

"of the appointment of guardians for minors and of the renunciation of community of goods by wives or widows. The book contains 68 pages, but only 32 were used by the French court, the remaining being utilised by a clerk of the Virginia court as a record of deeds. The best preserved of this class of books is the one kept during the English period. There were originally 444 pages in it, but 41 are now missing. It contains copies of many documents of the previous periods, as well as newly redacted acts. Some of these latter are in English but most of them are in French.

"Still another class of papers is formed by letters, generally written to the magistrates in reference to legal matters, but they are not all of this character. The number from the French period is very small, from the British much larger and the same is true of the latter period. There are several letters from the Spanish commandant in St. Louis to the British commander and later to the Virginia Justices of the Peace.

"The last class of documents can only be called miscellaneous. It is impossible to make any general statement in regard to their general character; but some of them are the most interesting and valuable papers of the collection. I call your attention to the earliest election returns in the Northwest. It is the announcement of the election of two justices of the peace in May, 1779, at Prairie du Rocher. Another is a combined voting list and ballot used in the election of 1781 at Kaskaskia. There were 16 candidates and 27 voters. There is also the paper containing the oath taken by the people of Vincennes on July the 24th, 1778, renouncing their allegiance to George the Third and taking oath to Virginia. 183 signed this paper, the great majority of them making their mark. A paper from the British period is perhaps the most interesting of all for it is a draft of a civil government for Illinois with certain popular elements. The paper has neither date, place nor signature, but evidently emanated from the military government about the year 1775.

"From the description you see that the papers are for the most part private papers, such as contracts, deeds, etc., with a large number of court documents of all kinds and with a smaller number of documents issuing from the administrative officers of the Government. To the layman such a collection might well appear as curious but hardly of much historical value. But the historian sees in them valuable monuments of the past, true remains of a past society. From these may be reconstructed the political, social and economic structure of the community from which they have come. They are for him what the footprints and bones of extinct animals in the strata of the rocks are to the paleontologist. From the Kaskaskia papers, therefore, we may hope to follow the changing fate of these French settlements of the Mississippi valley year by year, as has never been done up to the present time.

"Such are the Kaskaskia papers. Their recovery must be regarded as an important event in the history of Illinois historical studies, since they throw light on every period of the eighteenth century. But their importance must not be exaggerated, interesting as they are as records of a romantic period of our past; for in reading the crabbed hand-writing of these earliest documents of the northwest, the historian cannot but feel that his enthusiasm is akin to that of the antiquarian, for from these French settlers did not spring the forces that have made Illinois one of the great states of our Union. Our true history begins with the coming of the Virginians, and in so far as the Kaskaskia papers shed light on that event, they are of great historical value. Only incidentally are the events connected with the names of Boisbriant, D'Artaguiette and Delaloere Flancour of interest to the historian, his interest springing from the love of truth and accuracy and his desire to know exactly what did occur before the coming of the builders of the State; but as soon as he reads in these papers the names of Thomas Brady, of John Edgar and of Shadrach Bond, he realizes that now he is studying live forces incarnated in the men who have assisted in the winning of the west."