

Sampling Rural Rehabilitation Records for Transfer to the National Archives

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IN December 1945 the Farm Security Administration offered for transfer to the National Archives all the paid-in-full rural habilitation loan folders accumulated in its county offices from the time of the inauguration of the rehabilitation program until the end of 1943. This involved 315,000 loan cases, upward of 500,000 loan folders, and approximately 20,000 cubic feet of records. From this volume the National Archives has selected for transfer to its custody about 600 cubic feet. The method used in selecting, or sampling, the records, and the general character of the loan folders and the program which they document, have attracted the attention of archivists and records officers, and elicited some requests for additional information. The purpose of this paper is therefore to give a brief account of the rural rehabilitation program, describe the records involved, and explain the sampling process employed in the transfer transaction.

One of the major aims of the Federal Emergency Relief Appropriation Acts of 1933 and 1934 was to bring relief to needy farmers and their families. In 1933 approximately one million rural families were dependent on public aid for their survival. By 1935 the number was nearly doubled. The relief burden was at first carried by local agencies, but the economic resources of these agencies were soon exhausted, and the Federal Government had to come to their aid. In 1934 a Rural Rehabilitation Division was established within the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. The Division was authorized to grant money for rural rehabilitation to the several States, to be administered locally by the State Emergency Relief Corporations.

The corporations made loans to farmers unable to borrow from private agencies because they could not offer adequate security for the loans, and grants to families who had become destitute through the operation of natural catastrophes, such as floods, droughts, and hurricanes. Grants were sometimes made to rural families who had been

accepted for the rehabilitation loan program, but were in need of immediate aid to carry them along until a loan could be approved and farm and home management plans worked out for them. The grants, which were spent for food and other necessities, were often defined as gifts made by the Government to impoverished families who would be unable to repay the money advanced to them. Adequate security was required for every loan, however. It was taken in the form of promissory notes, chattel mortgages, or conditional sales contracts, depending on the circumstances and financial condition of the borrower, who was known as the client. At the beginning of 1935 some 350,000 families were carried on the rolls of the Rehabilitation Corporations. Approximately 1,200,000 rural rehabilitation loans have been made since the program was inaugurated.

The functions of the Rural Rehabilitation Division were transferred to the Resettlement Administration upon its creation, April 30, 1935, and a new Rehabilitation Division was established under its supervision. During the first weeks of its existence the Resettlement Administration expected to continue the procedure of granting money to the State Rehabilitation Corporations, but the Comptroller General decided otherwise. In an informal ruling of June 22, 1935, he announced that, under the provisions of the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, no part of the funds at the disposal of the Resettlement Administration could be used for grants to the State Corporations, and that any expenditures for rural relief must be made directly to the clients. This decision created an extremely difficult administrative problem. In the course of the week intervening between the ruling of the Comptroller General, on June 22, and the end of the fiscal year the Resettlement Administration had to create administrative machinery sufficiently well equipped to continue the rehabilitation program. That the problem was solved in a satisfactory manner speaks well for the Resettlement Administration.

But the Comptroller General's ruling had other results. As by the stroke of the pen of some mighty potentate, the activities of the Resettlement Administration were expanded to tremendous proportions. Almost overnight its local agencies became infinitely multiplied and their functions broadened. The records of this projection of the Federal Government from indirect to direct participation in the rural relief program should be of genuine interest to the students of public administration.

In analyzing the rural rehabilitation problems, the Resettlement Administration and its successor agency, the Farm Security Administration, discovered that rural poverty had been brought about, not so much by the economic depression of the early 'thirties, as by other,

more fundamental causes. Much of the land tilled by the clients had been worn out from years of misuse; many of the farms were too small to support a family; and insecurity of tenure, resulting in yearly moves from one farm to another, discouraged long-term planning and efficient husbandry. Most serious of all, perhaps, was the lack of training, on the part of the clients, in methods of modern farming and home management.

It was felt that these fundamental causes of rural poverty had to be removed before any progress could be made in rehabilitating the clients. The result was that rural rehabilitation became something more than the granting of loans to low-income farmers. In a sense, it developed into a reform program, the aim of which was to eradicate conditions of social, economic, and educational maladjustment. Under this program efforts were made to teach the clients how to operate their farms, manage their homes, maintain their health, and take their part in community activities. They were to be induced to produce and conserve the right types of food for their own use, to repair farm implements, mend family clothing, and maintain sanitary housing conditions.

This ambitious program emerged as one of the indirect results of the Comptroller General's ruling. It called for the close supervision of the rehabilitation of clients. Farm and home supervisors made frequent visits to the clients, of whom the less efficient and less enthusiastic received the most frequent and most unexpected calls. The supervisors made detailed check-ups and careful analyses of the progress achieved and the shortcomings to be remedied, and often sent timely reminders to individual borrowers, calling their attention to obligations that were to be met, and to new plans that had to be formulated.

This program was operated locally by the Farm Security Administration's county officials, who dealt directly with the individual clients. The local records are therefore of particular significance. They are maintained in the client's case file folders, and consist of all documents used in the loan transactions, from initial application to termination. They are rich in human interest material, and contain information of unique value for the study of social and economic conditions that prevailed in various parts of the country in the decade preceding the war. To the student of public administration they are important source material, documenting, as they do, this first gigantic rural relief and rehabilitation program wherein the Federal Government has dealt directly with the individual citizen. They also contain evidence for the evaluation of this 20th century paternalism that was designed to raise the standard of living among the underprivileged rural families, and they afford information that may serve to indicate whether and to what extent the clients of such a program tend to lapse into their old habits and

practices once governmental supervision has been removed.

The records maintained in a client case file fall into distinct categories, each readily identified. The correspondence carried on between the client and the Rehabilitation Division, especially during the period of the Resettlement Administration, gives a fair portrayal of the administrative machinery set up to handle rehabilitation problems, and of the policies, procedures, and ideologies that gave direction and impetus to the whole program. The loan agreement is the basic document. It binds the client to operate his farm and manage his home in the manner prescribed in his farm and home management plans, to keep specified records and accounts, and deposit his money in a specified bank. Other records in the folders are the farm and home management plans, the farm and home visit reports, used by the supervisors to indicate the progress made by the client in his farming, housekeeping, gardening, canning, maintenance of equipment, participation in community activities and health and recreational activities. There is often also a farm lease, pointing to the efforts made by the Rehabilitation Division to obtain for its clients satisfactory tenure arrangements. Most suggestive of all records in the clients' folders are the confidential reports. This type of report deals with the reputation of the rehabilitation family, its attitude toward Farm Security Administration programs, its suitability for a farm ownership loan, its advancement in rehabilitation, especially in respect to whether supervision should be continued, relaxed, or abandoned.

When the loan transactions were concluded, the complete record files were maintained separately in the county offices under the designation of paid-in-full loan folders. These are the records that were offered for transfer to the National Archives. They represent closed cases, and are of little future administrative or legal value. But they are of primary importance for the understanding of the rural rehabilitation functions of the Farm Security Administration and predecessor agencies. They contain the basic documentation of those functions, and therefore merit a place in the National Archives. But their volume, which measures upward of 20,000 cubic feet, precluded the transfer of the records *en toto*. Some satisfactory method of sampling had to be devised.

Various methods were considered. At first it was felt that the customary percentage method, based on the theory of probabilities, would prove satisfactory. This might take the form of selecting at random a given number of paid-in-full loan folders, or of preserving the folders of a given number of counties in various parts of the country. These and other statistical methods would preserve adequate documentation of the rehabilitation functions; but they would not insure the preservation of sufficient records for the evaluation of the economic, social,

and political factors that made the rehabilitation program necessary. It was essential that a method of sampling be found that would reflect these fundamental conditions, and, at the same time, show the remedies applied.

The economic conditions that called for rural rehabilitation were not the same throughout the country. Those plaguing the fruit growers differed from those which beset the dairy farmers, while the problems confronting the cotton planters differed from those harassing the wheat farmers. Even within the same general crop-producing areas the farmers' difficulties varied. The corn producers of South Dakota faced graver problems than the corn and cattle farmers of Southeast Iowa, and the dairy farmers of Minnesota were more unfavorably situated in respect to markets than the dairy farmers of Northern Indiana. Social conditions differed also from region to region, and the human factor was always varied. The reaction of the well-educated and erstwhile independent rural families of some Northern areas to the planning and close scrutiny of their affairs by the farm and home supervisors operating the local rehabilitation program might be quite different from the feeling of the sharecroppers of some Southern regions. The lasting effect of rehabilitation also might differ in accordance with these different human factors and different environment.

Any adequate sampling of the records reflecting these conditions, therefore, had to be so planned as to cover the rural rehabilitation activities in all farming areas. Otherwise the selected records would not be representative. They would not give complete information about the causes of the maladjustment in rural areas, nor contain the means by which to measure the efficacy of the various remedies applied to these conditions.

Once the decision was made to obtain records from the several geographical areas, the sampling problem was comparatively simple. The solution was found by consulting a project previously carried out by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. As a result of its extensive studies, the Bureau has classified the agricultural operations of the country into 134 distinct farming areas. On the basis of this classification it constructed a map delineating the location and extent of these areas. The sampling process was based upon this map and upon statistical data furnished by the Farm Security Administration to indicate the county in each area that was most typical of its operations. All the records of that representative county were then requisitioned for transfer to the National Archives. The records selected for preservation therefore consist of the paid-in-full rural rehabilitation loan folders accumulated in 134 typical counties or cross sections of the country

during the period from the inception of the rural rehabilitation program to the end of the calendar year 1943.

It would appear that this documentation adequately reflects the social, economic, and human factors that led to the establishment of the rural rehabilitation program. It contains sufficient data for the study and evaluation of the procedures, policies, ideologies, and techniques followed by the Farm Security Administration in its operation of the program. Together with other Farm Security Administration records to be transferred to the National Archives, or what are now in the custody of the Archives, they will afford the means for measuring the success achieved in the rural rehabilitation program and the soundness of the principles upon which it was based.

COUNTIES FROM WHICH RURAL REHABILITATION RECORDS WERE SELECTED FOR TRANSFER TO THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

CASELOADS OF BORROWERS

<i>Region I</i>			<i>Region III</i>		
STATE	COUNTY	PAID-UP	STATE	COUNTY	PAID-UP
Maine	Aroostook	762	Illinois	Marion	71
"	Kennebec	72	"	St. Clair	30
			"	Wabash	49
Maryland	Frederick	30	Indiana	De Kalb	166
New Hampshire	Rockingham	61	"	Hamilton	69
New Jersey	Burlington	20	"	White	128
New York	Livingston	16	Iowa	Boone	61
" "	Monroe	21	"	Clayton	54
" "	Oswego	48	"	Iowa	112
			"	Lucas	146
Pennsylvania	Clarion	41	Missouri	Lawrence	158
"	Erie	80	"	Perry	90
"	Juniata	26	Ohio	Jackson	72
"	Lancaster	61			
Vermont	Addison	82	<i>Region IV</i>		
			Kentucky	Bell	25
			"	Nelson	50
			North Carolina	Bertie	143
Michigan	Oakland	77	" "	Forsyth	99
"	Presque Isle	118	" "	Pender	56
"	St. Joseph	63	" "	Wake	78
"	Van Buren	253			
Minnesota	Isanti	92	Tennessee	Franklin	124
"	Sibley	57	"	Perry	94
			"	Williamson	80
Wisconsin	Juneau	91	Virginia	Buchingham	44
"	Langlade	137	"	Fairfax	34
"	Waukesha	24			

STATE	COUNTY	PAID-UP	STATE	COUNTY	PAID-UP
"	Pittsylvania	147	"	Nueces	62
"	Smyth	41	"	San Jacinto	60
West Virginia	Nicholas	78	"	Throckmorton	24
	<i>Region V</i>		"	Willacy	89
			"	Wise	97
Alabama	Dallas	81		<i>Region IX</i>	
"	Elmore	179	Arizona	Mohave	25
"	Marshall	381	"	Pima	51
"	Shelby	111			
Florida	Lee	18	California	Del Norte	3
"	Volusia	13	"	Monterey	56
Georgia	Hart	158	"	Orange	122
"	Worth	65	"	Sacramento	170
South Carolina	Berkeley	102	"	San Joaquin	160
	<i>Region VI</i>		"	Siskiyou	43
Arkansas	Lenoke	106	"	Tuolumne	4
"	Marion	198	Nevada	Churchill	111
"	Pulaski	129	"	Washoe	34
Louisiana	Assumption	14	Utah	Grand	18
"	Avoyelle	298	"	Utah	233
"	St. Helena	103		<i>Region X</i>	
Mississippi	Attala	72	Colorado	Alamosa	49
"	Carroll	16	"	Bent	47
"	Jasper	147	"	Delta	165
	<i>Region VII</i>		"	Logan	118
Kansas	Atchison	84	Montana	Pondera	67
"	Coffey	170	"	Stillwater	36
"	Ness	89	Wyoming	Albany	45
"	Sedgwick	124	"	Crook	176
"	Wallace	67	"	Goshen	165
Nebraska	Deuel	68	"	Sublette (Sublehe)	46
"	York	182		<i>Region XI</i>	
North Dakota	Barnes	179	Idaho	Bannock	140
"	Grand Forks	105	"	Clearwater	64
"	Stark	128	"	Fremont	112
South Dakota	Clark	128	"	Owyhee	85
"	McPherson	104	"	Twin Falls	347
	<i>Region VIII</i>		Oregon	Clatsop	37
Oklahoma	Lincoln	253	"	Jackson	306
"	Osage	184	Washington	King	305
"	Ottawa	172	"	Walla Walla	60
"	Pittsburg	156	"	Yakima	304
				<i>Region XII</i>	
Texas	Brazoria	71	New Mexico	San Miguel	92
"	Dallas	178	"	Santa Fe	106
"	Hamilton	132			
"	Haskell	158	Texas	Dawson	285
"	Kendall	22	"	El Paso	46
"	La Salle	37	"	Jeff Davis	10
"	Leon	110	"	Randall	32