

## **Introduction**

*PERIODICALLY* someone raises the question of why Wisconsin publishes a biennial Blue Book and why it contains the material included in it. The Blue Book has become a tradition. It was just 80 years ago, in 1878, that the name Blue Book was given to it although a forerunning document had been published for a quarter of a century before. Its form and content have remained essentially the same throughout these 80 years although constant effort has been made to improve it within the general scope of the objectives of the volume which are to provide a complete and accurate picture of state government.

The Wisconsin Blue Book originated in 1853 as a mere manual of rules, customs, precedents and forms for the use of the assembly. Ten years later it became a legislative manual for both houses containing the rules and precedents of the senate and assembly prepared by the chief clerks of both houses. With the 1863 edition other material, such as election statistics, names of federal officials, post offices appeared and beginning in 1878 the name Blue Book was applied to it.

From its inception until 1885 it was published annually, but since that date it has appeared biennially. Through 1937 it was released in the odd-numbered years, but beginning in 1940 it came out in even-numbered years. From 1853 to 1865 it was edited by the chief clerks of the legislature; from 1866 to 1903 by the Secretary of State; from 1903 to 1913 by the Commissioner of Labor and from 1913 to 1919 by the Industrial Commission. In 1919 the editing was transferred to the Printing Board where it remained until 1931 when it was transferred to the Legislative Reference Library, where it has been ever since.

The Blue Book as a legislative manual was a small book, but when it began to include other data, its size increased until in

1907 it contained 1,222 pages. In 1911 the legislature established a maximum length of 800 pages.

Approximately 45,000 copies are distributed by the Bureau of Purchases in accordance with the statutes. The bulk of these copies go to legislators. Each assemblyman gets 200 copies and each senator gets 300 copies. Copies go to all Wisconsin public libraries and to all schools. The distribution to schools is based on enrollment. Copies are also distributed to officials designated in the statutes. The book may also be purchased from the Bureau of Purchases.

The statutes provide a guide to the content of the volume. It must contain lists of legislators, statistics and other information of the same general character as that previously included. It must also contain material useful in the civics classes in schools.

In 1933 the cost of printing and distributing the Blue Book was a little more than \$17,000. Since then the costs have risen substantially. The 1956 edition cost \$66,798 for 45,500 copies, but this did not include distribution or editing costs.

Without the wholehearted cooperation of the various state agencies, the publication of this volume would not be possible. Special recognition is given to Gerald L. Matthews for the illustrations on the title pages, to John D. Meredith for the illustrations in the feature article, and to the E. F. Schmidt Co., Milwaukee, for the frontispiece; and to the staffs of the Printing Division of the Bureau of Purchases and the Legislative Reference Library for their work in preparing the copy for this edition.

#### LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE LIBRARY

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Editors