

## WAR RECORDS IN THEIR RELATION TO STATE AND LOCAL ARCHIVES<sup>1</sup>

FIRST let us consider briefly what in a broad way we collectors of war records are attempting to accomplish. If we could do everything we would like, if we could perform a perfect task, we would collect and preserve all the records and relics of every type which throw light of any kind upon our own geographical areas or topics of interest. We would include every single issue of every newspaper, all the publications of commercial and industrial organizations, every book published in our area or relating thereto, all photographs and other pictures, a program of every religious, social, or other event, every letter written by a man or woman in the armed forces, all letters written by civilians which throw light upon war conditions, the complete records of every federal, state, or local governmental agency in our territory, at least one sample of every type of uniform, every kind of weapon, every variety of military and naval supplies and equipment, and everything else used by the men and women of our area who are in the armed forces, together with many other types of records and relics. That is, if we were to perform our duty completely and fully, we would preserve in our war records collections every conceivable record and object which might be useful in the future for official or research purposes, or for museum displays, regarding the part our people have played and are playing in the war and its effect upon them.

Now clearly it is impossible for any of us to do so perfect a job, or for any of our collections to include all of these items. Even if we all could command unlimited storage space and could employ endless numbers of workers, we still would probably fail in some particulars. The only question is: How far will we fall short of the goal, and, with our limited resources, how can we best direct our efforts?

In nearly all of the states some type of war records program is being conducted, ranging from reasonably efficient coverage in some areas to only very limited accomplishments in others. In spite of our

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shortcomings we may hope that by the time we are through, these collections in the aggregate will preserve valuable data on many phases of our life during the conflict. Almost certainly they will surpass similar collections for previous wars.

Now to come to the immediate problem under discussion, state and local archives in their relation to war records pose something of a problem. Since the activities of state and local governments form an integral part of the total war picture, clearly the records of these activities will be one of the chief sources for the future historian who deals with this period. But such archives cannot be treated as can certain other types of records. When we attend a war bond rally, we can carry away copies of the program for the war records collection. Posters, newspapers, pictures, and many other types of materials can usually be had for the asking, or at least for a small price. But we cannot walk into the office of the governor and carry out his correspondence files, no matter how important they may be as war records, and the same applies to most of the series of the various state departments and agencies and also to the records of local governmental divisions.

There appear nevertheless to be certain steps which we can take in this field. First, there are certain types of less permanent materials, such as posters, news releases, mimeographed bulletins, and the like which can be had for the asking. By making periodic visits to the different offices or by asking that such materials be sent to us, we can acquire and preserve a considerable portion of them.

Second, by checking lists of state and local official agencies, we will find that some of them, such as the Office of Civilian Defense, have been created merely in connection with the war and will probably cease to exist thereafter. Their archives may be looked upon as war records, and we should seek to add them to the central war records collection. In most cases the agencies will not be willing to give up the bulk of these archives as long as the agencies are still functioning, but when they go out of existence our opportunity will come and we can make an effort to acquire the records.

Third, we cannot and probably should not seek to add to our war records collections the regular files of permanent official agencies. Sections of the files of the state treasurer, the clerk of the county court, or of most other state and local officials ought not to be extracted in order to be placed in any special collection. Instead, all of

the files which appear to have value ought to be preserved intact, as a unit. But, while ordinarily we will not find it best to place parts of these files in the war records collection, we can emphasize to the custodian the importance of their protection and preservation. Also, we can stress the need for an efficient archival agency in each area, to which the valuable official records, after they have become non-current, can be transferred.

We might as well admit, at least among ourselves, that the war has tended to cause the eclipse and curtailment of certain types of archival work. The National Archives, for example, has had its staff drastically cut during the conflict. But on the state and local level, at least, the prosecution of active war records campaigns would seem to offer an opportunity both to render a needed public service and at the same time to keep records work in general before the populace. The more we succeed with our war records programs, the more likely we are to arouse popular interest in archives work in general and the better chance there seems to be that such work will receive enlarged support on a peace-time basis, after the war.

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