

the nature of the case the masses of people have neither time nor opportunity to consult them, and their exploitation must be entrusted to certain workers whom the community assigns to this task. Their work it is to make the contents of the records available for the use of scholars generally and for ready reference by any who may care to consult them. Thus it is that practically all enlightened governments maintain historical agencies whose function it is to preserve and publish, with appropriate editing, their historical records, for until these sources of information are made accessible there can be no correct or accurate knowledge of the past to which they pertain.

It becomes a primary duty of the Detroit Public Library, therefore, in discharging the trust reposed in it by Mr. Burton, to publish the sources which are indispensable to those who essay the task of writing the city's history. To this end the present volume has been prepared as the first of a series to be issued under the general caption of the *Burton Historical Records*. In considering the question, which manuscripts should be given earliest publication in the series, there was little difficulty in reaching a decision. The papers of John Askin, a former resident and merchant of Detroit, constitute one of the valuable groups in the Burton Historical Collection. Although not the earliest in point of time, they are among the earlier papers; a more important factor determining their selection is the fact that John Askin's activities over a period of half a century in the Northwest, were so manifold that his personal papers illustrate practically every aspect of the life of his time in the region of the upper lakes, a fact which becomes more evident from a consideration of the outstanding aspects of his career.

Although Askin was a native of the north of Ireland he was of Scotch descent; according to family tradition he was a kinsman of John Erskine, Earl of Mar, who headed the revolt in 1715 in favor of the Old Pretender. As a consequence of its failure, many of those concerned in it left Scotland for Ireland. Among others was the father of John Askin, who settled at or near Strabane in the county of