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G.O., 19th September 1885, No. 219

SEPTEMBER.

Record System.

Circulating to all heads of departments
Secretariat note regarding the introduction of th
disposal-number principle into large offices.

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.

PUBLIC DEPARTMENT.

READ—the following papers :—

Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, dated 20th June 1882, No. 1586.

Read—again the following Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, dated 6th September 1873, No. 1767 :—

ABSTRACT.—Issuing certain instructions to Collector of Ganjam in regard to preservation and arrangement of records, and forwarding a list showing departments into which records, &c., should be divided; and requesting Collector to submit any remarks he may wish to make on the subject.

Read—again the following Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, dated 30th September 1874, No. 2819 :—

ABSTRACT.—Communicating to Collector of Ganjam report of Collector of Nellore as to the manner in which records are arranged in that district.

Resolution—dated 20th June 1882, No. 1586.

The Board of Revenue place on record a change recently made in the method of arranging and referencing from papers in their office. The general principles are applicable to all Revenue offices, and Collectors can, as opportunity arises, keep them in view in dealing with their own records.

2. Formerly papers reached the Board, and while under disposal were dealt with by the Board, with little attempt at serial or consecutive arrangement. The result was frequent displacement and occasional loss, and a great want of convenience in perusal. In putting away papers into record, the method was to keep the received letter in one place, and the proceedings disposing of it in another. In the arrangement of papers put away in record, the practice was to keep them in packages or dufters, each containing the papers of one month and one district. The papers lay loose and for the most part unclassified in each dufter; no check was exercised on the contents of a dufter, and if a paper was removed no voucher was taken, and the destination of the paper could only be ascertained after considerable search. For referencing from the papers so arranged a mixed method prevailed, being based partly on received number, partly on date, and partly on disposal numbers. Subject-indexes were in force, but not being current they could not be used till some months after the disposal of papers.

3. The arrangements which have been substituted are as follows:—Papers, whether before they are sent in to the Board, or during disposal, are filed together on a prescribed system based on chronological order. The file of papers thus arising is kept open till final disposal by a proceedings, when the whole is put away as a single unit for record and reference. The disposed-of files are arranged in record under three numbered series, printed indexed, manuscript indexed and unindexed, and a fourth unnumbered series for unimportant papers. Referencing is conducted entirely by the disposal numbers just mentioned. The subject-indexes are written up daily from the previous day's disposals, and bear on these disposal numbers.

4. Briefly, the file has been substituted for the dufter, or consecutive chronological arrangement for loose arrangement in bundles, in a number of particulars connected with papers; and in putting away papers in record and making them available again through indexes, the disposal-number system has been substituted for several mixed methods. These changes have had the effect of producing convenience of disposal, security of the public records, and quickness and certainty in referencing, in the Board's office. Collectors should not make any change in their own record systems except after very careful consideration, but in the event of any questions in connection with that subject arising, they can observe the general principles here indicated for their information.

(True Extract.)

(Signed) R. SEWELL,
Acting Sub-Secretary.

(True Copy.)

(Signed) S. SRINIVASA RAGHAVAIYANGAR,
First Assistant.

To all Collectors.

NOTE ON THE DISPOSAL-NUMBER SYSTEM OF RECORD AND REFERENCE.

Village Accountants' Records.—The oldest indigenous method of record-keeping is that of the village accountant. He ties the records together with little or no arrangement in a bundle made of cotton cloth. For the classification he trusts to his memory. This bundle is called by the English a "dufter," though the original Hindostany word has not that meaning. (2) *Records of native cutcherries.*—In larger native offices the cloth bundle is still the basis of the arrangements. Papers are however arranged by dates, either of receipt or despatch. The received papers are invariably placed in one bundle, and the despatched papers in another. When these two appertain to each other, the idea of actually connecting them has at this stage of record-keeping not occurred. A connection is established only by means of annotated entries. Miscellaneous papers, which are numerous and sometimes important, are not treated on any definite principle. In some cases they are made into separate bundles by themselves; but they are frequently neglected, and are the source of much trouble and confusion. When there are several distinct series of correspondence, as for instance in the case of a Tahsildar dealing with superior authorities, with Deputy Tahsildars, or with Revenue Inspectors; a set of date bundles is put aside for each such series, thus forming a rough classification. Where the office is large enough to require a reference system, this is obtained by ledgers corresponding to the date-bundles; each paper being posted in the ledgers. To find a paper, the eye must be run through the ledger; there is no other method of reference. On the abstraction of records there is no check, other than that of the ledgers just mentioned. There is no system of voucher for records taken out for use. (3) *Introduction of serial numbers.*—Though the English offices in the districts have in the main merely taken over the native system just described, miscellaneous improvements have grown up with the increased size of offices. The addition of serial numbers to the dates is a comparatively recent arrangement. As applied in the districts this is not of much importance, for little or no use is made of the serial number. It is noteworthy however as forming the germ of the latest improvements devised. (4) *Paste-books and copy-books.*—Another development is that of keeping the more important papers together in books; when received papers, by pasting them into books, and when despatched papers, by copying them into books. This method, if an advance for purposes of security, is the reverse for purposes of perusing the papers. For though it may be suitable to an office where only one or two persons have to use the records, it is obviously unsuitable where the records have to be dealt with simultaneously by many persons. (5) *The subject bundle system.*—This system has been devised of late years in certain offices supervised by Europeans. It consists of keeping the papers separate and not formed into books, yet of grouping them together into subjects and so tying them up. Registers carry the items from the received or despatched entries into the bundles where they are to be found. This method is only suitable as long as it can be certain that the papers will always be required in that particular connection and in no other. With a shifting administration, the classification of to-day may be unsuitable for the requirements of to-morrow. The subject bundles then become an incumbrance instead of an assistance. This method has not had much currency, and cannot be said to have been a success. (6) *The alphabetical index.*—This is a European invention. It was introduced some years ago, and combined with the system of serial numbers has developed into the system which forms the subject of the present note. In all stages but the last however the alphabetical index has been only partially applied. Again the serial number question has been left quite undefined;

that is to say the alphabetical index has operated first on one, and then on another part of the record system. (7) *The Board of Revenue record system, immediately preceding the introduction of the disposal-number system.*—The office of the Board of Revenue is the largest and most complex office of the Presidency. It stands between the Secretariat offices and the district offices. Its condition prior to the introduction of the latest record system may be considered typical, and can thus be summarized. If a paper which reached the Board was composed of several parts, as a letter and enclosures, these parts came up detached from one another. As the practice was to fold each paper twice vertically, an arrangement suitable to the cloth dufter, they were necessarily detached. Again when a bundle of papers was made up in the office for the despatch of business, say for the consideration of a letter so received, the component parts of the bundle were similarly detached, and for the same reason. It is needless to say that it was difficult to keep papers duly arranged, or to obtain a connected view of them, under this system. It was the cause of great delay. When the papers after being utilized were distributed and put away in record, the received papers (technically called "currents") were put away in one place, and the orders passed on concluding papers (technically called "disposals") were put away in another. To find them again double referencing was necessary. In the arrangement of the records the practice was to keep them in dufters, that is to say packages, each containing the papers of one month and one district. The papers lay loose and unclassified in each dufter. No check was exercised on the contents of a dufter, and if a paper was removed no voucher was taken, and the destination of the paper could only be ascertained after considerable search. The register of received papers was not systematically closed, and it afforded no guide therefore either to the tracing of papers, or to the check of arrears accruing in the office. There was no method for checking the length of time for which a paper was kept by any person or branch of the office. It may be added that each step in the transaction of the Board's business, however trifling or temporary, was marked by a separate "disposal;" thus making an immense number of items in the total records. There was no arrangement for connecting the records of the past, present, and future (technically called "chaining"). As to the arrangements for finding the records (technically called "referencing"), a mixed method prevailed; the books and indexes bearing partly on received number, partly on date, and partly on disposal number. The subject indexes which were in force were not prepared currently, and could only be used some months after the disposal of papers. (8) *Record system of the Chief Secretariat immediately preceding the introduction of the disposal-number system.*—The above remarks apply in great measure to the Chief Secretariat record system as it existed prior to the introduction of the disposal-number system. Papers were received from other offices twice folded, and when more than one loosely bundled together. The papers arising in the office were also dealt with as loose papers. Previous papers or "references" were presented without method. Papers were put away in record by date, though not in dufters. No exact account was taken of papers removed from record. The index though exhaustive was so much in arrears as to be of no service for current referencing. In all other particulars, the remarks made above regarding the Board may be repeated. (9) *The disposal-number system.*—The disposal-number system, which was introduced to remedy these different deficiencies, consists of the application of two principles; the first consecutive chronological arrangement of papers, and the second alphabetical indexing concentrated on a single series of numbers. The first process being made to lead up to the second, the whole forms a single system. It has already been introduced in the Chief Secretary's office, the office of the Board of Revenue, and the head-quarter offices of three Collectorates. (10) *Its method of operation.*—The first step in the disposal-number system is to cause the papers to be presented in consecutive form, or in the same way as the pages of a book. This is partly with a view to mere convenience, and partly to prepare the papers for forming finally a disposal-unit, as will be hereafter described. To enable the papers to be presented in juxtaposition, it is necessary to prescribe that they must not be twice folded. They must either be only once folded, or not folded at all; again like the pages of a book. It is also found very desirable to prescribe uniformity in size of paper, as in the case of a book; otherwise the papers under this method are apt to become dilapidated. Each bundle then begins with what is technically called a "current" or an initial paper; and gradually grows, one paper being attached to another, with the progress of business on that particular paper. This process is continued as long as it is convenient. If orders are passed of a temporary nature, as when further information is called for from other offices, the bundle or "file" is still kept open, and the intermediate orders still bear the initial or "current" number (at least this is the simplest course). When the manager of the office considers it desirable he closes the "file." A number is then put upon it, which cancels all previous numbers, and is thenceforth exclusively referred to in the indexes and other books of the office. As such a file may contain a number of papers, it is evident that multiplicity of records is very much diminished. The file becomes a unit for purposes of record, and the number is called the "disposal-number" whence the name of the system. The file once so made is never again broken up, and the record-keeper is responsible for its security. (11) *Its advantages.*—The disposal-number system substitutes a single principle, or at most a principle divided into two parts, for various mixed methods. Its advantages are mainly seen in great increase of convenience and rapidity of work in dealing with papers, and in security provided for the public records. Subsidiary advantages are that it enables previous papers to be "referenced" or traced

check of arrears or the progress of business. The superior convenience of a "file," which approximates in character to a book, over a loose bundle of papers, requires no comment. It saves a great portion of the time of superior officers in dealing with papers, and enables routine operations to be transferred to subordinate agency. The security of the records is attained by providing that every paper shall form part of some file, that files shall be paged, and that every file shall sooner or later bear a disposal number. A record cannot then be lost or abstracted, any more than a page can be torn from a book, without detection. The simplicity of the numbering system expedites the tracing of papers. As every paper must proceed to a disposal-number the methods of book-keeping to check progress are made more easy. (12) *Exchange of printed matter between departments.*—Though not a necessary part of the record system above-mentioned, this should be mentioned here; as illustrating a similar principle of presenting consecutive as opposed to detached matter. The steps taken in that direction are specified in G.O., dated 19th March 1881, No. 377, Public; Memorandum dated 8th March 1882, No. 1867, Public; and G.O., dated 16th March 1882, No. 903, Revenue. (13) *Improvements in routine.*—In offices where the disposal-number record system has been introduced, opportunity has been taken to make improvements in various routine matters, though not actually belonging to it; the changes being mostly with the object of relieving superior officers of details which can equally well be attended to by subordinates.

ORDER—dated 19th September 1885, No. 2196, Public.

The Government concur in the remarks made by the Board of Revenue in their proceedings, and desire that circulation be given to the Secretariat note read above which is explanatory of the system.

(True Extract.)

W. WILSON,
for *Chief Secretary*.

To the departments of the Secretariat.
,, the Board of Revenue.
,, all heads of departments.

Exd. J. Wright

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