

Thomas O. Amelia, 1901-1961

By ROGER H. McDONOUGH

New Jersey State Library

THOMAS O. AMELIA, Head of the Bureau of Archives and History of the New Jersey State Library, died on November 29, 1961, after a short illness. Mr. Amelia was widely known to members of the Society of American Archivists and was nationally recognized for his work in the field of records management.

He was born in Chicago in 1901, and shortly thereafter his family moved to Trenton, N. J. There he spent his precollege days and gained local recognition as an outstanding athlete. In 1918 he was junior New Jersey state tennis champion.

Mr. Amelia was graduated from Franklin and Marshall College in 1925 and engaged in business management surveys for banks, law firms, and insurance and mortgage companies in the Philadelphia area. In 1942 he entered the Federal service to help organize and supervise the registration of the million and a half enemy aliens throughout the United States and its possessions. In 1945 he assisted in merging the activities of the Alien Enemy Registration program into the Immigration and Naturalization Service and in reorganizing the records management systems and procedures of the latter agency. At the end of World War II he returned to his own business of management surveys.

In 1948 he was requested by the Pennsylvania Economy League to make a series of administrative surveys of various Philadelphia County offices. After the completion of these surveys he joined the league staff as a specialist in management methods, systems, and procedures for government agencies.

As a consultant to the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter Commission in 1951, he submitted a report on "Philadelphia Records and a Program for Administration," which resulted in the establishment of a Department of Records for that city, the first such municipal agency in the United States. Mr. Amelia also served as a consultant to the Chesterman Committee in 1953, and in this capacity he made a survey of the records of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, which resulted in the formation of a State records program.

In 1956 Mr. Amelia came to New Jersey as Head of the Bu-

reau of Archives and History in the New Jersey State Library. Under his guidance, important retention and disposal schedules were developed, not only for State agencies but for county and municipal offices as well. Operating under the 1953 New Jersey Destruction of Public Records Act, which gave the Bureau broad authority over records of all governmental agencies—State, county, and municipal—he carried out a vigorous program which significantly reduced the volume of useless records.

Although Mr. Amelia came into the archives field from the records management ranks, he had a deep appreciation of the need to preserve records of permanent historical value and constantly sought out materials for transfer to the State Archives. He campaigned vigorously for proper facilities for the safe storage and exhibit of the State's archival materials and assisted in the development of plans for the new State Library and Archives Building, scheduled for completion by 1964. He was also greatly concerned with the teaching of New Jersey history through the use of archival exhibits and at the time of his death was serving as a member of the Advisory Historymobile Committee of the New Jersey Tercentenary Commission.

Thomas Amelia was a member of the Society of American Archivists, the American Records Management Association, and various historical organizations. He is survived by his wife, Helen Saylor Amelia, and two brothers, Baird S. and J. Donald Amelia.

Vigour of Expression

The act of deprivation, and a letter from the lords of the Congregation to the Queen Regent, are still extant. They discover not only that masculine and undaunted spirit, natural to men capable of so bold a resolution; but are remarkable for a precision and vigour of expression, which we are surprised to meet with in an age so unpolished. The same observation may be made with respect to the other public papers of that period. The ignorance or bad taste of an age may render the compositions of authors by profession obscure, or affected, or absurd; but the language of business is nearly the same at all times; and wherever men think clearly, and are thoroughly interested, they express themselves with perspicuity and force.

— WILLIAM ROBERTSON, *The History of Scotland During the Reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI*, 1:428 (London, 1812).