

18-17

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REMARKS BY LIEUT. COL. CHARLES E. T. LULL

Collection of Historical Material Relating to Indian Wars
of the United States.

Sir National Commander and Companions of the Order. One of the most interesting events in history is that of the 100 Years War between France and England. We all recall this spectacular period from our youthful studies; but, how many of us stop to realize that the United States has had its own 100 years' war which, by every criterion, is of far greater significance than its counterpart of the Middle Ages. I refer, of course, to the American conquest of its own continental empire--the winning of the West.

The history of the American 100 years' war has never been written as a whole. Many of its more spectacular events have been recorded; but so far no Napier has arisen to give us a coordinated narrative of this, our greatest struggle. Unfortunately, the facts on which this narrative must rest are passing into oblivion and unless something is done, they will be more and more difficult to determine. It is a responsibility particularly appropriate to the traditions of this Order to safeguard the records of these events before they have passed beyond recall.

As time goes on, and we get farther and farther from the drama in which they took part, the actual participants become fewer and fewer and their personal recollections, more and more uncertain. There remain, however, a great number of contemporary documents which present the facts as known and experienced at or shortly after the time of their occurrence. Where these documents took the form of official reports or of papers of purely military nature, most of them found their way into the custody of The Adjutant General and we need not worry about them. But military records are not sufficient for historical work. Even for military history, they must be supplemented by other kinds of material. This material is to be found in such records as personal diaries, contemporary narratives, and, above all, in personal correspondence of the individuals concerned. In a period in which small groups of cultured persons lived in isolation on the frontier, the casual letter of an officer, a lady, or even of a child, may reveal conditions of utmost importance to historical research. We all know of such material. It is to be found in the possession of participants still living, or the descendants and relatives of those who have passed on. It is generally stored in some attic, or maintained as an heirloom or curiosity. As long as the family stays in one place, it probably rests undisturbed, but in case of a move, it is very liable to be destroyed.

Our present problem is to find this material, and to get it into suitable depositories where it can be safeguarded and made available for historical research. The ideal would be to bring it all together in some central depository where it could be of the greatest value to historians. Opportunity for such an assembly is offered by the Library of Congress where manuscripts are received, safeguarded, classified, and indexed so that they can be consulted with the least time and effort by the investigator. The Library has an exceedingly gracious way of acknowledging material turned over to its custody and will hold it under any reasonable conditions that the original possessor may request. When material of value is treasured as a possession with which its own owner does not wish to part, the Library is prepared to make copies and return the original.

To deposit in the Library of Congress is desirable, but, for manifest reasons, not always practicable. Owners may prefer to donate documents to other institutions such as libraries, schools, and local historical societies in which they may have a particular interest. Such a course is entirely in line with what we are trying to accomplish. The essential purpose being, of course, to save the documents themselves from oblivion and have them where they will be cared for and can be used.