

# The Iowa Historical Records Survey, 1936-1942

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NOW IS AN APPROPRIATE TIME, with the bill for a National Historic Records Program currently before the Congress, to look back upon a previous national attempt to arrange, describe, and preserve state and local records. This federal program was the Works Progress Administration's Historical Records Survey, one of the white-collar relief projects of the 1930's. Born of the demands for employment in the depression years, it lasted until the Second World War took workers from manuscript repositories and shuttled them into defense plants.

Some archivists and historians regard the Historical Records Survey as one of the most useful federal projects of the Roosevelt years. On the other hand, contemporary critics saw it as a prime example of New Deal boondoggle and make-work. To judge which image is correct, evaluation is needed of the project's operations on both state and national levels. Such evaluations surely will point to both errors and excellences which advocates of a National Historic Records Program in the 1970's might consider. This essay is an attempt to provide one such state study.

The Iowa Historical Records Survey is not necessarily a prototype of the WPA survey's operation in the rest of the nation. A relatively sophisticated system of historical administration had developed in the state by 1936, which may have given the Iowa project an initial advantage. At that time Iowa had both a State Historical Society, which had notable collections of manuscripts and imprints, and an Historical, Memorial, and Art Department, which housed manuscripts, imprints, memorabilia, and the state archives; the archives was authorized

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to take custody not only of the records of state government but those of the county and municipal governments as well.<sup>1</sup> The two institutions published three historical journals; both had publications programs in Iowa history; and work was done in the holdings of both to identify and list early Iowa newspapers and imprints.<sup>2</sup> Several technical innovations were made by these institutions, including the design of a file box which is the direct precursor of today's archival containers. The state archivist, Cassius Stiles, recognized the importance of provenance in handling archival materials and insisted upon research into the history and functions of an administrative unit before processing its records. In 1928 Stiles wrote the first American handbook on the administration of public records, a work entitled *Public Archives: A Manual for their Administration in Iowa*.<sup>3</sup> As Ernst Posner declared in his classic *American State Archives*, Iowa was "in the vanguard of American states that had made efforts to care for their archives."<sup>4</sup> On the surface, then, Iowa seemed an ideal place to launch a state Historical Records Survey, for it could look back on decades of fruitful experience in historical administration.

The WPA Historical Records Survey developed both from the long-term interest of scholarly organizations in the preservation of historical source materials and from the immediate need to provide work relief for those who needed it. At the time of the WPA's establishment, a little over half a million white-collar persons were on relief, comprising about 11 percent of those on the relief rolls. Of this half million, about 15 percent were professional and technical people, while the remainder were from clerical occupations.<sup>5</sup> As one state WPA administrator

<sup>1</sup> *Laws of Iowa*, 31 G.A. (1906), ch. 142, 104; *Code of Iowa*, 1935, § 4258.

<sup>2</sup> David C. Mott, "Early Iowa Newspapers: A Contribution toward a Bibliography of the Newspapers Established in Iowa before the Civil War," *Annals of Iowa*, Series 3, 16 (January 1928): 161-233; and Alexander Moffit, "A Checklist of Iowa Imprints, 1837-1860," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 36 (January 1938): 3-95; 36 (April 1938): 152-205. The latter appeared after the survey began but before the imprints project was launched.

<sup>3</sup> As early as 1913 Waldo Gifford Leland recommended to Illinois that it look to the Iowa archives as a model, and by 1933, according to A. R. Newsome, chairman of the American Historical Association's Public Archives Commission, Iowa had "the best archives department in the Middle West." "Your manual *Public Archives*," Newsome wrote Stiles, "is the best work available in its field." (A. R. Newsome to C. C. Stiles, October 26, 1933, File 40E Part 6, Edgar R. Harlan Papers, Iowa State Department of History and Archives [hereafter Harlan Papers, ISDH&A].) For a description of Iowa archival practices, see Cassius C. Stiles, "Iowa Public Archives," *Annals of Iowa*, Series 3, 17 (July 1929): 241-308.

<sup>4</sup> Ernst Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: 1964), p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Philip M. Hauser and Bruce L. Jenkenson, *Workers on Relief in the United States in March 1935*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1938).

said at the time, "I can give you anything—Phi Beta Kappas, all-American football stars, and Ph.D.'s galore."<sup>6</sup> To provide employment for these people, the WPA announced in August 1935 the establishment of its first white-collar project, known as "Federal One," which included nationwide cultural projects in art, music, drama, and writing. In the executive order that established the WPA, Roosevelt clearly emphasized providing the maximum number of jobs in the minimum amount of time.<sup>7</sup> But even these new programs of Federal One could not immediately absorb the mass of white-collar unemployed. Federal administrators, therefore, began to listen to those who were arguing that archival projects were ideally suited for mass white-collar relief, that under professional supervision anyone proficient in simple, white-collar techniques could adequately perform archival tasks.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, in October 1935 the Survey of State and Local Historical Records was established as an adjunct to the Writers' Project of Federal One.

After a few months of preparation, the Washington office of the Historical Records Survey (as it was always called) began to establish state projects. In January 1936 the supervisor of the Iowa Federal Writers' Project was requested to contact historical administrators in the state for suggestions on the scope of the Iowa project, to wire recommendations to Washington regarding a person to head the state survey, and to begin allocating the \$7,250 which the Iowa project was to receive. Luther Evans, national director of the HRS, cautioned the state not to attempt too much in the beginning; as he saw it, the way to start in Iowa was with an inventory of county records.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Donald S. Howard, *The W.P.A. and Federal Relief Policy* (New York, 1943), p. 231.

<sup>7</sup> As Harry Hopkins, the WPA administrator, told a staff conference in June 1935: "Never forget that the objective of this whole program as laid down by the President, and he has laid it down over and over again, is the objective of taking 3,500,000 people off relief and putting them to work, and the secondary objective is to put them to work on the best possible projects we can, but don't ever forget that first objective, and don't let me hear any of you apologizing for it because it is nothing to be ashamed of." Quoted in William F. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts* (Columbus, Ohio, 1969), p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> A few records survey projects had previously been undertaken by the short-lived Civil Works Administration, including one at the Iowa Historical, Memorial, and Art Department in Des Moines, but these had no central direction. (E. R. Harlan to Theodore C. Blegen, April 6, 1934, File 85N Part 27, Harlan Papers, ISDH&A.) Furthermore, Harry Hopkins and Raymond Moley had discussed an archival project since June 1935, and specific proposals had then been drafted. (David L. Smiley, "The W.P.A. Historical Records Survey," in *In Support of Clío: Essays in Memory of Herbert A. Kellar*, ed. William B. Hesseltine and Donald R. McNeil [Madison, Wis., 1958], pp. 7–11.)

<sup>9</sup> Luther Evans to field supervisors, January 11, 1936, "WPA, Des Moines, Iowa 78," Benjamin F. Shambaugh Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa (hereafter Shambaugh Papers, SHS).

Unfortunately for all concerned, there was at the time a "raging war" between the State Historical Society and the Historical, Memorial, and Art Department.<sup>10</sup> Jay duVon, the twenty-nine-year-old writer who headed the Iowa Writers' Project, was soon reporting to Evans that he found himself in a field he was "not familiar with" and "one which apparently abounds with professional jealousy and rivalry."<sup>11</sup> Although both the society and the department had been contacted about the survey, had been sent manuals on the survey, and had been solicited for advice; cooperation between them to aid in establishing the HRS in Iowa was simply out of the question. And, in March 1936, the director of the Historical, Memorial, and Art Department (HM&A) completely severed any possible connection with the survey, writing stiffly that he wished the state supervisor to "notify all concerned that I have nothing to do with it."<sup>12</sup>

However, the state archivist, Cassius Stiles, was as cooperative as his superior was hostile.<sup>13</sup> It was doubtful, he told duVon, that the HRS could survey all the records in each Iowa county by the end of the fiscal year (when WPA funding would expire). For this reason, he argued, the HRS should enter only the number of counties that could be completed in the time available, aiming for a few complete inventories which, as he saw it, would be much more valuable than many partially completed ones. He even offered to write for the national *Manual of the Survey of Historical Records* a supplement which would "particularize and make more specific the application of the project to this state." When duVon relayed these proposals to the Washington office, Luther Evans quickly concurred.<sup>14</sup>

The director of the State Historical Society, while not as enthusiastic as Stiles, was at least amicable. He met with duVon on various occasions and offered some sound advice. But it was clear that the HRS would have to make its own way through the

<sup>10</sup> Don Farran to author, October 22, 1971.

<sup>11</sup> Jay duVon to Luther Evans, February 21, 1936, "Iowa—Jan. to Oct., 1936—Jay duVon, State Director, Federal Writers' Projects," General Project Correspondence, WPA—Historical Records Survey, Record Group 69, National Archives (hereafter Gen. Corr., WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA).

<sup>12</sup> The difficulty was apparently due to the director's age, overworked condition, misunderstanding of the project, and dislike of duVon, with whom he had already worked on writers' projects. See, for example, E. R. Harlan to Jay duVon, March 11, 1936, File Q Part 36, Harlan Papers, ISDH&A.

<sup>13</sup> Stiles privately told duVon of "the difficulties which he labored under" as a result of his superior's attitude. (Jay duVon to Luther Evans, February 21, 1936, "Iowa—Jan. to Oct., 1936—Jay duVon, State Director, Federal Writers' Projects," Gen. Corr., WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



tangle of county records, without major door-opening support from either of the state's historical institutions.

Evans, meanwhile, in good bureaucratic fashion, was urging duVon to spend his appropriation and to hire fifteen people, the Iowa project allotment. This brought to the fore the problem of balancing archival goals against relief needs. For one thing, the fifteen salaries had to be fitted into a complicated wage schedule, one that divided the state into six different wage zones on the basis of differences in the cost of living and then established pay differentials within each zone for professional, skilled, intermediate, and unskilled workers.<sup>15</sup> For another, Evans indicated there was the desire to balance the skill categories at a ratio of three professional to four skilled to one intermediate worker. And for a third, the people employed must, within limits, come from the relief rolls of the U.S. Employment Service. Only 25 percent of the total, a high percentage in WPA terms and a concession believed necessary if Federal One projects were to have effective supervisor-worker ratios, could come from sources other than relief applicants.<sup>16</sup> But duVon managed to meet the conflicting needs for professional services and the requirements for relief, and by the end of March he had hired seventeen people. As larger appropriations were made available, the number increased to sixty in late April and to seventy-five in May.<sup>17</sup>

In late March, Cassius Stiles's son, Ray, took over as director of the well-launched survey.<sup>18</sup> He immediately suggested to Luther Evans that the HRS undertake an ambitious "planned educational program" aimed at legislators and state and local officials. The administration of archives in Iowa, he argued, was handicapped by appropriations which were insufficient, largely because of the legislators' ignorance of the value of public archives. Furthermore, Stiles said, county and local govern-

<sup>15</sup> E. J. Kaltenbach, "The Organization and Function of the Works Progress Administration in Iowa," Master's thesis (Iowa, 1937), p. 35. This was part of a larger national system that also established four regional scales, Iowa being a part of the midwest region. The idea was to provide a "living wage" for each particular area and type of worker.

<sup>16</sup> For most WPA projects, the maximum allowable percentage of nonrelief employees was set at 10 percent. McDonald, p. 174.

<sup>17</sup> Public Relations Division, Iowa Historical Records Survey, "Brief History of Iowa Historical Records Survey," June 7, 1937, "WPA-HRS, Des Moines, Iowa 78," Shambaugh Papers, SHS.

<sup>18</sup> Ray Stiles had previously been employed in the state archives but had been a casualty of the depression budget cuts. With his background and the support of his father, he seemed a natural choice. Jay duVon to Luther Evans, February 21, 1936; see footnote 13.

ments were woefully ignorant of their records-keeping responsibilities, and he believed that the establishment of the survey was an ideal time to begin an educational effort. But Evans was cautious. He called Stiles's suggestion "interesting," but warned that action along such lines "must be rather carefully considered." "We must not," he wrote, "take an active leadership in local campaigns for larger appropriations, but should work quietly by calling conditions to the attention of important leaders and encouraging them to take the necessary action."<sup>19</sup>

The first Iowa survey of county records got underway in early April 1936. To obtain permission to enter a county and begin a records survey, someone from the state HRS office would travel to the county, obtain permission from the county board of supervisors, and, backed by this approval, ask each county official individually for permission to see the records of his office. Someone familiar with the records, such as a former county recorder, would then be trained in the techniques of the survey; since the forms were standardized and the manual clear, the training was relatively easy. Because of the nature of the WPA, which, in theory at least, separated line and staff offices, the Iowa HRS did not do the actual hiring of workers in the county. The HRS simply notified the county United States Employment Service of the numbers and classifications of people needed, and the USES provided them from the county relief rolls, if possible.<sup>20</sup>

After their initial training by the state staff and the local project supervisor, the workers were ready to enter the county offices and begin listing records. This process consisted largely of filling in forms devised by Evans and his Washington staff. Initially, a buildings form recording the locations and conditions in which the records were kept was completed. Following this came a printed records form, a volumes form (for bound records), an unbound records form, a newspaper form, a map and photograph form, and a painting and statuary form. Workers were cautioned to make sure no materials were overlooked. They were to fill out the forms in pencil

<sup>19</sup> Ray Stiles to Luther Evans, March 23, 1936, and reply, March 26, 1936, "Iowa—March thru Aug., 1936—Ray Stiles," Gen. Corr., WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.

<sup>20</sup> Such an approach, it was found, was both easier and quicker to establish and more "grass-roots" oriented (in line with Roosevelt's desires) than the alternative idea of sending teams out from Des Moines to survey one county at a time. One result of this approach, however, was that real control over the product had to rest at the state editorial level. At best, state staff members, traveling throughout the state, could make only spot checks. Often the editors found that rechecks as extensive as the initial survey had to be made. Still, these did employ local people again.

and sign each one. To insure accuracy, which to Evans was the "most essential feature of the Survey," two workers were required to check each form after it was completed. Finally, weekly progress reports were to be sent to the state office and completed forms forwarded for compilation.<sup>21</sup>

From a desk in Washington it was relatively simple to instruct workers to walk into a county courthouse; gain permission from the clerk of court to use the records of the office; determine, for example, that a file contained official correspondence of the clerk, 1912-22; and note that a volume consisted of marriage licenses, 1890-1900, A-F. But things were never that simple. Bound records used daily by the public were usually available, especially for the last half century. But other types of records were often missing, scattered, or in no discernible order. In one Iowa county, for example, a janitor protested the recording of documents in the basement. They were, he argued, his furnace kindling in the winter!<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in Clarion, county seat of Wright County, workers first had to locate the records (in the attic), clean off the ordure, sort them into office designations, arrange and list them, and finally bring in a WPA manual-labor project to build shelves to hold the restored records.<sup>23</sup> Under conditions like these, the simple instructions shielded myriad problems.

Then there were local difficulties. Stiles, it seems, was peculiarly insensitive to the etiquette involved in entering a county. In both Dubuque and Woodbury Counties, for example, his failure to request permission of the county boards of supervisors resulted in difficulties that persisted long after he had been replaced.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, his rapport with the five district WPA administrators in the state was none too good. At one stage the district supervisor for Region 1 (Waterloo) even threatened to close down the HRS project operating there, but he was persuaded to allow it to continue.<sup>25</sup>

And political difficulties were not long in surfacing. The state's leading newspaper, the staunchly Republican *Des Moines Register*, sensed a New Deal boondoggle in the HRS. It quoted

<sup>21</sup> Works Progress Administration, *The Manual of the Survey of Historical Records*, (Washington, D.C., 1936).

<sup>22</sup> *Des Moines Register*, July 28, 1937.

<sup>23</sup> Don Farran to author, October 22, 1971.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> The state was divided into five WPA administrative regions, each with a district supervisor in charge. While the district supervisors did not in reality have the authority to close a project, it is indicative of the Stiles problem that the Region 1 supervisor was ready to close the HRS, authority or no.

Polk County courthouse office workers as saying that the HRS personnel there "spent most of their time sitting there smoking and telling stories." It alleged also that they were engaged in such "useful" projects as counting the number of steps from the basement to the top floor, that office drawers had been forcibly opened by HRS workers, and that one project called for counting the number of men entering the main toilet, an allegation that HRS officials quickly denied.<sup>26</sup>

Other charges came from the Democratic side of the fence. The Democratic chairman of Polk County, a Mr. Drennen, sent a memo to State WPA Administrator L. S. Hill charging Ray Stiles with an improper accounting of funds that Stiles had handled for a veterans' organization. Hill, after checking into the accusation, found that Stiles's culpability had never been proved, although various people thought he had been dishonest, and that the real difficulty stemmed from Stiles's heavy drinking and his slowness in preparing reports. Jay duVon, though no partisan of Stiles,<sup>27</sup> thought the real reason for the challenge was that Stiles had run for commissioner of public safety on the Republican ticket in 1932. A Democrat partisan, he reasoned, could find it odd that a Republican would be heading a New Deal program. After conferences involving Evans, Hill, duVon, and other WPA officials, it was decided to ignore the situation.<sup>28</sup>

With appropriations extended during the summer of 1936, the Iowa HRS expanded its activities into the field of church archives.<sup>29</sup> According to Luther Evans, the church survey was undertaken because "church archives contain large bodies of information which supplement the public records at many important points, particularly in the matter of vital statistics" and because they "also contain vast quantities of data not available elsewhere on the religious and social history in the United States."<sup>30</sup> Evans's staff devised a church survey form much like

<sup>26</sup> *Des Moines Register*, May 7, 1936.

<sup>27</sup> "He bores me to death and I find myself constantly restraining a desire to give him a swift vitalizing kick in the pants." Jay duVon to Lawrence S. Morris, April 21, 1936, "Iowa—Jan. to Oct., 1936—Jay duVon, State Director, Federal Writers' Projects," Gen. Corr., WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.

<sup>28</sup> The criticism of Stiles from Drennen and the *Register* is an instance of criticism from both right and left and yet from both for political reasons. Apparently similar difficulties occurred in New Jersey with its Republican supervisor. See David L. Smiley, "A Slice of Life in Depression America: The Records of the Historical Records Survey," *Prologue*, 3 (Winter 1971): 153-59.

<sup>29</sup> At this time, it became necessary to departmentalize the state office. A general administrative division and a public relations division served both church and county records surveys, while editing and publications divisions were specialized.

<sup>30</sup> Luther Evans, "Preservation of the Nation's Records," an address delivered before

the one used in the survey of county archives, although it requested more historical information (for example, the name, educational background, and tenure of the first settled clergyman) and was therefore probably more difficult to complete. States were instructed to begin the project by compiling a preliminary directory giving the names and addresses of churches and pastors.

After drawing up an initial list of nearly five thousand Iowa churches, the newly appointed Iowa HRS church editor, himself a former pastor, contacted the heads of the major religious denominations in the state and requested endorsements for the survey program. These were almost universally forthcoming.<sup>31</sup> Next he wrote to each local cleric, asking him to recommend the project to the churches in his charge. The local survey director then sought permission from the local church's governing body, conferences were held with church officers, and workers were assigned to the church (preferably workers of that denomination to eliminate "possible objections to workers of Protestant affiliations making the survey in Catholic churches and vice versa").<sup>32</sup> Local project workers were asked to "be on the lookout for any defunct or abandoned churches," whose records should also be listed.<sup>33</sup> The church survey operated much like the survey of county records; indeed, the survey had no full-time church-survey workers in the field but used county records-survey workers when that project was "between" phases.<sup>34</sup> Because there was no travel money available for transporting workers throughout the county, the survey was generally restricted to those churches found in the county-seat town where the workers had the county archives assignment. Despite these obstacles, a surprising 1,183 churches were surveyed within a year.<sup>35</sup>

the 48th Continental Congress, National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, April 19, 1939; personal copy in possession of Don Farran, Rowan, Iowa.

<sup>31</sup> Iowa HRS form letter S-1796, Ray C. Stiles and William H. Hart to "Dear Reverend," July 16, 1936. For a resumé of endorsements see undated memorandum, probably January 1940, William H. Hart to O. Clyde Sutherland, "Church Survey, Indorsements and Opinions," in volume labeled "Church Archives: Instructions on the Preparation of Church Directory and Inventory, also Miscellaneous Materials," John Wilbois Collection, University of Iowa Library.

<sup>32</sup> "Iowa State Bulletin Number 3, Church Records Survey," bound copy of bulletins 1-104 in ISDH&A. This caution probably avoided controversy; see, for example, the Texas difficulties cited in Smiley, "A Slice of Life in Depression America."

<sup>33</sup> "Iowa State Bulletin Number 3, Church Records Survey."

<sup>34</sup> O. Clyde Sutherland to Luther Evans, January 11, 1939, "Church Archives: Instructions on the Preparation of Church Directory and Inventory, also Miscellaneous Material."

<sup>35</sup> William H. Hart, "Semi-Monthly Progress Report of the Various Districts, Church

The summer of 1936 brought also a shift in the county archives program. Originally, the state editorial office was to make typescripts and carbon copies of the pencilled inventories sent in from the field, one copy to be deposited in the county, another to be deposited with the state, and a third to be sent to Washington as raw material for the preparation of a nationwide master inventory. But Evans, after some deliberation, decided that a publication for each county, compiled in the state office and prefixed by essays on the history of the county, its governmental organization, the legal status of its offices and records, and other pertinent data, would provide deeper information. With the compiling of the data in the state office, counties could be held to a uniform standard and yet quicker rechecks could be made than if the compilation were done in Washington. County inventory drafts would then be forwarded to Washington for thorough review by the national editorial staff, which could in this way hold the state to national project standards. The edited inventories would then be returned to the state for publication.<sup>36</sup>

Stiles, although enthusiastic about this publication program, was characteristically dilatory in turning in reports and draft inventories. Eventually, after repeated requests for the material from the Washington office, Stiles was reprimanded by Luther Evans.<sup>37</sup> Soon after these difficulties (which were never really solved, but only aired), Stiles was embroiled in an administrative controversy over an irregular travel voucher. Apparently Stiles became drunk on an official trip to Council Bluffs and upon returning to Des Moines filed for \$1.50 more than he was entitled to claim. Once again, however, after consulting with various WPA officials, Evans decided to give Stiles another chance.<sup>38</sup>

At about the same time these problems were coming to a head, a monetary crisis was developing also, one that went beyond the normal irritations of the requirement to operate with appropriations that rarely ran for longer than three months at a time. On

Division," April 30 to May 15, 1937, in volume labeled "Sample Church Entries, Madison County, Iowa," John Wilbois Collection, University of Iowa Library.

<sup>36</sup> In November 1936 the Comptroller General ruled that federal funds could not be expended for publications of the type the HRS contemplated. Consequently, each state had to find sponsors to defray the costs of publication, and these sponsors usually insisted on keeping costs to a minimum by using low-quality paper and ink, reproduction by mimeograph or multilith process, and binding by a WPA bindery project. In Iowa the HM&A became the sponsor, and the state footed the bill.

<sup>37</sup> Ray Stiles to Luther Evans, October 27, 1936, "Iowa—October, 1936—Ray Stiles," Gen. Corr., WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.

<sup>38</sup> Fletcher Tilton to Luther Evans, November 18, 1936, WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.

November 20, 1936, the Historical Records Survey became an independent branch of Federal One; since HRS had always been virtually independent, this changed very little. But at the same time it appeared that all WPA funds would run out by mid-December, and reduced employment quotas were scheduled to go into effect on December 15. Federal One projects were to be cut by 5.4 percent, but the cut was to include a reduction of the nonrelief exemption from 25 to 10 percent. The latter reduction constituted the most serious blow, for it affected the supervisory personnel. As a part of this national cutback, the Iowa HRS was reduced from ninety to eighty people. Choosing the persons to be released generated a certain amount of political edginess. The regional HRS supervisor told Evans that for Iowa this cut was "extremely difficult" because "most of the non-certified workers have strong political connections."<sup>39</sup>

Somehow, however, the personnel decisions were made, and the HRS shrank in size. Ray Stiles was finally replaced in the spring of 1937 by a young man named Don Farran, who had been employed by both the Federal Music Project (Boston) and the Federal Writers' Project (Des Moines). Although he lacked formal archival training, the new director learned quickly, was adept at personnel management, and knew key people throughout Iowa.<sup>40</sup> Under his direction the public relations of the survey slowly began to improve.

At about the same time Farran assumed his new duties, a new director assumed control of the Historical, Memorial, and Art Department. He brought with him an open attitude toward the relationship between the HRS and the HM&A, an opportunity which Farran exploited by inviting him to make suggestions on survey projects, by visiting him, and by keeping him informed of interesting manuscripts and museum-quality objects that the survey workers discovered in the counties. The improvement in relations between the survey and the HM&A was so rapid that by August 5, 1937, the director wrote Farran that "any time you can use me, give me a ring."<sup>41</sup>

Farran established an advisory committee, asking the directors of both the State Historical Society and the HM&A to recommend committee members (in addition to themselves, of course). He followed their recommendations, and by August

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> For example, Farran knew the director of the State Historical Society, Iowa Senator Clyde Herring, and most of the staff of the *Des Moines Register*, for which he wrote book reviews. Don Farran to author, October 22, 1971.

<sup>41</sup> O. E. Klingaman to Don Farran, August 5, 1937, File 10B Part 6, Klingaman Papers, ISDH&A.



1937 the committee had been recruited. In reality, it never met in a formal advisory capacity, being primarily a public relations device by which the HRS could gain entry into collections of records and manuscripts controlled by the committee members.<sup>42</sup>

In other respects also Farran repaired some of the damage done by Stiles. By relaxing Stiles's harsh administrative rules, he was able to improve staff morale. By repairing relations with other WPA units, he was able to cooperate in such projects as WPA fair exhibits. And by traveling to Dubuque to listen to complaints of county officials there, he succeeded in getting the HRS project reopened in Dubuque County.

But political difficulties still plagued the survey. In Madison County the original inventory of county records had been completed in June 1936, but when survey workers attempted a recheck in September 1937 the county attorney issued instructions to all county officers to close their records. In Plymouth County, the initial survey was underway in the fall of 1937 when the board of supervisors abruptly reversed its previous approval and closed the records to project workers. Farran appealed to the Attorney General of Iowa in an attempt to gain access, but he was unsuccessful; the records remained closed in both counties. "I suspect it [the refusal of access] may have political ramifications," Farran wrote to the director of the State Historical Society, "but see no reason why any political issue should be raised concerning the work of the Historical Records Survey."<sup>43</sup> To Luther Evans he suggested that both counties were "strongly Republican, which may or may not account for their antagonism." "I have pointed out to them," he continued, "that we are concerned with the records compiled under the Republican, Democratic, and other administrations, and have no political concern in the matter."<sup>44</sup>

Administratively, the major bottleneck now facing the survey was in editing the forms which the counties had submitted to the state office. The cuts of December 1936 had taken their toll in editorial personnel, and in June 1937 only about half of the

<sup>42</sup> Don Farran to O. E. Klingaman, July 27, 1937, and reply, July 30, 1937, File 10B Part 6, Klingaman Papers, ISDH&A; Don Farran to Benjamin F. Shambaugh, July 27, 1937, and reply, July 31, 1937, "WPA-HRS Des Moines, Iowa 78," Shambaugh Papers, SHS.

<sup>43</sup> Don Farran to Benjamin F. Shambaugh, October 18, 1937, and enclosure, Don Farran to Charles D. Van Werden, County Attorney of Madison County, October 18, 1937, "WPA-HRS, Des Moines, Iowa," Shambaugh Papers, SHS.

<sup>44</sup> Don Farran to Luther Evans, October 19, 1937, "Iowa—Oct. and Nov., 1937—Don Farran," Gen. Corr., WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.

county forms and a third of the church forms had been processed.<sup>45</sup> Partly by loosening Stiles's tight bureaucratic rules and partly by reorganizing staff assignments, Farran was to some extent successful in reducing the backlog. During 1938 the first three county records publications, those for Dubuque, Dallas, and Jasper Counties, were printed, and the draft of the first county church inventory was completed. In addition, the church survey, while nearly doubling the number of counties in which it was operating, processed nearly 90 percent of its field forms.<sup>46</sup>

Still, the publication process was agonizingly slow. At times the lag between initial survey and publication was so great that additional fieldwork had to be done to bring information up to date. Furthermore, although Evans decided in September 1937 that each state should prepare a "key volume" on the county government and county records policies in the state, thus allowing the extended introductory essays in the county records volumes to be replaced by abbreviated essays discussing only the differences between the policies of a particular county and the state norm, Iowa never completed this general volume. It was still in draft form when the project closed; consequently, each county inventory published retained the time-consuming essays in the front. Quite possibly, by devoting more time to the preparation of the key volume in 1937 and 1938, the state HRS could have made possible the later publication of more county-inventory volumes.

The major cause of the limited publication output, however, was the diversion of HRS energy from county inventories and church surveys into other projects. Washington officials later defended this change in emphasis by arguing that it brought greater local participation, which in turn enabled the project to withstand the subsequent changeover from federal to state support. But to critics, it seemed that by siphoning off workers into other projects, the Historical Records Survey was following the WPA pattern of attempting all and completing nothing.<sup>47</sup>

In Iowa, as elsewhere, part of this diversification grew out of a

<sup>45</sup> Public Relations Division, Iowa Historical Records Survey, "Brief History of Iowa Historical Records Survey," June 7, 1937, "WPA-HRS, Des Moines, Iowa 78," Shambaugh Papers, SHS; William H. Hart, "Semi-Monthly Progress Report of the Various Districts, Church Division," April 30 to May 15, 1937, in volume labeled "Sample Church Entries, Madison County, Iowa," John Wilbois Collection, University of Iowa Library.

<sup>46</sup> William H. Hart, "Semi-Monthly Progress Report of the Various Districts, Church Division," October 1 to November 1, 1938.

<sup>47</sup> Sargent Child, "What is Past is Prologue," a report read at the annual meeting of the American Library Association, June 23, 1942; personal copy in possession of Don Farran.

WPA commitment to assist local records projects.<sup>48</sup> But the major diversionary projects were those established by the national HRS administration. One of these, long planned but not initiated in Iowa until October 1937, was a survey of manuscripts. This survey was to have had three final products, according to Luther Evans: a guide to depositories of manuscript collections in the state, a guide to manuscript collections in the depositories, and calendars and inventories of selected collections.

Once a list of depositories in the state had been established, such information would seem relatively easy to collect. But Farran wanted to reduce administrative expenses by completing at once both the forms for the guide to depositories and the guide to collections. This caused endless delay. In Des Moines, the director of the HM&A wanted personally to fill out the forms on valuable collections, apparently not trusting survey workers with the manuscripts. At the State Historical Society in Iowa City, the director insisted on being present when the collections were handled and then was laid up with an appendectomy just as the survey was to begin work.<sup>49</sup> And throughout the state, the administrators of depositories were slow to grant permission for a survey of their collections, reluctant to have their unprocessed collections arranged for description by persons they suspected of being untrained amateurs or worse, and wary of a survey form that asked the field worker to evaluate the "relative importance of the various matters dealt with in a depository's collections" and to determine whether its holdings "really contribute new information of significance to the subjects mentioned."<sup>50</sup> As Farran early recognized, curators with their own "pet interests" often differed drastically concerning the importance of a given manuscript collection and often gave unsound advice.<sup>51</sup> But to ask survey workers, who were usually not specialists in historical materials, to substitute their own judgment was not conducive either to rapid progress or to good relations with the manuscript administrators. In the end, the Iowa HRS obtained most of its information for the guide to

<sup>48</sup> In Iowa a detail of HRS workers indexed and arranged the papers of Edgar Harlan in the Historical, Memorial, and Art Department, and a National Guard survey of state militia records received HRS support.

<sup>49</sup> Don Farran to Luther Evans, November 12, 1937, "Iowa—Oct. and Nov., 1937—Don Farran," Gen. Corr., WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.

<sup>50</sup> Works Progress Administration, Supplement 6 to the *Manual of the Historical Records Survey: The Preparation of Guides to Manuscripts*, September 10, 1937.

<sup>51</sup> Don Farran to Luther Evans, December 17 and 31, 1937, "Iowa—Dec. 1937—Don Farran," Gen. Corr., WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.

depositories by writing letters to the administrators of the depositories from the Des Moines HRS office.

In the meantime another project had begun, this one an imprints survey. According to the plans, field workers would complete forms on all imprints found in the state dating from the beginning of printing in the colonies through printing done in 1876. From the information supplied by the field workers, the state office staff would prepare an original and two duplicate library-size cards which would be sent to the national imprints office, which would in turn file the original by author and the duplicates by chronology and current geographic location. Eventually, after all states had sent in their cards, the national office planned to record all known locations for a single title on a master card and send this to the Library of Congress for inclusion in the Union Catalog.

The Iowa imprints survey was formally launched on April 20, 1938, and within a week seven HRS people were at work on imprints held by the HM&A. Before long the survey had completely filled its quota of 106 project workers. But since imprints were generally held in the same institutions that held manuscript collections, the harassed historical administrators were once again confronted with an influx of survey workers.

By the summer of 1938, then, the original Iowa HRS had grown immensely. Some of the increase had resulted from the pressure of interest groups, either on the local or national level. But the major cause was pressure from the president, the Budget Bureau, and top WPA officials to spread existing funds over as many jobs as possible. Federal One, whose average man-month cost was 69 percent higher than the cost for the WPA as a whole (the cost was computed as the amount of federal money spent per month per person for both labor and nonlabor items), was under pressure to bring its man-year cost down to \$1,000. Since the Historical Records Survey could employ more people for the same money than any of the other Federal One programs, the obvious way to do this was to increase relatively the numbers employed by the HRS. Accordingly, between June and November of 1938 the WPA and Federal One allowed employment on the HRS to rise more than 30 percent while the other arts projects raised their employment only slightly.<sup>52</sup>

A further consideration in the proliferation of HRS employees in mid-1938 was another rise in white-collar relief rolls, which,

<sup>52</sup> McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration*, pp. 231-33.

accompanied by the anticipation of an off-year election, made the administration quite willing to expand cheap white-collar activities. In Iowa, for example, Farran was now pushing for a survey of the state archives, and in doing so he was stressing that "the white-collar load on Des Moines and Polk County is so great just now that this project proposal is almost the only place they will have to put workers."<sup>53</sup> Farran wrote to the state WPA administrator that the project had not yet been approved in Washington and therefore had not been officially advertised; however, he had already received applications for employment on it from "almost eighty certified white-collar workers in Polk county."<sup>54</sup>

Farran managed to secure approval for the state archives project, and he soon had over one hundred persons employed on the survey. Because there was no room at the HM&A for the project workers (manuscripts and imprints people were already there, in addition to Writers' Project personnel) and because the records were scattered in various storage areas anyway, the state rented office space for the survey and physically moved the records to the workers for arrangement and description.<sup>55</sup>

But now Farran was restless. Offered a job with the Federal Theatre Project in Chicago and anxious to accept, he waited for over two months while the HRS struggled to find a successor acceptable to all interested parties. As the HRS regional supervisor wrote Evans, "When you have the administration [of the HRS], the Governor, Senator, and the historical interest[s] to please, to say nothing of various offices, regional and national of WPA, and then try to have someone appointed who will really do a job for the project, it is pretty hard."<sup>56</sup> Nearly a dozen names were proposed and rejected. Iowa Senator Clyde Herring tried to exert political influence over the selection process, but the WPA successfully blocked his moves.<sup>57</sup> Finally, in November 1938, O. Clyde Sutherland, an administrator in the Iowa WPA's Adult Education Department, took over. He was to be the last director of the Iowa Historical Records Survey under the hegemony of Federal One.

<sup>53</sup> Don Farran to Luther Evans, June 2, 1938, File 10B Part 6, Klingaman Papers, ISDH&A.

<sup>54</sup> Don Farran to George J. Keller, June 2, 1938, File 10B Part 6, Klingaman Papers, ISDH&A.

<sup>55</sup> Raphael N. Meng to Iowa Governor George A. Wilson, February 1, 1939, File 10B Part 6, Klingaman Papers, ISDH&A.

<sup>56</sup> Howard E. Colgan to Luther Evans, August 30, 1938, "Iowa—1938—Howard E. Colgan, field supervisor," Gen. Corr., WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.

<sup>57</sup> Don Farran to author, October 22, 1971.

Sutherland's job was essentially one of publication, since much of the field work had either been completed or was well under way. And publication did make some progress in 1939 with the production of another county inventory (Cherokee) and of the Iowa project's only venture into documentary publication, a copy of the diary of a Civil War surgeon named E. P. Burton.

The output, however, was still nothing to boast about. Although the church project had now surveyed about half of Iowa's churches and had virtually completed a directory of state religious organizations, it had not published any actual inventories. In part this was due to Luther Evans's decision to organize the church inventories on a statewide denominational basis instead of on a countywide multi-denominational basis (in anticipation of which the surveys had been undertaken), but it was also true that, as Evans complained, the Iowa church survey workers had "a very imperfect conception of the nature of research work" of the type demanded by the survey forms.<sup>58</sup> Nor was the manuscripts survey progressing as well as had been hoped.

By this time, moreover, the future of the WPA was unclear. Much of Roosevelt's congressional influence had waned by 1938, and congressional conservatives were regaining the upper hand. Since the projects of Federal One were the most visible part of the WPA program, they seemed to bear the brunt of the growing conservative criticism. In 1938 the Dies Committee had begun investigating the activities of some New York City employees of Federal One; in April 1939 the House appropriations committee began a series of hearings; and finally, in June 1939, the emergency relief appropriation act set August 31, 1939, as the expiration date for federally funded projects that were sponsored solely by the WPA.

In Iowa, Sutherland and the state WPA administrator responded to the cutoff of federal funds by persuading the Historical, Memorial, and Art Department to provide state support for the survey. But naturally there was a difference. The climate had changed, and most of those involved in the continuing projects knew it. The HRS in Iowa would, in the main, live on past capital until the coming of the war brought public service projects briefly to the fore.

One of the major problems for Luther Evans in his new role as "consultant to" rather than "director of" the HRS was to retain

<sup>58</sup> Luther Evans to O. Clyde Sutherland, November 1, 1938, and January 26, 1939, "Church Archives: Instructions on the preparation of Church Directory and Inventory, also Miscellaneous Material," John Wilbois Collection, University of Iowa Library.

national control of project standards in the production of inventories. In the case of Iowa, Evans had cause to worry, for he had previously noted that Iowa had grown "saucy" about criticism of its work on manuscripts.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, it was no surprise to him that Sutherland should ask in October 1939 whether "all previous instructions" from the national office, particularly the requirement that all drafts be submitted to Washington before publication, "still hold good." Evans quickly and stiffly replied that they did, but in reality he was relying upon moral suasion for control, for he no longer approved appointments, allocated funds, or set manpower quotas.<sup>60</sup>

The period of state control was the high watermark in the publication of county inventories. Three volumes appeared in 1940 (Ida, Woodbury, and Carroll), two (Montgomery and Taylor) appeared the following year, and the largest county inventory of all, the two-volume set for Polk County, was published in 1942. In part this production was due to work previously completed during federal days, but in part, too, it reflected the stabilization of the project. Under state control, no more major activities of the scope of the manuscripts or imprints or state archives projects were initiated, and the project staff was allowed to concentrate on those already established.

The survey of church archives, now redirected toward the denominational inventories, made good progress, completing five indexes, all of which lacked funds for publication. The Iowa imprints volume, issued as a checklist expanding and updating the imprints list which had previously been published in the state, appeared in 1940. And the state archives project, although it produced no publications, also flourished during the years of state control. By March 1942 it had collected and arranged the records of the governor, the secretary of state, and the state adjutant general, and it had surveyed the records in the state hospitals for the insane, the state training school for boys, and the Iowa Soldiers' Home at Marshalltown.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> The national directors of Federal One continued to be a part of the WPA, but only as consultants to the state projects. Luther Evans to Jacob Hodnefield, September 13, 1939, Memoranda to Regional Supervisors from Luther Evans, 1939, Director's Diary Series No. 35, WPA-HRS, RG 69, NA.

<sup>60</sup> Clyde Sutherland to Luther Evans, October 17, 1939, and reply, October 20, 1939, in volume labeled "Church Archives: Instructions on the preparation of Church Directory and Inventory, also Miscellaneous Material," John Wilbois Collection, University of Iowa Library. Sutherland's letter referred specifically to the church archives project and its instructions, but the general implication of the letter was clearly broader than a single project.

<sup>61</sup> Iowa Historical Records Survey, "Report on Status of Files in Iowa," March 27, 1942, 651.3118—Final Inventories of State Historical Records Survey Files, WPA, RG 69, NA.



A local project was added to the HRS list in the fall of 1939. The city council of Sioux City requested that an HRS project be established in the Sioux City Public Museum to catalog and index the collections there. The city volunteered to contribute typewriters, a member of the State Historical Society staff supplied the supervision, and four WPA workers were assigned. Eventually, this small project published two volumes, a guide to the manuscript collections and a transcription of an early Woodbury County history. In all probability, this amounted to the best output per man-year ratio in the state.<sup>62</sup>

Beginning in 1940, however, the national emphasis in the WPA turned to national defense. In Iowa, two projects were initiated, one a guide to public vital statistics, the other an inventory of various civilian organizations that might aid in militia-type defense activities. The vital statistics survey was prompted by the growing number and size of defense contracts, which were taking people off relief rolls but demanding proof of citizenship before employing them. In Iowa this created an overwhelming demand for copies of vital records, and when the Bureau of the Census suggested the vital statistics project to the various state records surveys, Iowa quickly complied, publishing a volume within a year of the suggestion. In this case the Division of Vital Statistics of the Iowa State Department of Health was a cooperating sponsor, helping defray some of the publication costs.<sup>63</sup> The suggestion for the civilian defense survey came from the national HRS office, ostensibly with the endorsement of Fiorello LaGuardia, the director of the Office of Civilian Defense. But, as it turned out, LaGuardia had not been consulted and eventually reacted to the insult by forcing a cancellation of the project.<sup>64</sup> By the time he did so, Iowa had completed about four-thousand field forms of "fraternal, benevolent, social, civic, and cultural associations."<sup>65</sup>

By late 1941 the future of the Iowa Historical Records Survey was uncertain. Nationally, the survey was dwindling as war work drew off more and more personnel, and finally the national HRS office ordered each state to prepare a report on the status of its files and to ready the project records and raw materials for storage. Just as soon as the war was over, it

<sup>62</sup> "Notes," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 38 (January 1940): 107.

<sup>63</sup> Walter L. Biering, "Foreword," *Guide to Public Vital Statistics in Iowa*, (Des Moines, Iowa, 1941).

<sup>64</sup> McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration*, p. 825.

<sup>65</sup> Iowa Historical Records Survey, "Reports on Status of Files in Iowa," March 27, 1942, 651.3118—Final Inventories of State Historical Records Survey Files, WPA, RG 69, NA.

believed, the project would be revived, first, because the postwar period would probably mean a return to unemployment and, second, because it could not believe that the work of the HRS would be allowed to remain permanently uncompleted. As Sargent B. Child, Evans's successor as national director, put it: "It is inconceivable that there will be permanently discontinued an undertaking which, beyond question, has been the largest scale project of its nature ever undertaken by any nation at any time and which has produced, in spite of obvious shortcomings, a valuable result. Its mode of operation and its structure may be altered and its goal enlarged or modified, but the momentum which it has steadily gained over the period of six and a half years cannot be lost even with the interruption of an earth-shaking war."<sup>66</sup>

With this in mind, Child asked each director to make a recommendation as to where the project's files should be stored for the duration. In response, on March 27, 1942, Iowa State Supervisor E. A. Franquemont filed a thirty-seven page report, accompanied by a note which read: "The product files of the Iowa Historical Records Survey are now contained in 108, 11 × 14 × 29 cardboard file boxes, that would occupy 225 cu. ft. or 50 sq. ft. of floor space. Each file is labeled by a cut-out entry taken from the eighth typed copy of the 'Report on Status.' It is the Iowa project's recommendation that the product files be deposited in the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines."<sup>67</sup> A note was attached later to the report. Undated, it read, "All files are now in storage in space provided by the State Curator."<sup>68</sup> With that, an end that did not appear to be an end, the Iowa Historical Records Survey died.

What, then, did the Iowa Historical Records Survey accomplish? The simplest measure is in terms of the product: ten published county inventories, three manuscripts guides, two historical transcriptions, one checklist of Iowa imprints, one guide to public vital statistics. But other accomplishments can also be listed. It straightened, cleaned, and arranged records and historical materials. It provided training in archival skills, with the result that at least two persons employed on the projects

<sup>66</sup> Sargent Child, "What is Past is Prologue."

<sup>67</sup> E. A. Franquemont to Sargent Child, March 27, 1952, 651.3118—Final Inventories of State Historical Records Survey Files, WPA, RG 69, NA. By this time the HM&A had become the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, and its director was titled "Curator."

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

subsequently found careers in archival work. And it may have stimulated, at least momentarily, a greater interest in history and historical documents, particularly on the part of project workers and the custodians of historical materials.

If the purpose of the Historical Records Survey was, as Roosevelt believed, to provide widespread white-collar work relief, the Iowa program must be judged a success. It did indeed help some Iowa white-collar workers through a difficult employment period, employing local people in eighty-eight counties. And while there were often criticisms of the HRS project workers, they seemed on the whole to have performed reasonably well.

If, however, the program is judged by the quality and quantity of its products, it was at best a qualified success. The publications, to be sure, were usually technically adequate; the cross references, while complex, were workable; the introductory essays were informative; and the controls exercised by supervisory personnel on the state and national levels did make for an acceptable and relatively standard product. But the quantity of material actually published was miserably small. By June 1937, eleven counties had completed the initial survey of county records and fifty-three others were in some stage of inventory. Yet when the project closed five years later, only ten county inventories had been published. Similarly, the project failed to publish any indexes or inventories of individual manuscript collections. Only the simpler lists, the location of depositories and the collections held by the depositories, ever saw print. And beyond this, there were only the imprints checklist, transcriptions of a diary and an early county history (both indicating a poor choice of material and low editorial standards), and the survey of vital statistics. No publications at all came out of the church survey or the survey of state archives.

In all fairness, however, it must be admitted that technical difficulties and administrative diversions accounted in part for the limited output. And it must be remembered that those in charge contemplated a continuing postwar program that would publish additional volumes and keep them updated. Nor did these administrators foresee that without a continuing program much of what they did produce would soon become useless. In the postwar period the projects were not revived, which meant that the surveys were soon out of date and the carefully stored material was soon forgotten. Some of those who tried to use the published surveys found that county records-keepers had not maintained the systems established with HRS assistance. In

most cases, the surveys and floor plans were of no assistance in locating records. In many cases, too, depositories altered their policies or manuscripts and imprints changed hands, and these guides were rendered useless.

Even more ironically, the administrative records and raw materials of the Iowa Historical Records Survey have themselves been lost. The curator of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives wrote: "In response to your request we have checked our holdings to see if there is any possibility that we might have some of the originals of the WPA [Historical Records Survey] however I find that we do not have any. . . . The large volume of material that would have been included in the survey records was disposed of many years ago. This is not surprising considering the crowded conditions that exist here in the building."<sup>69</sup>

What could have been done? Would a public information program such as the one suggested by Ray Stiles at the beginning of the project have made a difference? As Don Farran recalled, his greatest difficulty as Iowa HRS director was convincing counties that they were irresponsibly breaking state law when they destroyed county records or when they failed to maintain their records in a semblance of order. But the establishment and maintenance of a records management program throughout the state would have required constant admonishment from the state archives or the state historical society, probably supplemented by teaching and inspection teams backed by legal penalties for noncompliance. And, as Farran pointed out, there was no state money in the 1930's for such a program.

Was the Iowa HRS, then, just "make work," a boondoggle? It certainly was make-work in that the project was created and expanded in direct response to relief needs. It was not, however, make-work in the sense that the work was trifling or meaningless or that the project used more people than could be profitably employed. On the contrary, the work which the HRS performed had been planned and propagandized for by numerous groups for decades. And the attitudes of the HRS administrators reflected this. There was a bit of messianism about them, and they were firmly convinced that the project would have great lasting value. Roosevelt and Hopkins may have been looking at employment, but the HRS staff, as with the staffs of the other Federal One projects, was certainly product-oriented. That these administrators were shortsighted about

<sup>69</sup> Jack Musgrove to author, September 17, 1971.

the value of the product is equally clear. But to say that they did not prevent and probably could not have prevented the result is not to impugn their motives. And, while the Iowa project was not as politically pure as Evans avowed ("no extraneous issues of politics or propaganda entered into our planning"), neither was it a haven for broken-down politicians.

But the Iowa HRS was a boondoggle in the sense that its product, at best, had a short-term usefulness and, at worst, was doomed to futility from the start. It could possibly have had great usefulness had it been accompanied by and followed with the right kind of state program, but given the social and political realities of the depression and war years, this potential was almost impossible to realize, even in a relatively advanced and enlightened state like Iowa. The problem of updating the survey information could today be overcome by the use of modern information retrieval methods. But unless the apathy and indifference of public officials and records-keepers could also be overcome, reviving the Historical Records Survey, at least based on Iowa's experience, would probably be a Sisyphean labor.