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WHAT IS PAST IS PROLOGUE¹

IT IS fitting that those who have assisted in the progress of the Historical Records Survey should learn how much has actually been accomplished and how much remains to be done. It is also important that, after a most careful evaluation has been made of the completed work and of the methods used in reaching the goals already attained, blueprints be drawn for the future day after the war when the survey will again be continued. I say "will" rather than "may" because 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 remarkably valuable result. Its mode of operation and its structure may be altered and its goals 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.

Before we discuss plans for future activity, let us glance back over the road we have traveled. A year ago we had overcome a number of difficulties by stabilizing procedures and by introducing new policies which led to various technical improvements in the quality of the publications. At the same time the rate of their issuance had been accelerated. The support of the sponsors and co-operating sponsors throughout the country had contributed immeasurably to our efforts in Washington and in the state editorial offices. It was reported then that 1,337 publications had been issued up to June 21, 1941, an increase of 481 volumes in one year.

There were several factors which, we then felt, would alter the emphasis of the work of the survey. The new appropriation for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1942, would curtail the total number of persons employed by the Work Projects Administration by approximately one-third. This cut was subsequently effected. The personnel, trained in the tasks peculiar to the survey, would find their way to

¹ An abstract of a report read at the annual meeting of the American Library Association, June 23, 1942.

employment in our expanding industries or would be transferred to certified WPA defense projects. The events have borne out this prediction. Further reductions followed in rapid succession until on January 1, 1942, we had only four persons—including a secretary—left in Washington. Obviously, administrative and in some instances technical authority had to be delegated almost completely to the state supervisors.

The competence and loyalty of the state supervisors and their assistants rose to the occasion as the difficulties increased both in Washington and in the states. Almost heroic efforts were exerted by state editorial offices to meet the situation and to carry the work forward in spite of all odds. This they did in addition to new work directly connected with the war effort. Because of the loyalty, integrity, and persistence of these men and women the results, as measured in terms of new publications, exceed those of last year. This year's total is 609 as measured against 481 for the year 1940-1941, bringing the grand total to date to 1,940. There is every reason to believe that when the publications now being printed or mimeographed are issued the number will exceed 2,000. Deterioration in the quality of these publications, which we had every right to expect, has not taken place. This fact has surprised us more than anything else this year.

This year, 134 published volumes in the Inventory of Federal Archives series have been issued, bringing the total to 584. This virtually completes this phase of the program initiated in February, 1936, as a nation-wide project sponsored by the National Archives and for which the Historical Records Survey assumed responsibility in July, 1937. Only in a few states does there remain a small number of completed inventories which, due to the national crisis, may not be mimeographed. Those which cannot be published will be forwarded to the National Archives where they may be consulted. The fact that this work has been completed is due in large measure to the efforts of Dr. and Mrs. Philip M. Hamer of the National Archives staff.

The number of published Inventories of State Archives has advanced from 11 to 28 volumes. This work was initiated quite late in the program's history when the curtailment of personnel caused the state directors to suspend work in rural areas and concentrate many of the remaining workers in cities where the editorial headquarters were located. In a number of instances this meant the state capitol. The states in which the greatest amount of work in this

field has been done include Louisiana, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, and California. The number of volumes published represents but a small fraction of the work completed or approaching completion. In a future continuing program, a relatively large number of publications could be issued in a short time because of the amount of field and editorial work already completed. There is no way of ascertaining in how many departments of state governments the work has been completed until the inventories of our editorial files in the forty-eight states have been forwarded to Washington. If the reports from the twelve states already received are indicative of what we may expect from the other states, we can underscore in red this phase of the program for future planning.

In the Inventory of County Archives series, the number of publications has advanced from 504 to 628, an increase of 124. The best estimates which we can make, based upon incomplete reports, indicate that the field work has been completed in ninety per cent of the 3,066 counties in the country. In the tons of material which will be deposited for the duration of the war in state archives, state libraries, and state universities, not only will unpublished inventories of county records be included but also tremendous quantities of rechecked transcriptions and abstracts of source material, upon which the state editors have relied in compiling the historical sketches and governmental organization essays contained in these inventories. In quantity this material staggers the imagination. From this material authentic local history—as differentiated from the antiquarian pseudo-genealogical histories of the '70's, '80's, and '90's—can be written. Since this portion of the survey program has been the core or heart of its existence, questions will arise—in fact, they have already arisen—as to why the efforts of the survey were “dissipated” or syphoned to other activities. There is an answer to these questions which I shall give later in this paper.

The number of published Inventories of Municipal and Town Archives has advanced during the year from 131 to 180, a gain of 49. As with the Inventory of State Archives, the publications in this series only suggest what has actually been completed though not yet made generally available.

The manuscript program has also advanced considerably. To the 64 guides, calendars, and lists which had been issued a year ago we have added 43 new ones, bringing the total to 107. Perhaps the two most significant manuscript publications are the *Guide to Manu-*

script Collections in New York State, which is supplemented by a similar publication for New York City, and the *Guide to the Manuscript Collections in the Archives of the North Carolina Historical Commission*. The Georgia and the Montana projects are following the example set by the North Dakota project in issuing guides to unpublished graduate theses in their respective states. The Inventory of Manuscript Accessions for 1941 is being published as an appendix to the Annual Report of the American Historical Association. In these two activities we have again set a pattern for future work when the war ends. A revised check list of all of the publications of the survey, which we hope to have issued before October, will contain the titles of the new manuscript publications and those now being mimeographed or printed.

Many new Church Archives Inventories and Directories have also been published this year. The total has risen from 97 to 164 volumes, a net gain of 67. In spite of the many factors which have tended to hinder the efforts of the state editors, the technical quality and the accuracy shown in the volumes of this series have improved to a greater degree than those in any other phase of our program. The outstanding inventories in this field have been the *Inventory of the Church Archives of Massachusetts: Universalists* and the *Inventory of Church Archives: Society of Friends in Pennsylvania*. An important directory was *A Directory of Churches and Religious Organizations in Greater Detroit*. The continued review of this material in Washington prior to publication was made possible by the generous contributions of the American Jewish Committee, the American Catholic Historical Association, the Presbyterian Historical Association, the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches, and the Church Historical Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church, through the Library of Congress.

Some who have spoken about the survey previously have created quite innocently an erroneous impression regarding the work of the American Imprints Inventory. Reports have stated that from 7,000,000 to 8,000,000 imprint slips taken from catalogue cards in thousands of libraries throughout the country have been filed in the central editorial office. How this count was made we do not know. Let us call it an administrative error, for certainly the tireless HRS workers in the field were not to blame. The corrected figure is slightly smaller than 15,000,000. This enormous mass of material has been given to the Library of Congress in accordance with the plan origin-

ally made when this inventory was undertaken. The physical custody of the files has been given to the Wisconsin Historical Society for the duration. Ten additional volumes for the following states have been published during the past year: California, Louisiana, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Twelve more have been edited and approved for publication. The last numbers assigned were 48 and 49, to two Texas check lists. We hope that most of these will be issued.

While only two new volumes have been added to the American Portrait series, I would like to call your attention to one book in particular now in press. Intrinsically important, it is even of greater importance as an illustration of how the "theory of progressive bibliography," so strongly advocated by Dr. Luther H. Evans, the late Robert C. Binkley, and others, has worked in the past and how it can be successfully employed in a future program. Over a year ago, the New Jersey project issued a book entitled *1440 American Portrait Artists, 1663-1860*, to be used as a tool by those compiling inventories of American portraits. As the publication date approached, the editor, Dr. George C. Groce, felt certain that quite a number of additional names might be found if the date were postponed. Copies of the published volume were sent to strategic libraries and museums where they were carefully checked by Historical Records Survey workers and interested scholars. By this co-operative method, new names long suspected by the editor were located, and the revised volume will contain 2,900 names. Since the value of this kind of book can be more than doubled in such a short time, I strongly recommend that this method be employed more widely in the other fields of scholarship in the future.

During this year check lists of newspapers have been issued in Texas and Louisiana. Others will be issued this summer in Wisconsin and Mississippi.

In spite of new work introduced to assist the defense program which became the war effort, this year's results, so far as the work common to all of the state projects is concerned, have been better than those of last year. Other very important phases of our program have suffered, however. The Annotated Bibliography of American History, which was announced as having been completed by Dr. George M. McFarland last year, is one casualty. It is true that 3,000 new annotated titles were added to the 29,000 which had been edited a year ago. The District of Columbia project was closed on

July 1 of last year, which cut off all clerical and editorial assistance. This exceedingly valuable bibliography, now safely deposited in the Library of Congress, should be given an A-1 priority rating for post-war work. Little more than some reclassification and proper arrangement is necessary before it can go to the printer.

The enormous Atlas of Congressional Votes which is to indicate by graphs and maps every roll call of the Senate and House of Representatives prior to 1933, which is more than fifty per cent complete, has had to be suspended. I have been informed by Mr. Clifford L. Lord, consultant, that it is to be moved from the New Jersey project office to Columbia University for temporary deposit this month.

The Bibliography of American Literature, upon which a very great amount of time and effort has been expended, will remain at the University of Pennsylvania. Large quantities of materials on historic sites in a number of states must go to storage also.

We do not know definitely at the present moment whether the series of Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1898-1938, and the Executive Order Index will be published or not. It is probable that at least a beginning will be made.

The accumulated files of the survey have proven to be most useful this year for purposes which never had been considered when the project was initiated early in 1936. Many Guides to Public Vital Statistics, based largely upon data found in the published and unpublished inventories of state, county, municipal, and town records, have been distributed to all of the state vital statistics offices so that each state office might have necessary information about the location of birth and supplementary vital records throughout the country. They have also been of great value to large industrial organizations which are holding war contracts and which have had to recruit thousands of workers from other states and other regions. Proof of citizenship has become essential to the war effort, and the survey has made a distinct contribution. Guides to vital statistics found in church records have been compiled and distributed in a similar manner. These have proven to be particularly valuable for states in which the keeping of public vital statistics records was not required by law prior to 1905 or 1910. An official in another federal agency in Washington which is using these guides estimated that this work could not be duplicated for less than \$4,000,000. The Bureau of the Census is assisting in this work at the moment by contributing to the salary of

a reviewing editor in the central office. A good start has been made in compiling Guides to Naturalization Records.

Very useful Guides to Maps are being issued for the state defense councils. Again, these books are based upon information found on countless thousands of field forms which the survey workers have filled during the past six years, in the normal work of the program.

I hardly need to mention to this audience the assistance given by the Historical Records Survey to the central and state committees on Conservation of Cultural Resources. When the state committees were established they were informed that the survey projects already had the necessary legal authorization in the presidential letters, which govern all project operations, to render this assistance. The close co-operation between the central committee office and the central Historical Records Survey office was reflected in many states where in some instances the project sponsor became chairman of the committee or one of its active members. In other instances the survey supervisor became secretary of the state committee. As soon as the state committees organized themselves, work began immediately in making inventories of space in areas which were felt to be reasonably safe from possible bombing or other hazards and dangers of war. The information was used by the local committees in making recommendations to institutions within their states which needed such space for the removal of their most valuable holdings. The information was also forwarded to the central committee in Washington so that institutions from other states, particularly those states facing the two oceans, could learn what space was available in the interior of the country.

Under the same program the survey workers have also assisted librarians, curators, and public officials in making lists of the more valuable material in vulnerable institutions which would have priority if and when the evacuation of it should become necessary. I wish it were possible to learn how frequently the survey files were used in this work because in them, of course, were deposited thousands of inventories already made for peacetime pursuits. Some day, when time is less pressing, I hope that the story of this emergency work may be adequately written.

Let us now turn toward the future. Although thirty state projects are still in operation and new publications are being issued at the rate of approximately 40 per month, the work in all states will cease during the summer months. It is quite apparent to those who have

examined the final inventories of the files for those projects which have already been suspended, that ten times as much inventory and research material has been collected and placed in orderly arrangement as has been published. What an extraordinary background this is against which new plans can be drawn! What a vast amount of material awaits editing and publishing! Can anything be done about it? For the present, aside from completely edited inventories which will be published by the project or the project sponsors, and aside from certain material which may be used by graduate students as suggested hitherto, the answer is clearly in the negative. We are engaged in a titanic struggle in which our whole philosophy of living is at stake. This total war is requiring our total effort.

It is then to the postwar period that we must direct our thinking. The reconstruction of a shattered world, with cities and towns decimated, with the peoples of many nations numbly facing famine and starvation and with economic and political systems in chaos, will call upon the energies and resources of America as they have never been called upon before. The costs of reconstruction will greatly surpass the costs of the war. Few if any of us actually comprehend the significance and only vaguely realize the implications of these expenditures. Moreover, even the economists are far from being in agreement on matters such as postwar employment or unemployment.

While I dare not predict what the postwar employment or lack of it may be, I would like to point to the fact that much of the very best work which has been done by survey workers has been accomplished by persons who, because of physical handicaps or age (which in our modern world is a very relative term) or sometimes because of the lack of age, have not been considered employable in our business and industrial life. Parenthetically, I should like to ascertain at the present moment in just what activities contributing to the war effort many of these "unemployable" individuals are now engaged. There will be these same groups of people and there will also be a new group of our fellow countrymen who will have been physically incapacitated in the battles to save the American way of life. There may also be another large group who cannot be fitted into the postwar worlds of education, business, and industry.

If, in time, we approach an economic pattern in the postwar era which resembles that which we have known during the past ten years, then surely there will be an opportunity for the work of the Historical Records Survey to go forward. The kind of work in which we

have been engaged is, in a broad sense, never done. It will engage the attention of some of our grandchildren as it did some of our forefathers. But since it has been proven that so much can be accomplished in such a relatively short space of time when we can employ the energies of so many people, I count myself as one of those impatient individuals who would like to see the survey reopened on a scale comparable with that on which it has functioned in the past.

I say that this is not only good for the future scholarship of America, but exceedingly good for those who will become engaged in it. The enthusiasm for this kind of work, the growing realization of its long-range importance to American living, to say nothing of American history, which has been engendered in the lives of those who have been a part of it, can scarcely be understood by those who have merely used the published results of the survey. I have taken many field trips from Washington to try to interpret the over-all importance of the work in which the survey has been engaged. I must confess that many times I have learned more than I have been able to give. By evening camp fires in Arizona, in the libraries and on streets of New York and New Orleans, in the rolling blue-grass country of Kentucky and by the raging wintry sea off Portland, Maine, or the quieter water near Los Angeles, I have listened to the outpouring of local and national history by state directors, by workers and editors. They knew their sources of information and they cited them. They gave me something that is found too infrequently in our colleges and other institutions of higher learning. I think, in discussing the survey, we have never stressed enough its value to the 25,000 or more persons who, at one time or another, have been connected with it. May I intensify a note I sounded two years ago? To have the graduate schools of America's universities use increasingly the product of the unemployed is a new if not revolutionary practice in American education.

From the point of view of its cost, I am quite certain that any intelligent taxpayer would feel that the money appropriated had been well spent, once he was shown the direct and the indirect results of our work. The two thousand widely distributed volumes are but a portion of the result. When we count the material which can be published in 10,000 or more additional volumes, we come nearer a justification of the work. But this is not enough. The thousands of records rooms and vaults in which order has been brought out of chaos—the courthouse attics and basements which have been remade into usable

libraries of local records—all must be added to the credit side of the ledger. This work had to be done before accurate and usable inventories could be made. Yet this valuable by-product of the survey would have been a most worthwhile project in itself.

The survey never became engaged in constructing annexes or wings to courthouses or building fireproof vaults. Yet they were built all over this country as a result of the focus brought upon the housing conditions in our public buildings by the survey workers. It may have been brought to your attention previously that in Tennessee alone 25 per cent of the courthouses were enlarged or had ample fireproof vaults installed. The effect of the work upon public officials and other employees of local governments has been tremendous. The initial indifference or even hostility which was frequently reported in the early correspondence and field reports disappeared as time went by. Funds were appropriated by these very officials when needed for publication purposes. When the workers were withdrawn from the public record rooms because of the curtailments in our budgets, angry protests frequently replaced the earlier attitudes of indifference or tolerance. The purposes and usefulness of the survey had become clearer in the public mind.

This brings us to local participation and the part it must play in a future program. The scope of this paper does not permit adequate treatment of this important factor in the survey's success and the brevity of our reference to it is due only to the limitations of time. Let me say at once that in my opinion the events of 1939 which caused the abolition of the five federal projects, popularly known as the Arts Projects, greatly strengthened the Historical Records Survey. What appeared then to be a tragedy to some, turned out to be a blessing. When Congress determined that local legal sponsorship was necessary, the supervisors were forced to obtain local financial support, which brought with it an increasing interest and then participation. I desire to add quickly, but with equal emphasis, that had the survey been initiated as forty-eight autonomous projects, with no strong central administrative and technical controls, the whole program would have collapsed in confusion in less than two years' time. Too many divergent and conflicting points of view were present in the early days to have permitted local control with even a faint promise of success. During the past year evidences have continually appeared in some states to prove that we have been compelled to go too far in the direction of decentralization. There is a middle position be-

tween the two extremes which has been adequately tested and which, most of those close to our administrative and technical problems agree, is solid ground upon which future plans can be soundly made.

Another very important point to consider, in looking forward, is made clear if we glance back another moment. Local participation came when it was needed and wanted in many ways. It came to support and sustain a program which had gone beyond an experimental stage—a program that had a variety of interests and maturing policies. It is quite apparent that this assistance by participation never would have come with the strength it did, had the project not been partly diverted from one or two of its original goals. The introduction of the state and municipal archives inventory work; the manuscript, church records, and the American Imprints and Portraits phases; the work on historic sites and markers; the special bibliographies and other miscellaneous work all served to strengthen the program because it brought greater outside participation. I do not defend certain specific if minor decisions which may not have been wise but I do maintain, with all emphasis, that the policy of diversification proved to be so sound that the projects in forty-seven states, where local interests and forces vary widely, were producing accurate and useful guides and inventories as late as March, 1942. There was little precedent when Luther H. Evans initiated the survey in January, 1936. There will be a great deal of it when the time comes for its continuance. One final and most important factor, which contributed immeasurably to the success of this great undertaking, has been the strong, friendly though objective counsel and ever available support to the director by members of the National Advisory Committee.

SARGENT B. CHILD

Director,
Historical Records Survey