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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES }

REPORT
No. 665

TRANSFER OF CERTAIN ARCHIVES AND RECORDS FROM NATIONAL ARCHIVES TO THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO

JULY 1, 1957.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of
the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. ROBESON of Virginia, from the Committee on Post Office and
Civil Service, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. J. Res. 275]

The Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, to whom was referred the joint resolution (H. J. Res. 275), transferring to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico certain archives and records in possession of the National Archives, having considered the same, report favorably thereon without amendment and recommend that the joint resolution do pass.

STATEMENT

This legislation will provide that the historical records and archives taken over by this Government from the Government of Spain, under the terms of the peace treaty which brought the Spanish-American War to a conclusion, be transferred from the custody of the National Archives of the United States to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The cost of the transfer is to be borne by the Commonwealth.

At the time of the cession of Puerto Rico to the sovereignty of this Nation in 1898, these records were brought from Puerto Rico to Washington, D. C., and later were placed in charge of the National Archives. Certain of the records, such as those relating to land titles, have been restored to Puerto Rico, to meet the frequent local need for such documents. However, most of the material relating to administrative and legislative actions by the predecessor Government of Puerto Rico has remained here.

The material involved was, at one time, all located in Puerto Rico, and this joint resolution proposes nothing more than a restoration of such material. The material will be much more accessible in Puerto Rico to a majority of those desiring to conduct historical research, or who would have some other interest in the information contained in

these documents. The material, which relates mainly to Puerto Rico's colonial period, is of the type which any of the States may have retained regarding its own early history. The committee is informed that the Government of the Commonwealth is making careful preparations for proper care of the records to be transferred. House Joint Resolution 275 requires that the Administrator of the General Services Administration shall determine that proper provisions have been made before the transfer of the records.

As far as the committee has been able to ascertain, there is no opposition to the adoption of House Joint Resolution 275.

The committee has received favorable reports from the Department of the Interior and the National Archives, the latter through the Administrator of the General Services Administration. These reports follow.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, D. C., June 7, 1957.

HON. TOM MURRAY,
*Chairman, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service,
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.*

DEAR MR. MURRAY: This responds to your request for the views of this Department on House Joint Resolution 275, a resolution transferring to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico certain archives and records in possession of the National Archives.

We recommend that the resolution be enacted.

House Joint Resolution 275 would provide that the historical records and archives taken over by this Government from the Government of Spain, under the terms of the peace treaty which brought the Spanish-American War to a conclusion, be transferred from the custody of the National Archives of the United States to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The cost of the transfer is to be borne by the Commonwealth.

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protection standards approximating its own standards will be achieved by the Commonwealth prior to the transfer.

The Bureau of the Budget has advised that there is no objection to the submission of this report to your committee.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) HATFIELD CHILSON,
Under Secretary of the Interior.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION,
Washington, D. C., May 14, 1957.

HON. TOM MURRAY,

*Chairman, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service,
House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: In accordance with your request of March 18, 1957, the General Services Administration submits a report on House Joint Resolution 275, a joint resolution transferring to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico certain archives and records in possession of the National Archives.

It is believed that these records should be transferred to Puerto Rico where they can be used to greater advantage, with other similar records, by Puerto Rican scholars.

A complete description of the records and action that has been taken in contemplation of this proposed transfer is attached hereto.

In view of the foregoing, GSA strongly recommends the enactment of House Joint Resolution 275.

The Bureau of the Budget has advised that there is no objection to the submission of this report to your committee.

Sincerely yours,

FRANKLIN G. FLOETE, *Administrator.*

The records which would be returned to Puerto Rico under certain conditions are described as "the official archives, executive and judicial, of the former Spanish authorities in Puerto Rico, now deposited with the National Archives of the United States, including those relating to rights and properties of the inhabitants of Puerto Rico." This description is explicit and there seems no danger of confusion over the boundaries of the material to be returned. By this language is meant the entire body of records designated in the National Archives as "Records of the Spanish Governors of Puerto Rico" and comprising Record Group No. 186. In volume these records amount to 186 cubic feet. In date they fall between 1750 and 1898.

Briefly, the history of these records is as follows: Between 1898 and 1900, beginning when Puerto Rico was still under military government, there were removed from the Governor's Palace and sent to the Library of Congress in Washington some 2,246 bundles of books and manuscripts comprising the library and official records of the successive Spanish governors of the island. This move was initiated by the Library of Congress and ordered by the War Department. Only material not deemed necessary to the future administration of the island was supposed to be sent, but shortly after it was received at the Library, the return of certain records relating to lands was requested.

In 1901 the Librarian of Congress reported that all the material had been roughly sorted and about two-thirds returned to the island as being more useful there. This two-thirds was turned over to the insular Department of the Interior, which had responsibility for lands. It has since passed through many vicissitudes including a fire in 1926 which destroyed an undetermined portion of it. Some papers rescued from the fire are now in private collections. The University of Puerto Rico now has the remaining papers (about 400 cubic feet) as well as several of the more important private collections involved, and these are about to be turned over to the recently established Institute de Cultura Puertorriquena which now has responsibility for the archival program of the Commonwealth ("an act to establish a program for the preservation and disposal of public documents," approved December 8, 1955; Governor's order of June 19, 1956).

About one-third of the original shipment, composed about equally of printed material and manuscript material, remained in the Library of Congress. Apparently the printed volumes were absorbed into the book collections of the Library and a few bound manuscript volumes were taken over by the Manuscript Division, but the remaining part of the records was stored in the basement of the Library until it was transferred to the National Archives in 1943, being properly considered as archival in character.

The records when received in the National Archives were in complete disorder and there is ample evidence that they were already in that condition when they were sent from Puerto Rico in 1898-1900. A considerable portion of them was also damaged by mold and book-worms. Because of its interest in these records the University of Puerto Rico maintained a person for 3 years in the National Archives to arrange the material. The arrangement, although far from complete, is much improved as a result of this service, paid for by Puerto Rico. The National Archives has kept the records safely in an air-conditioned building where they should remain until Puerto Rico can provide the same lest the mold spores again start growing. Requests for information from them are infrequent. About two-thirds of such requests originate in Puerto Rico.

The basic reasons for the transfer of these records to the Government of Puerto Rico are as follows:

1. Puerto Rico is an associated State or Commonwealth, and, as stated in the preamble of this bill, "it is fitting that such documents be now placed in the custody of the Government of the said Commonwealth."

2. The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has provided by law for an archival program (the above cited "Act to Establish a Program for the Preservation and Disposal of Public Documents", approved December 8, 1955), which program is now in operation and supported by appropriations. The Commonwealth has recently made the initial appropriation toward a new archival building, which will, according to plans, provide air-conditioning and other safeguards. It has already contracted for the purchase of a laminating machine, which will enable it to rehabilitate the fragile and damaged material. It paid for the trip of a staff member of the National Archives to go to Puerto Rico last fall to help plan and organize the program. It has recently employed another staff member of the National Archives (who will be given leave of absence) to supervise the program and train employees

for a period of 12 months. Provisos in the bill insure that this program will be brought to a more advanced stage before the records will be transferred; indeed the passage of the bill with these provisos will help to encourage the Puerto Ricans in this undertaking and help to secure continued support for it.

3. It is desirable for archival, administrative, and historical reasons to bring the original body of records together. The greater part, as has been described, is already in Puerto Rico. We can make little further headway in the National Archives toward a final arrangement of the records here because the registers and other controls that should determine that arrangement are in Puerto Rico. The Puerto Ricans likewise cannot set up their part of the records without knowing what is here. Programs for arrangement, description and repair must await the merging of the two major bodies. Only then can the lesser parts be fitted in, and the missing parts, lost in the fire or otherwise, be determined. Only after all this is done will it be possible to understand and make full use of the records for administrative, legal, historical, and other research purposes. The greatest demand for such use will come from Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans and not from the United States, so the location of the reunited body should unquestionably be in Puerto Rico.

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