

# The Manuscripts of Social Welfare

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THE TIME has come to face squarely the problems created by the accumulation of vast quantities of manuscript files by thousands of organizations and leaders in the field of social welfare. It is my purpose to invite the attention of American archivists and social work leaders to the nature of "social welfare" from a record-keeping standpoint. I shall suggest problems that will plague those concerned with preserving the record. And I shall indicate what I feel to be appropriate action. That this is something of a pioneering effort can be surmised from the bland wording of a letter recently received from an acquaintance, the veteran chief of the bureau of research of a State social welfare department. He wrote, "I am afraid that I do not apprehend with sufficient clarity the problem which you pose regarding the usefulness of social welfare manuscripts to make any significant comment. Sorry." Clarification seems to be the first order of business!

*The manuscripts of social welfare are the unprinted documents and letters, the paperwork, of the social welfare field.* What, then, is "social welfare"? On this controversial matter there are many in our society who will disagree pleasantly and some who will quarrel vigorously. Having once put together 110 statistical tables on the subject in book form and devoted a chapter to the matter in a second one, I have a definition to suggest.

*Social welfare is special services supplied and material assistance given by all or part of society to a human being thought to be in need.* Some social work experts will be satisfied with this definition; others will not. In any case, social welfare — like democracy — is an ongoing process, with turnover in agencies, programs, and personnel. Among those who receive services the turnover is variable but frequent. In structure, the field consists of nonprofit organizations, both governmental and voluntary, engaging in the giving of service and monetary aid. It is individual social workers counseling and advising. It is people in need of help receiving a hand from society. It can consist of changing the daily environment of children

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and youths in ways calculated to give them a better chance in life, to increase their happiness, and to strengthen their characters. Education and religion, as such, are excluded, and so is medical care unless free or part-pay.

Social service in our country is now a highly organized effort. In an average city of over half a million persons, literally hundreds of welfare and social work organizations are active. The yellow pages of the downtown Los Angeles telephone book list such organizations in five columns of fine print, and this does not begin to tell the story of groups seeking to "do good" in the rest of the sprawling county.

The stranger to social welfare will find invaluable some sort of classification to guide him as he is faced with multitudes of organizational names in this field. In the writer's *California Social Welfare*<sup>1</sup> an attempt was made to classify all organizations in the social welfare field according to the age groups they served (children, youths, adults, and the aging, with disease and rehabilitation groups kept separate). Subclasses were broken down by function. The resulting classification, while possibly subject to some localism or regionalism, may be helpful to the interested archivist, since through its use he will find it possible to classify local or State welfare groups according to what they do. While some archivists may deliberately set out to try to assemble manuscripts from all the community agencies dealing with one group — children, for example — others may want to gather at the outset materials representative of many aspects of the total field. To the formal list given here should be added headings to embrace community organization, fundraising, and regulatory bodies. In some localities additional headings may be needed. The archivist should not be discouraged if he finds that public welfare departments, the American National Red Cross, and other enormous organizations engage in work with all ages and must be listed in many subcategories. Here, then, is the writer's welfare agency classification system by age groups:

#### A CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM FOR SOCIAL WELFARE AGENCIES (BY AGE OF PERSON AIDED)

##### *Services for Children*

##### A. Programs for Children in Their Own Homes

<sup>1</sup> (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, 1956), sponsored by the Commonwealth Club of California. A "Note on Sources of Social Welfare Information" in that book may be useful to archivists new to this field. Expansion of the writer's definition of social welfare appears in chapter 2 of his forthcoming book, *The American Pattern in Social Welfare*.

- B. Placement of Children in Foster and Boarding Homes
- C. Institutional Care of Children
- D. Unmarried Mother Programs
- E. Adoption Services
- F. Family and Child Counseling
- G. Material Assistance
- H. Homemaker or Housekeeper Services
- I. Well-Baby and Child Health Conferences
- J. Day Care and Nursery Services
- K. Other Services for Children

*Services for Youth*

- A. Group Work and Recreation
- B. Counseling and Guidance
- C. Housing Accommodations, Free or Part-Pay
- D. Other Services for Youth

*Health Services for Children and Adults*

- A. Medical Services
- B. Research and Educational Programs Relating to Diseases
- C. Crippled Children and Adults Programs
- D. Mental Health Programs for Children and Adults
- E. Cerebral Palsied Children and Adults
- F. Infantile Paralysis
- G. Tuberculosis
- H. Services for the Chronically Ill
- I. Dental Services
- J. Schools and Programs for the Blind, Deaf, and Hard of Hearing
- K. Rehabilitation for the Handicapped
- L. Other Health Services

*Services for Adults*

- A. Material Assistance
- B. Services for Travelers, Migrants, and Immigrants
- C. Institutional Housing
- D. Counseling and Guidance
- E. Visiting and Rehabilitation Work in Institutions
- F. Legal Aid
- G. Services for Military Personnel and Veterans
- H. Disaster Relief
- I. Group Work and Recreation for Adults
- J. Other Services for Adults

*Services for the Aging*

- A. Material Assistance
- B. Institutional Housing and Boarding Homes
- C. Group Work and Recreation
- D. Employment Services for the Aging
- E. Other Services for the Aging

With an eye to the future writing of biographies, a word should be said about leaders in social service work. In the early days of this century the field of charity and settlement work belonged to a handful of strong personalities who were seldom formally trained, occasionally rich, and often controversial as they attacked "the System" or "the bosses." These key leaders in the Progressive Movement made their mark on America. The archivist may want to begin discharging his responsibility to the overall social welfare field by writing a few oldtimers in the State (and especially in its largest cities) to ascertain the identities of such men and women. Few have attracted biographers so far. Charming and useful accounts can be written from filing cabinets and boxes of personal papers, once they are safely on deposit. Progress has been made on the names of

tenance for individuals. Such documents must be obtained at all costs.

The social service records of local government will certainly antedate the enactment of the Federal Social Security Act. To limit one's accumulations to the 1930's and later would be going too far in the direction of presentism, and it would be a distinct disservice to the factual record in States where mothers' aid, adoption procedures, blind and indigent aid, and even payments to old folks were State programs long before August 14, 1935. Yet an emphasis on the present and the recent past will be characteristic of the best archival programs in social welfare, for the vast organizational importance of the field dates from our great wars, depressions, and moments of intensified and heartfelt humanitarianism. Long-lived organized groups also date from such emotional days; our own lifetime has been crammed with them, and the revolutions in paperwork procedures, communications, and transportation have facilitated the building of permanent social service bodies, voluntary and government alike.

When considering the present state of social welfare manuscripts it may be fair to say that the social casework aspect of social welfare has thrived on paperwork, even though dire warnings against this are printed in journals of the profession. Moreover, one prominent welfare council executive says that in his field "squirrel instincts" prevail where committee reports and correspondence are concerned (when filing space is not a problem). "Virtually everything is saved in the council files," he reports. Pity the poor researcher of tomorrow when he comes to seek policy-level data!

The archivist ought to intervene now to urge welfare agencies to engage in intelligent weeding. For the well-operated welfare agency already has assigned someone to weed out the files annually (and every three or four years) along specified lines. The ground rules laid down by contemporary management will make all the difference to the historical writers of the future. Wise decisions by leaders who make history will enormously help experts who store history and those who vicariously relive it and tell the story to others.

Our current operating file contains records for the current year. . . . At the end of the . . . year these records are added to the transfer file without review. The body of records beginning its fourth year is removed annually from the transfer file for review. Essential records are then transferred to the permanent file and non-essential records are destroyed. The purpose of this review guide is to maintain a standard system to assist reviewers in preserving records that have permanent reference use or historical value which should never be destroyed. Our reviewers are cautioned to be alert to correspondence that contains significant background material which may assist in determining policy, procedure, et cetera.<sup>2</sup>

Another leader alert to the needs of policy formation and of present and future researchers is Robert H. MacRae, executive director, Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago. His weeding policies rest on generalizations along these lines:

It shall be the responsibility of the files supervisor to see that the files are kept weeded of material of which it is no longer necessary to retain a record. . . . Material from general files will be permanently removed or destroyed only upon authorization by a member of the professional staff. . . . Much material which is sent to files is of transitory importance, and in many instances it is possible to predict when it will no longer be required. In sending such material to files, executives or secretaries should note how long the material is to be retained, 6 months, 3 months, etc. The files staff will then be responsible for removing this material from the files at the appropriate time. Whenever it appears from infrequency of use that the retention of material is of doubtful value, the files staff will consult with the appropriate members of the executive staff about the need for keeping it. . . . Experience has shown that the subject files will, after a number of years, become overly complex as conditions and/or terminology changes and as various committees give attention to different aspects of a particular subject.<sup>3</sup>

Archivists alert to the nature of welfare council paperwork will note that such files are likely to contain minutes of innumerable committee meetings on a wide range of subjects, audits of member agencies of community chests, and background data for preliminary studies prepared in council offices for transitory purposes. Such materials, whatever their preoccupation with the present, will be of the utmost importance some day as records of the community in action. Researchers in the twenty-first century will find them valuable — provided they are preserved.

Correspondence of the nation's welfare councils also includes letters passing among important leaders. Because many councils engage heavily in legislative pressure at State, county, and city levels

<sup>2</sup> Letter, Sept. 3, 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, Sept. 2, 1959.



— considering “social action” a duty — there may be in their files letters on social issues from important people. The archivist owes it to the historian of State and local history to save community council files from destruction even if he must agree to keep this material closed for 5, 10, or 25 years (as well he may).

As important as the local councils, but significant for different research purposes, are the national or regional coordinating offices of such groups as the Y. M. C. A., the Salvation Army, and disease-oriented fundraising bodies. Area or territorial offices which cover many States have files of enduring interest to major university libraries or to large State historical societies with regional obligations. One thinks at once of the filing cabinets in the architectural-award-winning building of the Pacific Area headquarters, American National Red Cross, in San Francisco, where the story of disasters like the headline-making floods of 1956 lives on in routinely filed reports. Such files break down naturally into clear-cut subjects, which may be discussed briefly. In that Red Cross office are files pertaining to the financing of local chapter work, letters of criticism and praise, reports of inspections (“field visits”) made by staff members in urban and rural areas, correspondence on united fund membership negotiations, and manuscript histories of local chapter work in peace and war. The conference minutes on a wide range of subjects will have enduring importance. There are also present, not only here but in many other welfare agencies, biographical sketches of prominent local citizens not quite of the *Who's Who in America* level. These sketches of board members, chapter chairmen, and fundraisers, if gathered together in facsimile by archivists from welfare agencies, might come to comprise a biographical resource for local history of value unmatched except by privately held newspaper morgues.

Files in Red Cross chapter offices relating to prisoners of war, AWOL servicemen, tragedies, and many other touchy and private subjects will never be available for general research by outsiders, nor will most research scholars begrudge this loss. The needs of privacy must take precedence over the desire of the public to know. Still, the tactful and responsible sociological researcher can learn much from astute counting in such files when working on the premises with permission. He may find to his surprise that most of the counting he planned on has already been done by a staff member as a matter of routine.

What do welfare agencies do with the motion picture films, posters, and press releases of last year's community education cam-

paign? Are these of any value? Most agency officials would probably say that they are not. Doubtless they have a short life. But archivists remember the quick disappearance of the millions of Blue Eagle posters of 1934, and it may be well to ask the true value of a locally produced and carefully stored 16-mm. movie on community "needs" after the lapse of a century. Archivists may want to turn

into the loss of publicity and news releases, posters, radio and TV scripts, and films prepared for community investigating or fund-raising purposes. (However: much of this material comes from United Community Funds and Councils of America, Inc., in New York City, with local matter clipped or printed in.)

Who is collecting welfare and frontloading agency lessons, badges, pins, emblems, photographs, uniforms, and other such evidences of the overall social welfare scene? Perhaps these scenes are no more than trivia, but some historical critics may want to consider the preservation of samples.

Archivists hardly need to told of the richness of the manuscript collections in the National Archives and in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. But justice must be made of social welfare materials. In the National Archives are the records of such New Deal youth agencies as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration, and of adult employment agencies like the Works Progress Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Agency. One must agree with the judgment that such newspapers files as these contain "an immense and immensely rich body of source materials on social welfare subjects for the 1930's," the judgment of the veteran archivist Harman Kahn.<sup>4</sup> One wishes that social work professors would agree, to the point of having advanced graduate students make forays into this unexplored wilderness. The journals of social work do not yet reflect much interest in the use of Federal archival collections for research in social service history, although such research was pioneered by graduate students at the University of Chicago in the 1930's.

Natural comparisons to many newspaper collections in the National Archives are the papers of President Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. The White House papers of Mr. Roosevelt contain much material on social welfare. The subject file on the Social Security Board has a heavy concentration of papers on the background and drafting of the Social Security Act.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 24, 1955, from Hyde Park, N.Y. The author is indebted to Mr. Kahn and his staff for information on social insurance materials in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and to Mr. Earl Franklin for data on those in the National Archives.



It includes correspondence with members of the Senate and House about the act, items on the staffing of the Board and its later work, and correspondence with Harry Hopkins, John G. Winant, Sen. Robert H. Wagner, Arthur J. Altmeyer, and Mary Dewson. This file might be used in conjunction with certain files at the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, discussed later.

The general subject file for the Department of Labor in the Roosevelt Library contains material on social welfare subjects and on the activities of Secretary Frances Perkins. This will rise in value when the transcript of her lengthy oral history interview at Columbia University is made available, five years after her death. There is among the White House papers a general subject file on social welfare containing much correspondence with Secretary Perkins on the philosophy of the Social Security Act. Letters from citizens on social insurance reflect varying viewpoints. This writer has found the bulky incoming letter files at the Roosevelt Library very rewarding and recommends their examination to all concerned with the climate of national opinion on particular issues. Other White House files contain correspondence with prominent individuals and key organizations in which they pass judgment on the philosophy of the Social Security Act.

The papers of Harry Hopkins for the 1930's deal with many aspects of the problems of those troubled days. The material is normally arranged by State, making possible specialized studies of local relief and welfare programs. Perhaps in the long run our State Archives will assemble copies of at least a small part of the widely scattered archival materials classified in file folders by State. These are now lost to local and State historians because they are not easily accessible. In this instance, it may be that State historians should arrange to obtain microfilms of pertinent files for their libraries. There are in the Hopkins papers reports of special investigators who wrote directly to their chief on problems encountered in States and localities. The writer found similar reports by Department of Labor investigators, filed in the National Archives, most illuminating. The Hopkins papers include correspondence with Fiorello LaGuardia, Aubrey Williams, Frances Perkins, and other prominent persons. Subject folders contain correspondence on wage policies, youth programs, classes of work projects, and administrative problems in WPA. Lists of folders and, in some instances, subject indexes, may be used by researchers at the Roosevelt Library. No doubt the Hoover, Truman, and Eisenhower libraries will in time offer researchers equal opportunities to use data similar in social welfare significance.

Efforts have been made at the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations to enlarge its manuscript collection. Strict definitions of "labor," "industry," and "social welfare" have not deterred this important unit of the University of the State of New York, housed at Cornell University, from acquiring valuable material on the origins of social insurance laws. The records of John B. Andrews, from 1907 to 1942 secretary of the American Association for Labor Legislation, are important for the increase of public welfare activities in the United States. The association's correspondence fills 64 boxes. The records of Abraham Epstein, from 1927 to 1942 secretary of the American Association for Old Age Security, though lacking most personal correspondence, include 26 boxes of legislative bills; and the collection also contains pamphlets and press clippings of interest to students of social security and reform legislation. Also of importance at Ithaca are materials gathered by or relating to other men who were active in social service activities during long careers.

The working files of agencies themselves, however, comprise the most valuable collections of information on modern social welfare. To say this is to take nothing away from the excellent collections just mentioned. Today the manuscripts of social welfare are in the files of organizations from coast to coast. It will never be practical to assemble even a minute part of such riches in a single depository. Two thousand community chests and united funds and 442 community councils, several scores of national health agencies with more than a hundred thousand dollars in annual budget, agencies affiliated with local Catholic social service groups, Jewish welfare federations, and a multitude of Protestant church-affiliated and independent groups have files of their own. The Red Cross, Salvation Army, Y. M. C. A., Y. W. C. A., the scouting organizations and boys' clubs, and such national associations as those dealing with heart ailments, cancer, crippled children, polio, and tuberculosis are giants in their communities — and their communities are everywhere. The files of the Russell Sage Foundation, the National Association of Social Workers, the Council for Social Work Education, and similar bodies can be designed to reveal much to researchers with approved projects.

Nor is this list more than a beginning. One fundraising regulatory group, the Board of Social Service Commissioners of Los Angeles, has 56 jam-packed filing cabinet drawers — 5,400 folders — on organizations that solicit money in that area. The National Information Bureau, a private body, has files of the greatest signifi-

cance, as befits a group with vast power over voluntary fundraising agencies. Surprisingly voluminous files are accumulated by city regulatory bodies or by police headquarters' licensing bureaus or local better business bureaus and chambers of commerce.

The walls of the Greater New York Fund offices are lined with full filing cabinets, even though there and in bodies like the United Foundation (Detroit) will be found IBM cards (hundreds of thousands) designed to eliminate such bulk while expediting service. The Welfare Federation of the Los Angeles Area has various card files on individuals numbering 150,000, 4,500, and 4,000, as well as on 6,000 clubs; there are "thousands" of enrollment cards. Robert Coburn, executive director of the Chicago Joint Appeal, engaged a highly qualified file expert to make his paperwork mountain easier to scale; the writer heartily approves of what is being done there. Elsewhere in Chicago, the public welfare department has an ultra-modern file room, and groups like the American Medical Association and the national dental and hospital associations (and the bar association) have files on many social welfare topics. Files in boards of supervisors' offices, in mayors' offices, and in institutions for the aging, children, and the homeless are all part of the social welfare scene. Medical social workers create new files in mental institutions and county hospitals. And government agencies seem to thrive on typescript.

Someday, perhaps in the distant future, the National Archives will face the problem of preparing a preliminary inventory of the records of the Social Security Administration. Since the Archives tries to retain the "permanently valuable," what in the enormous Social Security Administration will prove of value? Individual social security records are closed, as is well known; they are active files. The public assistance case records of the nation, kept in local public welfare department offices, and not a Federal problem, are also closed. The former Commissioner, Charles I. Schottland, writes that most SSA correspondence and reports "might be available for research purposes" if approval of officials in office can be obtained.<sup>5</sup>

The correspondence of a Government bureau like SSA is vastly extensive, as can be imagined. The researcher of some future year would have to know clearly what he wanted in order to use his research time intelligently. Mr. Schottland suggests, for example, that "an analysis of complaints and laudatory letters to the Bureau of Old-Age and Survivors Insurance might be quite indicative of the public attitude toward this program, but it might be very difficult to

<sup>5</sup> Letter, Aug. 31, 1959.

get at it from the standpoint of sheer bulk." He adds that agencies tend to do little research in old files, the research implications of the material being of little interest to them. To this observation might be added the apt judgment of the district director of the Alameda County (California) United Fund that "there is a great deal of material piled up in files that is not used, partly because people cannot lay their hands on it readily, and partly because some of us are just lazy."<sup>6</sup>

The problem of secrecy is as important in the social welfare field as it is in the fields of law and medicine. If the professional relationships between lawyer and client and between doctor and patient give rise to paperwork that is of necessity secret (or at least private), the social worker-client relationship also results in files of material that are deeply personal to the individual. The casework files of local bureaus handling programs of old-age assistance, aid to dependent children, aid to the blind, and aid to the disabled and paying general relief checks will probably never come to archivists. Voluntary agency files on individuals, intimate reports to be found in family and childrens' agencies or adoption agencies, contain much highly charged and deeply emotional data of a type which might even grow in embarrassing importance with time. Archivists should not be deluded into thinking that adoption or aid files from the nineteenth century can be accepted for deposit and research use without trepidation. Who in this audience would like to read in a footnoted treatise that his mother was left on a doorstep in 1898? The writer has viewed such poignant data, but it was locked in a large safe in the agency; his reading of the story of human misery was for "background information" only. A safe is a good place for files containing references to money paid by an agency for syphilis treatments, outrageous accounts of child desertion, tales of brutality (which may be false), and payments by agencies to dope-addict mothers made to keep families together.

Social workers have stood implacably opposed to the revelation of such entirely personal material, and statutory laws or the common law appear normally to protect it (as they should). Whatever one may think of publicizing naked relief roll lists (as was done in Indiana amid much controversy), one can only hope that archivists will be vigilant to avoid *needless* revelations from the private lives of obscure people. And researchers will want to follow the criterion that *to count* is one thing; *to name*, another.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of Alfred G. Wardley, Aug. 31, 1959 (a hardworking executive scarcely to be numbered among the "lazy" ones).

If our archives one day come to contain casework files on individuals and families, those in charge will have to assume the burden of indoctrinating every researcher in his responsibilities. Archivists must also weed out divorce-oriented private detectives up to no good. Since the ultimate goal of the social worker is rehabilitation of individuals and families, that noble goal will only be made more difficult of permanent accomplishment if archivists innocently facilitate the work of even one careless researcher.

As a student of social welfare this writer has long held high the general principle that "the record" ought to be open to trained researchers without restrictions other than those imposed by libel laws and private property rights in written material. But all who are concerned that the rights and dignity of mankind be protected as a basic principle in our nation will urge that archivists enter the field of social welfare manuscripts flying the flag of social morality and brotherly obligation. They can do no less if archival science is a profession in any sense of the word. The archivist who joins hands with other professionals by accepting permanent custody of their records must know and respect the ethical principles of other specialists. The custodian of medical, legal, and social work case files is inescapably, to some extent, a doctor, lawyer, and social worker; he is inescapably restricted in his conduct by their codes of ethics and professional attitudes.

The archivist can easily gather mountains of correspondence in the social welfare field without any qualms about such matters, provided he asks executives, "Are there casework files on individuals in this collection?" If the answer is yes, the next question will relate to safeguards insisted on by the agency gathering them. These safeguards should be in writing. Social workers will be keenly interested in the matter; indeed, they have probably been over vigilant to keep "the layman" from knowing what they do, how they do it, and in detail what it costs. In any event, researchers trained in graduate schools of social work will present no problems of this kind for the custodian of records. Nor will any other researchers, if archivists carry out their indoctrination procedures properly. Too much secrecy will seriously inhibit research in social welfare manuscripts. But few agencies will consent to donate files unless the archivist is fully prepared to give advance assurances that personal information in files will be entrusted only to reputable, trained, and indoctrinated researchers. One warning about overdevotion to secrecy in social welfare research, and we are done with the subject.

Precisely because of the deeply ingrained orientation toward "con-

fidentiality" possessed by social workers, the social welfare field has long resisted research by the outsider. Pull, persuasion, friendship, and the backing of law are often needed by the researcher if he is to see and use "the record." A polite request is not enough. This can be particularly true of records guarded in local government agencies. In California a famous statute commonly called the Brown Act was passed, precisely to counter the tendencies of petty bureaucracy to exclude the stranger, whether scholar or not. The philosophy of the Brown Act should be better known. It says:

The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people . . . do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.

A somewhat similar point of view was expressed by former Secretary Marion Folsom of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare on February 11, 1957, in testimony before the House Subcommittee on Appropriations:

Congressional committees say we ought to give information out, and I have taken the position, since I came down to the Department, that we didn't have any secrets in the place, and we ought to give out any information we have on these programs. The people are paying for them and they ought to find out about them.

If this open attitude, and the point of view of the Brown Act, were more common in agency circles, the researcher in social welfare would be able to tell a more complete story and would have fewer problems in the telling.

It might be expected that the writer, long an enthusiast for careful oral history compilation, would bring up the subject at this point.<sup>7</sup> But the action is legitimate, for the tape-recording and transcription of oral history could produce new manuscripts of interpretive value in the puzzling social welfare field. The interviewing of social work leaders, present and past, and of key executives in agencies and government bureaus could, if carefully planned and adequately subsidized, pave the way for tomorrow's historians. The Oral History Research Office of Columbia University contained at the close of the 1950's the reminiscences of four social workers. Its other manuscripts that are strongly oriented toward social welfare are those of three ministers, three civic-minded lawyers, a reformer, two physicians, a government official, and a businessman-community leader.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See the writer's "Oral History Can Be Worthwhile," in *American Archivist*, 18:241-253 (July 1955).

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Albertson, Will W. Alexander, George William Alger, Roger N. Baldwin,



Who will step forward with the facilities and the money to do a systematic job of interviewing State welfare directors of the past and present, Red Cross and health agency officials, and other outstanding leaders? Some manuscript reminiscences in this field will have to be created by interviewers and cooperative interviewees if the full story of social welfare activity is ever to be told.

In conclusion, let the writer offer a word of advice on the key matter of where to start when entering the field of social welfare manuscripts as counselor or compiler. Visit the office of the executive director of the community planning council, sometimes called the "welfare council." After making a sober plea for the general worth of preserving the historical record, ask that a more formal presentation be scheduled for a meeting of welfare agency representatives. The ball will be rolling. A simultaneous visit to the executive director of the united fund or community chest and to the director of the public welfare department will be very desirable. An early discussion with the honorary president of the chest or fund, set up by the paid executive director, will pay handsome dividends. Try to form a community "Committee for the Preservation of Social Welfare History," offering to serve as unpaid secretary.

The handful of well-financed archivists hoping to acquire the top-drawer archives of social welfare may want to begin somewhat differently. A good start would be to contact some of the addressees listed at the close of the biennial *Social Work Yearbook*. Some of the most important of those organizations, however (like the American Public Welfare Association, the National Conference on Social Welfare, the National Association of Social Workers, and the Council on Social Work Education), may not care to have outsiders using their correspondence files except under the controlling guidance of their own people. Such coordinating groups engage heavily in efforts to change aspects of the social welfare scene that they find distasteful, and the methods they use as they do battle with contrary-minded groups are likely to be considered private for some time. Yet eventually the archives of national pressure groups and educational groups come to archivists for deposit, especially when leaders pass from the scene. For example, the files of the Association for Labor Legislation and the American Federation of Labor are now safely in archival hands, and the files of the National Civic Federation have been used for comprehensive historical investiga-

Genevieve Earle, Homer Folks, Allan Gregg, Connie Guion, Bruno Lasker, John H. Lathrop, Frances Perkins, Louis H. Pink, Lawson Purdy, William J. Schieffelin, and Lawrence Veiller. The Baldwin and Perkins manuscript memoirs are closed at this writing.

tions. The files of organized labor, incidentally, are of enormous importance for social welfare research.<sup>9</sup>

Social welfare is an area of national significance. Historians are obligated to tell its emotional story some day. It is my considered judgment that they have only modest understanding of the field at this time, unfortunately, and very little active interest. This will change. The exploratory activity already engendered in the history of "philanthropy" (an important part of "social welfare") and the formation of a social work group researching selected aspects of social work history are twin signs that the day of invigorated interest is not too far removed.

Let the archivists meet their responsibility to coordinate, organize, and gather the record in accordance with the best standards and procedures of modern archival science. Then the full story of American health, recreational, counseling, and charitable activity — in sum, American humanitarianism in action — can eventually be told. The repeated telling of the story of the American pattern in social welfare will help guarantee that the practice of "doing good" for others will flourish permanently in our society.

<sup>9</sup> See the writer's "The New Labor History; a Challenge for American Historians," in the *Historian*, 18:1-24 (Autumn 1955).

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### *Abuse of the Telegraph*

One glaring abuse of the privileges of the military telegraph to which we are all more or less subject, and which ought to receive official condemnation, is the practice too common with officers of the Army of conducting their entire correspondence by telegraph when the same might be much more satisfactorily transmitted through the regular mails. This practice is, as I conceive, based upon a misapprehension of the uses and purposes of the military telegraph. The beauty and utility of the telegraph as a means of communication is its rapidity; but, as anyone can see, there must be a limit to the capacity of any telegraph line, and to have it lumbered up with long unimportant dispatches at a time when the utmost celerity is demanded for really important dispatches is a perversion of its use which ought not to be sanctioned.

The prevalent idea that he who sends most dispatches is most efficient is as untrue as it is absurd.

— Report of Capt. W. L. Gross, Asst. Supt., U. S. Military Telegraph, Dept. of the Ohio, Danville, Ky., Oct. 13, 1864 (printed as a part of *S. Doc.* 251, 58th Cong., 2d sess.).