twelve persons, six librarians and research assistants and five stenographers and clerks besides the chief. During Legislative sessions additional persons, of course, are employed. Normally, this increase brings the total number on the staff to about twenty-five. These additional or seasonal employees include bill-draftsmen, who are attorneys, and as many stenographers and clerks as are needed to type, proofread and index the bills. The entire staff, including the persons employed only for the session, is employed under civil service. For years there have been few changes in personnel. The Library has had only three chiefs in 41 years and several of the present employes have been with the department for as long as twenty-five years. Dr. Edwin E. Witte succeeded McCarthy in 1922 and served until October 1, 1933, when he accepted a chair in economics at the University.

ROY. What do you consider the major functions of the Library, Mr. Ohm?

OHM. Before answering that, I might say that our department, while called a library, is in reality a research institution. It is a storhouse of facts and a clearing house for information. Our major services are bill-drafting, ^{and} reference and research. In addition, we edit the Wisconsin Blue Book. The reference work consists of locating, compiling and digesting information and data on proposed or enacted legislation and on a wide variety of subjects relating to governmental activities, ^{answering questions, furnishing material and conducting research on specific subjects.}

The best known function is the bill drafting service in which we draft bills, resolutions and amendments for introduction in the Legislature. The reference and research work is a service extended to members of the Legislature, State Departments, local officials, and private citizens and, occasionally, even to people outside the state. Bill-drafting is done primarily for members of the Legislature and upon their written instructions. Legislative reference work is carried on at all times, both during and between sessions. The drafting of bills is done almost exclusively during sessions including about a month before each session.

ROY. I imagine a "peep" behind the scenes of bill-drafting would be mighty interesting. Can you, in a few words, give us an idea as to how a bill is prepared in your department?

OHM. Usually the member of the Legislature interested in introducing a bill comes to our office and gives us his instructions. Or he may tell us in a general way what he has in mind. Sometimes in order to get the necessary detail for the bill we ask him questions so as to get his ideas before us. We do not put our ideas into a bill. The draftsman writes down the

detailed instructions under which the legislator signs his name. That makes his request official. The request is then given a file number and assigned by the chief to the draftsman. When the draftsman has completed his draft it is turned over to a stenographer who types the measure, making seven copies. The bill is then proofread and placed in the files ready for inspection of the member. Usually a copy of the draft is submitted to the member, being mailed to him at the legislative postoffice. During the process of drafting our work is strictly confidential so that a copy of a draft can be seen only by the member requesting it. If the member approves the draft, the measure is placed in form for introduction, that is, two of the copies which are "backed" and the remaining copies are placed in a regular bill envelope provided by the Legislature. If, however, the member wishes to make some changes in the draft we prepare a second draft and go through the same procedure as in case of the first draft.

ROY. Do you folks draft bills for anybody?

OHM. Only for members of the Legislature, the Governor, and State Departments. However, in order to facilitate our work and the work of the Legislature during the busy session it has been customary for our Department to prepare bills also for state-wide organizations, such as the County Board Associations, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, State Federation of Labor, League of Women Voters, ^{the State Employees Association} and similar organizations. Whenever this is done we do so with the understanding that a member or committee of the Legislature will sponsor the bill before it is delivered.

ROY. How much drafting work does the Library do during a regular session, Mr. Ohm?

OHM. Our drafting requests for a regular session total anywhere from 4,000 to 5,000. That includes bills, substitute amendments, amendments and resolutions.

ROY. Does your Department draft all of the measures that go to the Legislature?

OHM. Practically all. In recent sessions, Roy, I would say that 99.5 per cent of the measures introduced in the Legislature came thru our office. You understand, of course, that members of the Legislature don't have to have their bills prepared by us, but for many years all of them have done so.

ROY. Do you think this bill-drafting service tends to promote the volume of legislation?

OHM. No, the record shows not. In Minnesota, for example, where no public law drafting service is available and where the sessions are limited by law to ninety days, between two and three times as many bills are introduced as are introduced here in Wisconsin. According to a recent survey, Wisconsin introduces but very few more bills than the average number for all the states. And according to the same survey the average total enactments in Wisconsin is only slightly more than the national average.

ROY. Now for the question uppermost in the minds of all Americans these days - National Defense. Has the work of the Legislative Reference Library reflected any signs of the times so far?

OHM. Roy, I doubt if there are any governmental agencies, national, state, or local whose work, in some way or other, has not been affected by ^{the present} emergency. In our own work the incoming material we must look over, classify and catalog has in-

creased enormously. Many of the requests for information these days are concerned with the emergency. A few sample questions will illustrate. Recently we've been asked, for example, whether a law was passed in Wisconsin during the first World War authorizing Counties and Municipalities to appropriate funds for local Councils of Defense. We were also asked whether such a law is still in effect and, if not, whether our present statutes grant such authority. Then we had an inquiry from one of the largest aircraft manufacturing industries of the country as to what action Wisconsin has taken to provide for the necessary emergency relaxation of labor laws, particularly those applicable to hours for women, in order to meet the requirement of maximum production. These, and many more I could relate, definitely reflect interest and concern in the National Emergency.

ROY. Are the requests in normal times always as sober as the ones you've just mentioned?

OHM. Most of them relate to questions in economics or political science or affairs of government. However, we occasionally receive inquiries of a less serious character, even though they may be very important to the persons submitting them. Let me give you an example or two: Not long ago a legislator wanted to know the exact Court Case in which a dog was put on trial for some misdemeanor and in which the attorney made an eloquent plea on behalf of the dog. Again, a state official asked us for information on the relationship of quinine to dermatitis. Another state official asked for the facts regarding the old lady who was put in a lion's cage at Evansville and which case was investigated by the Wisconsin Legislature in 1918. Still another legislator wanted to know the

the dietetic value of bananas as compared with potatoes, bread and meat. And finally, a Madison resident recently requested information relative to common and scientific names of a species of painted turtles frequently sold as pets.

ROY. You people certainly have to be prepared to answer questions concerning everything from the proverbial "soup to nuts".

OHM. Yes, in a complex society, the field of inquiry is unlimited. But we proceed on the theory that all of the inquiries are important. We're convinced after years of experience and the review of several thousand inquiries each year, that the people of Wisconsin and the nation are thinking constantly on a wide variety of subjects and problems. Our job is to serve them in every way possible.

ROY. Thank you, Mr. Ohm. Ladies and gentlemen you've been listening to a discussion on the Activities of the State Legislative Reference Library. Our guest was Mr. Howard F. Ohm, Chief of the Library. The State Employees Association will present another timely topic next week, same time, same station. Until then this is Roy Kubista saying Good Evening.

ANNCR. THE STATE IS YOURS will be brought to you again at 8 o'clock next Monday evening over this same station. We invite you to join us at that time.