

THE WAR RECORDS PROGRAM IN ILLINOIS¹

THE Illinois War Records project was inaugurated by the Illinois War Council, the official civilian defense agency of the state, to prepare the groundwork necessary for a comprehensive history of Illinois at war in anticipation of a popular demand for such an account. With this purpose in mind, Governor Green, on May 9, 1942, created the Division of War Records and Research to preserve not only the records of the state and local war councils, but, insofar as possible, the records of the war contribution of the entire state as well.

The Division of War Records and Research is a sub-division of the council's Public Relations Committee. In addition to its chairman, Lieutenant-Governor Cross, the division consists of twelve members who have acted in an advisory capacity. Among them are Professor Tracy Strevey, chairman of the History Department of Northwestern University, Paul M. Angle, state historian of Illinois, L. Hubbard Shattuck,² director of the Chicago Historical Society and historian for the Chicago metropolitan area, and Mrs. Theodore C. Pease of Urbana who, as Marguerite Jenison, edited the last two volumes of *Illinois in the World War*, published by the Illinois State Historical Library in 1923.

Mr. Shattuck's membership on the committee was most helpful as the Illinois War Council does not have jurisdiction over the Chicago metropolitan area, which is a separate unit for civilian defense purposes. The division has worked very closely with Mr. Angle, as any extensive historical project will, in all likelihood, be carried out under the direction of the Illinois State Historical Library. The writer was in charge of the historical project for two years from September, 1942, to September, 1944. The program has now been transferred to the State Historical Library under the direction of Mr. Angle.

As has already been indicated, the division undertook a two-fold program. The first part was concerned with the preservation of the

¹ A paper prepared to be read at the cancelled luncheon meeting of the Society of American Archivists scheduled for December 28, 1944, at Chicago, in connection with the annual meeting of the American Historical Association.

² The death of Mr. Shattuck occurred while this paper was in the hands of the editor. Mr. Shattuck was succeeded as director of the Chicago Historical Society by Mr. Angle. Mr. Angle's successor as state historian has not yet been named.

records of the state and local war councils. The second part of the program dealt with the preservation of the records of the war effort for the state of Illinois as a whole, insofar as this was possible. Libraries and historical societies were encouraged to preserve community war records. Steps were taken to include in the program civic organizations and governmental agencies participating in the war effort, such as various divisions of the state government, business organizations, colleges and universities, and similar groups. Although no effort was made to assemble historical records on a large scale at the headquarters of the council, co-operating organizations were asked to keep the Division of War Records and Research informed of their war activities by sending brief reports from time to time. In this way, it was possible to obtain some idea of the extent of the entire state's contribution to the war. It was hoped that this preliminary work, limited as it was, would aid in the preparation of a future history of Illinois at war.

It is with the part of the program relating to the preservation of the records of the state war council and local war councils that this paper is primarily concerned. The basic records of the Illinois War Council are: the minutes of the monthly council meetings, correspondence by and to staff members, monthly reports from the standing committees, releases and directives to local councils, bulletins, pamphlets, or other council publications, and news releases. Most of the material has been classified under the standing committee with which it is concerned. These committees are: Adjustment of Business to War Conditions, Agricultural Resources and Production, Auditing, Civil Protection, Conservation, Co-ordination of Independent Groups, Finance, Labor, Legal and Legislation, Local Councils of Defense, Military and Naval Public Education, Public Health, War Bonds and Stamps, Women's Division, and Works and Housing.

Especially valuable for purposes of reference are the reports submitted monthly by the standing committees of the council, since they present a résumé of activities during the month. The council has also published many instructive pamphlets on a number of programs such as civil protection and victory gardens. A most important source of information is the council's official publication, *Illinois Mobilizes*. In addition, the daily releases, "News of Illinois at War," which are sent to state newspapers, provide information on all the latest council developments.

Letters sent to, and received from local councils and federal agencies, especially the Office of Civilian Defense, have frequently proved to be of great value in preparing a record of council activities.

Attention should also be directed to a collection of early records of the council dealing with its background and the short-lived council established by Governor Stelle, who was governor from October, 1940, to January, 1941.

Many programs have been undertaken by the Illinois War Council in co-operation with other organizations. This is especially true of salvage drives and war bond campaigns. All salvage drives have been directed by the war council and the Illinois branch of the general salvage section of the War Production Board. Most of the salvage records for Illinois are kept at the War Production Board headquarters in Chicago rather than at the headquarters of the Illinois War Council. As this is a federal agency, the federal government will make provision for the disposition of salvage records after the war. These records are most complete and cover all salvage activities in the state by counties. The War Finance Committee of Illinois has directed the sale of war bonds. Local war councils have played a secondary role as they have been confined to co-operating with the program as directed by the federal government. Consequently, a large part of the history of war bond drives is to be found in the records of the War Finance Committee of Illinois. The latter organization has considered writing a history of its activities.

The Illinois War Council, like the national Office of Civilian Defense, emphasized the protective aspects of civilian defense. During the past year, when it became apparent that air raids were unlikely, the administrative staff was cut considerably. Even the civilian war services are now maintained with a minimum of direction by the state council which, last summer, was reduced to a skeleton organization.

The Division of War Records and Research felt that one of its major responsibilities was to obtain more concrete data about the many and diverse activities of local war councils. As the Illinois War Council is essentially a directing rather than an executing agency, it is on the local level that the civilian defense program has been carried out. Data at council headquarters on local accomplishments was limited and largely statistical in nature. Available information consisted of personnel reports, and periodic reports summarizing

accomplishments in particular programs, such as the total number of victory gardens for the year in a particular community, or bond sales by local councils for a specific time. To supplement this data, a questionnaire was sent to all local councils late in 1942. From the replies received, a mimeographed report was published, surveying the great variety of programs sponsored by local councils throughout the state.

A series of field trips to leading local councils throughout the state was made for the purpose of inspecting records and encouraging local councils to prepare a summary account of civilian defense activities. The field trips showed a wide variation in the preservation of records. Although some councils had considerable data of historical value, such as scrapbooks of clippings and summary histories of major accomplishments, too often the only records available were correspondence and personnel data, even in communities where outstanding work was being done in civilian defense. It was pointed out on these visits that adequate written records of important programs were indispensable if either the final report of the Illinois War Council or a future history of Illinois at war was to give credit to the many outstanding local achievements in civilian defense. As a result of the field trips, a number of local councils prepared historical sketches which included matters of human interest and a discussion of problems encountered in carrying out the various programs in the communities. An interesting example is the story of the two service men's centers in Galesburg operated under the jurisdiction of the local war council.

In general, it may be said that local councils which received generous financial assistance from local governmental units kept more complete records. Without financial aid a full-time secretary could not be employed. And it is usually the secretary who keeps the scrapbook or other record of activities. In Illinois, the state government has extended no financial assistance to local communities for civilian defense purposes. This threw the entire financial burden upon local governmental units which were frequently unwilling or unable to grant extensive aid.

A question raised during the field trips was what disposition would be made of local records after the war. Records of the state council will presumably be transferred to the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library. On the other hand, local councils usually desire

to keep in the community all important records, especially scrap-books. As the offices of local defense councils will close after the war, it is important that permanent depository be found for such records. The public library or local historical society seem best suited for this purpose, as these organizations, particularly libraries, are in many cities preserving community war records.

The staff of the Division of War Records and Research spent a considerable portion of its time in preparing, in co-operation with the entire executive staff, a rather comprehensive report on the achievements of the Illinois War Council since its inception in April, 1941, through June 30, 1944. It was felt that a preliminary account of the council's activities should be prepared while the war was still in progress. This was similar to the policy followed by federal war agencies. The great advantage of such a preliminary report is that it preserves in written form first-hand oral information from staff members associated with specific programs that might otherwise be lost.

In assembling data for this report, all available records were analyzed and personal conferences were held with many state officials participating in the council's program. A limited number of copies were prepared in mimeographed form.

The report was divided into six major sections. The first section described the organization of the Illinois War Council and local councils. The field organization of civilian defense in the state, consisting of three zones, nine regions, thirty-four districts, and one hundred counties, was reviewed. The various types of local councils—area, county, municipal, and township—were defined. This section was concluded with a description of a plan of organization of a typical local war council.

The second part of the report dealt with the civil protection program. The civil protection division to insure the success of the training program for members of the U.S. Citizens Defense Corps sponsored various courses of instruction as, for instance, schools for air-raid wardens and auxiliary firemen. A description was given of the series of six practice exercises in 1943 which were held to keep members of the defense corps in a state of readiness for an emergency. These exercises culminated in a state-wide blackout, except for the Chicago metropolitan area, on July 30, 1943. The high spots of the contribution of the U.S. Citizens Defense Corps as a relief agency in the

event of natural catastrophe were also included. During the spring floods in late May, 1943, in central and southern Illinois, the defense corps units in forty-two counties co-operated with other agencies to protect life and property. Outstanding service was rendered by civilian defense workers in various parts of the state.

Part three presented a résumé of the civilian war services, which included such varied activities as a farm labor program and public health activities.

The fourth section was devoted to a description of the major role the women's division was playing in the war effort of the state.

The last two sections briefly described public relations and office management.

A major limitation of an official report of this character is that it is necessarily highly officialized, factual, and descriptive and of limited value in providing guidance for a possible future emergency. The same is true of the records of the state council in general. Only recently Miss Margaret C. Norton, the state archivist, remarked that when plans for a state defense council were being considered for the present emergency, the records of the state council of defense of the first World War revealed a list of bond purchases by individuals, but no data very helpful in setting up the administrative unit of Illinois' present war council. From the standpoint of administrative organization and procedure, the official records will necessarily not reveal all of the administrative problems which inevitably confront a temporary organization created to meet an emergency. Furthermore, the theoretical administrative organization may not reveal the actual basis of operations. It may be questionable whether basic decisions should be made by a group of seventeen council members who are entirely divorced from the administrative staff responsible for the execution of policy. These and related questions can only be understood if a critical and objective analysis of the administrative organization is made.

Reference should be made to the records of the war activities of the various branches of the state government. Officials of state agencies were requested to send periodic reports of their special war activities to the Division of War Records and Research. Some idea of the diversified types of war activities of state offices can be seen by reference to programs of a few specific departments. The Department of Public Works and Buildings, to cite one example, felt the

full impact of the nation's war program. The Division of Highways of this department emphasized the construction of access roads from the general highway systems to military establishments. Attention has also been given to the construction of strategic highways. Most of this program was carried out under the terms of the Defense Highway Act of 1941. Under the guidance of the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the public schools of Illinois instituted a war-time program of education. Young people at the elementary school level, through such programs as "The Schools at War Program" and "The Junior Citizens Service Corps," learned what democracy means, what we are fighting to protect, and what peace after victory should be and mean.

As part of its program to further the preservation of data on war activities for the state as a whole, libraries and historical societies were encouraged to preserve community war records. It was found that many libraries were keeping scrapbooks of newspaper clippings. This program was encouraged, but, in order to make scrapbooks more useful for historical purposes, it was suggested that they include more than clippings pertaining to the direct contributions of the community to the war effort. It was recommended that scrapbooks record a picture of the community in war-times. Such a scrapbook would include not only such data as stories about service men or the local war council, but also articles on the sociological aspects of the war on the community—disagreements between capital and labor, race troubles, and juvenile delinquency, etc. Public libraries were also urged to preserve pamphlets and other records concerning community war activities.

The contributions of historical societies varied. In the main, they assembled the letters and photographs of servicemen.

A survey was also made of the ways in which colleges and universities in the state co-operated with the war effort. They were asked to furnish data on such subjects as the following: military or naval training programs, such as the Army A-12 and Navy V-12; war-time physical education programs; acceleration of the curriculum; special war-time courses in vocational training; staff members on leave for war-time service; and civilian morale programs. A wealth of material was assembled indicating that higher education in Illinois had met the challenge of war.

Members of the Division of War Records and Research felt that

if an adequate history of Illinois' war participation were to be written, a broad outline of such a work should be delineated beforehand. Accordingly, in 1943, a sub-committee of the division was appointed for this purpose. In preparing an outline, it was assumed that two types of histories would be published after the war: (1) a detailed topical history in several volumes, primarily for record and reference; and (2) a narrative history in one or two volumes for the general reader. This outline covered only the topical history. The major headings of the outline are: Military Records, The Eve of War, Early Military Activities, Civilian Defense, State Departments and Agencies, War Production, War Relief and Welfare Agencies, Schools and Colleges, Civilian Activities, Civilian Life in War-time, and Peace and Readjustment. Each of these topics was further divided into numerous subheads.

As previously mentioned, the war records program has been transferred to the state historical library, under the direction of Mr. Paul M. Angle. This step was authorized by the council upon the writer's recommendation when the writer resigned to join the faculty of Rockford College last September. It was felt that the state historical library was the logical agency to take over this project. All records pertaining to the war activities of the state at large, as well as all duplicates of council records, have been sent to the state historical library. The records of the war council and such records of the local war councils as are available and worthy of preservation will presumably be transferred to the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library upon the termination of the war.

Up to the present, Mr. Angle has been able to do no more than to keep the historical program alive due to the lack of an adequate staff. However, he is doing his best to obtain additional employees and reports that indications are that the request for additional help will be granted. It would seem quite possible that the present session of the Illinois legislature will take some action to authorize at least the continuation of the preliminary work on a history of Illinois during the present war.

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