POLICY DOCUMENTATION IN THE WAR PRODUCTION BOARD

OUT of the hundreds of books written about the last war, only three dealt extensively with our munitions production: Bernard M. Baruch's *American Industry and the War;* Benedict Crowell's *Munitions Production, 1917-1919;* and Grosvenor Clarkson's *Industrial America in the World War.* All three grew out of intimate association with the events they pictured, and indeed the first two studies were actually final reports of war agencies. Baruch was chairman of the War Industries Board, Crowell was Assistant Secretary of War and Director of Munitions, and Clarkson was director of the Council of National Defense. To be sure, our munitions production in the first World War was relatively unimportant. We depended almost entirely upon French and British production for artillery and heavy equipment, contributing our share by transporting raw materials to feed the foreign factories.

Contrast that with the second World War when we supplied the United Nations for a global war. The story of American production is the real story of our part in the second World War. It was, as someone had said, "a quartermaster's war." And this is the story which unfolds in large part in the records of the War Production Board.

At the beginning of our war effort, the record of the past was searched, and when finally located, was found to be gat-toothed with missing information. The studies prepared by the Army Industrial College attempted to prepare the Army for this war, but they were nonetheless inadequate. Hastily the extant records of the War Industries Board and the Council of National Defense, the Emergency Fleet Corporation and the Shipping Board, the Committee on Public Information, the War Food Administration, and the War Trade Board were scanned. Research projects were set up in the new emergency agencies, in the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and nearly every other "war related" agency; Baruch's report was reprinted by a commercial firm; but even if the entire story had been available the effectiveness of this late-in-the-day program was problematical. Knowledge must be assimilated over a period of time in order to affect habits of thought, otherwise there is too great a temptation to resort to the "this time it's different" attitude that no forebodings can temper.

The challenge of recording the details of the war was recognized early by President Roosevelt. A Committee on Records of War Administration was appointed in the Bureau of the Budget under the guidance of Pendleton Herring of Harvard to foster and coordinate historical projects in the war agencies. The records and history-writing programs which were, or had previously been, established in the War and Navy Departments and other agencies were as diverse in make-up and procedure as there were separate agencies or major departments within the agencies. In some cases, the historian was left to fend for himself in finding his material; in others, he was saddled with both records collecting and writing responsibilities, with the result that neither could be done to best advantage; in still others, the records and writing programs were tied in with reliance on operating divisions for assistance in both fields but subject to pressure from both operating and staff levels at cross currents, with unsatisfactory effects on both the historian and the job he was trying to do. In the War Production Board, records retention was so integrated with the writing project as to facilitate and document the latter while retaining its own identity as the source material for future historians and researchers and to ease the path for Congressional investigations, legal cases, and administrative uses.

The evolution of this records program was gradual and developed despite much administrative indifference. In the spring of 1941, Henry E. Edmunds was appointed archivist in the Office of Historical Advisor of the Priorities Division, OPM. It was not until November, however, that the establishment of the Office of Historian and Recorder was formally announced in the administrative issuances of the division. The duties of the office were: (1) to serve as historical advisor to the division on all priority and allocation experience; (2) to prepare surveys and reports on past priority and allocation experience; and (3) to provide permanent records of priority and allocation actions and experience.

In connection with his duty of furnishing officials in the agency with information about the experience of the last war, the gaps in the remaining records of the War Industries Board and other first World War agencies brought home to Mr. Edmunds the absolute necessity for corralling and controlling the records of OPM while the agency was active instead of waiting until the end of the war, as had been done in 1918. Therefore, he sought to extend the boundaries

of his archival activities by impressing upon his superiors the necessity for having a records program for the entire agency, thereby increasing the efficiency of the operating divisions by retiring their records not in active use to a central depository at intervals with a considerable savings in space and equipment and insuring the safekeeping of this material for the benefit of the agency as a whole. The rigors of that job can only be told by Mr. Edmunds himself, but with time and tact he gradually succeeded in getting together many of the noncurrent records of operating divisions and most of the records of discontinued or reorganized divisions, even at the point of rescue from the route to the incinerator.

By the fall of 1942, Mr. Edmunds was established in a records depository in the basement of an old school building next to the railroad tracks with about ten thousand linear feet of records and a staff of five. But it was not only the initial acquisition of the inactive records and their housing, recording, and servicing that concerned him. The problem of making the records available for research or quick reference from a subject standpoint had convinced him that the prevailing archival precepts of provenance, of keeping the records in the form in which they were originally filed as a reflection of the character of the administrative organization which created or accumulated them, was not particularly applicable to the records of the War Production Board.

In such an emergency agency, the administrative history of its intraorganizational set-up is lost in the constant metamorphosis of the agency itself, and the recurring reorganizations and shifting personnel leave only a few industry divisions with anything like continuity of name and place in the hierarchy. Consequently, for any meaning at all, one must rely on functional development. Here again changes of emphasis were so frequent that even continuing functions like priorities and administration of basic commodities like steel, copper, and aluminum were affected by varying organizational realignments. The rapidly changing war situation, which necessitated providing for various urgent production programs momentarily superseding everything else in importance and for contingencies which might or might not occur, demanded fluidity of organization and functioning in the board.

OPM, SPAB, and WPB, and in a degree, their predecessor, the Advisory Commission to the Council of National Defense, were

created for one purpose—to produce the wherewithal of war. Theirs was the blanket charge to do the job in the quickest possible way and without regard for the refinements of ordinary government procedure in complying with the rules and regulations designed to restrict expediency or favoritism to the welfare of all. In fact, some peacetime operations were deliberately circumvented in order to secure the wholehearted support of industry and to obtain information otherwise restricted to the companies' confidential files. It was hectic. Lights burned brightly every night along Independence Avenue. Records were the least of anybody's worries.

In the beginning, there was an attempt to set up a central files system, but this soon proved impossible. At one time, the offices of the agency were located in seventy-two different buildings within the city of Washington, in addition to the field offices and operating divisions located outside the city. Business was transacted in large part over the telephone and by wire, and the fastest and most efficient courier service simply could not keep pace with the demands upon it. It finally developed that every office kept its own records and any attempt at centralized control was maintained only in an advisory capacity as a service to be consulted at the request of the division and as a training course for new file clerks. The character of the files prohibited uniformity among the various offices in many cases because of the diversity of the activities performed and the nonconformist business and collegiate backgrounds of many officials.

Mail and files sections were set up under the administrative officers in most of the large operating divisions. Their files however, were generally administrative and company case files regarding applications for priorities, the multitudinous statistical forms required from industry, discussions of special industry situations, and procedural problems. The nearest approach to central files, besides the master priorities files, were those of the Materials Division of OPM and of the Office of Civilian Requirements and the Program Bureau of WPB. Even so, each section within those offices kept its own files. General "policy" material usually centered in the "desk" file of a staff official or the office files of chiefs of divisions, branches, and sections. These collections, being small, were easily lost because of the constant reshufflings of office space, the momentary reorganizations of the agency, and the short terms of many key officials who left their corporations to do a specific job in Washington and rushed back to

their companies when the job was done or were sped off to other jobs for the government in Lend-Lease, the Board of Economic Warfare, or other parts of the capitol alphabet. The files left behind were often picked up by the next occupant of the office, regardless of relevancy of function. As an illustration, the shipbuilding records of OPM were discovered in the middle of an accession from the Radio and Radar Division of WPB for no rhyme or reason. In other instances, officials carried their records along with them as they moved from job to job.

Many of the files were handled by secretaries, who had no appreciation of the continuity of a file as a unit or as the record of a function, but were only concerned with caring for property and serving their chiefs during their individual tenures. They disclaimed all responsibility for finding a document a year old, when they had been there only eight months. Moreover, their interpretation of information, as exemplified by folder labels, was often, to put it mildly, quaint. On the other hand, some industry men had little interest in records other than those needed for continuing operations. The files left by important officials were sometimes found to contain nothing at all suggesting the personality of the men or their offices. Many of these collections consisted almost entirely of top level issuances, published for limited circulation, but duplicated in the files of other high officials. Conforming to the old government saying that "nobody ever signs anything he writes or writes anything he signs," carbons of important outgoing letters often failed to turn up at all in the file of the sender but appeared in the file of the lesser known aide who actually drafted the letters. The "original and seven carbons" system was not only prevalent throughout the agency, but the carbon count frequently seemed to go higher.

Thus, the problem that confronted Mr. Edmunds in considering his collection may be defined as: (1) Confusion of record keeping systems; (2) Administrative fluidity; and, (3) Size and duplication of files.

By this time he was able to turn his attention to something more than the struggle for recognition of his records program. It seemed to him, therefore, that the only solution was to locate and segregate the material of permanent value and arrange it in such a manner that it would be immediately available for research purposes.

This decision was also influenced by the fate of first World War

records. From his experience in answering requests about the last war, Mr. Edmunds found that questions were generally of two kinds: (1) How and why: Who granted priorities? Were typewriters rationed? How much steel was allocated to small businesses to keep them going? (2) The flashy requests—punch lines for speeches, publicity drives, or slogans: How many bullets were fired in France? How many men were employed at the Hog Island shipyards? In retrospect, it meant that what was wanted was precise information on definite subjects, in brief, and quickly.

The story of what happened to the first World War records has been told several times, but it is worth repeating. Nothing was done while the war agencies were active. Late in 1918, Miss Adelaide Hasse was hired to gather together and arrange the records of the War Industries Board and the Council of National Defense. Unfortunately it was already too late, because many officials had already carried off their records, some files had disappeared in the general melée, and other government agencies had already put in their bids for pertinent records. Mr. Baruch's corespondence had become sepaated from the files, the field office records, and many others were likewise gone. Miss Hasse and her assistants rearranged the remaining records alphabetically by subject, with organization and administration in a separate alphabetical arrangement. After four years or so, Miss Hasse left the War Department which had custody of the collection, and the records were for the most part buried at the Army Industrial College until they were transfered to the National Achives in 1937, where some semblance of order was restored to the disarrangement which had progressed during the intervening years. During that period, portions of the material had been withdrawn for use by Army Industrial College and by Congressional committees, with the result that some documents were lost or not refiled properly. In the many physical transfers of the records, they were shuffled around, folders disintegrated and the contents scattered.

In 1935, when the Senate Special Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry (the Nye Committee) was studying the War Industries Board, it could not even find an adequate summary of the activities of the agency. The comprehensive final report prepared by Holsinger and Johnson in 1919 could be found only in galley proof. What became of the original or why the galleys were never printed is unknown. These proofs were finally printed for the use of

the committee and constitute the best record of industry's accomplishments, but copies are practically collectors' items.

The other war agencies records fared even worse. Most of the Committee on Public Information records were lost; the War Shipping Board records were buried in the dust of the old White House garage until the late war; the Food Administration records remained in space-consuming expansiveness even after their transfer to the National Archives, but many important documents had long before been removed to the Hoover Library of War, Peace, and Revolution at Palo Alto.

Unfortunate as the case was then, how many times more serious would such an oversight be now. The War Industries Board employed around 1,000 people and with its predecessors lasted only about a year and a half. The War Production Board employed over 22,000 people at its height and with its predecessors lasted four and one-half years. In 1919, the possibility of future wars seemed remote; in this atomic age, nothing is remote or impossible.

Analysis of what happened to first World War records revealed these salient points: (1) It is easiest to use records when they are arranged simply by subject. (2) The time to begin records conservation is while the agency is active. (3) Effective use of records is impeded by having to wade through quantities of operational material and records of purely transitory importance. (4) Officials often carry away their records because of ignorance of the law and because they do not trust the government to properly preserve them (or because they might wish to preserve the record for a more personal posterity). (5) Governmental mistreatment of records is not due to negligence or indifference alone, but is weighted in the initial instance by the bulk of the material which creates a storage problem and, secondly, by the absence of people who know anything about the records or the agency when the records actually do come up for consideration. (6) The inaccessibility of the records to government and to qualified scholars may have contributed to our ignorance of industrial mobilization and to our intellectual apathy toward it (witness the dearth of material written about the first World War industrial effort as well as the complete reliance upon the Army Industrial College to adequately cover the subject area).

On these assumptions Mr. Edmunds proposed to act and to make of his office something more than a mere repository of inactive records.

The problem of preserving the experience of the War Production Board and its predecessors was being considered on a "topside" level about this time also. Luther H. Gulick, chief of the Division of Organizational Planning, wrote to Chairman Nelson on October 15, 1942: "It is recommended that a group of professionally trained persons be established to collect and record in orderly fashion the documents of major importance in the development of the policies and organization of the WPB." The suggestion was approved by Mr. Nelson on October 17. The chairman himself had already gone on record as suggesting that a "case file" of important decisions of the board be made in an effort to reflect in example how the various problems of WPB had been met. The difficulty here was that his staff assistants, whom he would have assigned to compile and analyze the material, did not have the time to devote to it. Nearly nine months elapsed before the suggestion formally presented by Mr. Gulick became actuality.

In January, 1943, the Historical and Recording Section (the records function had been combined previously, for administrative purposes, with the function of publishing the industry orders of the board in the *Federal Register*) was transferred to the Distribution Bureau. About the same time, an attempt at organizing a subject matter file was begun in the Office of the Executive Secretary. This effort was hampered by the fact that, outside of the records of the board itself and top committees served by the central secretariat, the file's sponsors had no general access to the records of any other office within the board. On April 19, 1943, the Historical and Recording Section was finally transferred to the Office of the Executive Secretary, where it would be in a logical position to exercise a non-competitive and horizontal overall position to the operating divisions of the board. It was only natural, therefore, that when the history program, or policy analysis program as it was known, was activated in July that it should be integrated with the records program.

Under the new set-up, formally established by an administrative order dated August 13, 1943, the Historical Records Section of the Policy Analysis and Records Branch was able to implement with more authority its already well-established function of accessioning, administering, servicing, and recommending for disposal. In addition, it was able to put into effect the creation of a policy documenta-

tion file. This was to be the single comprehensive file of the top policy documents selected from the higher level records collections of WPB, OPM, SPAB, and those records of the Advisory Commission which had not been taken over by the Bureau of the Budget.

Incidentally, the discrepancy between actual organization of the Policy Analysis and Records Branch and the date as listed in the General Administrative Order, noted above, is not an uncommon one throughout the board. It is especially noticeable with committees whose minutes often predate from one to three months the date of establishment announced in an administrative order and is another example of the problems confronted by persons who are called upon to service the records with no familiarity with the inner workings of the agency.

The factor of selection of important documents had passed through several stages of thought. In exploratory conversations in May, 1943, it was recommended by Mr. Edmunds that the selection and collection of significant documents could best be accomplished by centralized control over the decentralized files. He agreed that selection criteria should be established at the point of origin in each office of the board, subject to continuous review by the records program personnel, an idea which he felt impelled to modify considerably in undertaking actual operation of the task. The analysis of the quality of records by their originators leads to either the theory that everything is wonderful, the most important records created in the board, or that everything over three months old is obsolescent and of no further value. Furthermore, officials are often unable to view their files or indeed their duties in proportionate relationship to the other offices of the board, or else they are so disinterested that they leave the matter to their administrative officers, who seldom have the experience for making such decisions. In practice, some offices attempt a last-minute screening processing on their files before finally turning them over to the section, which, usually left unfinished, only further confuses the state of the material and enables the officials to carry away what they want and consign what they inexpertly consider useless or not fit for the record to "Confidential trash." Naturally the watchful eye and attendant ear of the Historical Records Section is on the alert to catch such recalcitrants.

As in the case of the history program, records selection needs the unbiased viewpoint of qualified professionals. Naturally in acces-

sioning any group of records, the opinion of the office of origin is solicited and valued as to the general quality of the records, but for individual documents the trained and indoctrinated expert can usually sense their importance without having actually fathered them. For the record, one of the suggestions offered in the early talking stages before the program was begun was that every document should be labeled at its origin to show whether it was of permanent or transitory value!

Inevitably the question arises: What is a policy document—how does one select records of enduring value? Inevitably the answer follows: We just select them. Although this is the simple truth, there is the more involved and sonorous definition constructed for those who take their facts solemnly: Policy documents are those which express the theoretical principles, define the powers, and declare the administrative decisions of higher authority or lead step-by-step to the making of those decisions, which initiate and explain procedure, and which report the plans, activities, and organization of the agency and its component parts in sum, in specific or part, and in relationship to its background.

Initially the criteria rests with the files selected for screening. The files of key staff officials and chiefs of operating divisions fall naturally into this category: the chairman of the board, the various vice-chairmen, chiefs of divisions and bureaus, key officials called in to perform special functions. Files below the division level might occasionally be chosen for screening if they cover an important subject area not adequately covered elsewhere or if they serve to illustrate the difference between policy and procedure. The major renderances and issuances of the agency, such as reports, publications, committee and board records, statistical compilations, procedural manuals, administrative orders and regulations, external orders and directives, organization charts and directories, and executive personnel lists are basic to such a collection.

Delegations of authority within the agency, from supra-organizational levels, and in agreement with other agencies are likewise selected, as well as records of committees which might originate in other agencies but which had WPB representation. Some case files reach the selected documents level but principally in the "cause célèbre" stage; that is, matters involving certain companies or projects which, because of special political or economic significance or

affecting matters of policy, came to the attention of top officials in whose files the dossiers were left. Drafts of documents constitute a problem, as the number often goes well over ten. It was finally decided to save only those which were substantially different from each other or the final draft or those which bore marginal notations, expressing an opinion.

The type of file chosen for screening is generally the subject file. Name and numerical files seldom turn out to be of policy caliber. Classified files (secret, confidential, and restricted), by the very reason of the necessity for security at one time, are important. Chronological files, which most operating offices consider as non-record material, pose a separate problem. First of all, it is difficult to determine just how they are to be made up, because letters which should certainly be there somehow don't turn up while irrelevant material often does. Undeniably, in a very few cases, important letters may be found in the chronological files which cannot be located easily elsewhere. Another baffling peculiarity is the practice of some offices in keeping both a chronological file and a "day file." Apparently the day file is arranged alphabetically by addressee within a weekly or monthly period, though the duplication cannot seem worthwhile to anyone. The policy adopted by the Historical Records Section, mostly as a concession to searchers who love to "steep themselves" in the records of some "big shot" official and as a provision of double evidence that a document cannot be found, is to retain as a unit (but not in the PD file) the chronological files of top officials and to dispose of those of lesser lights. It is admitted that the solution may be only temporary and is not wholly satisfactory from a records administration point of view, as the few important letters located in the chronological files do not justify keeping the large amount of junk with which they are embalmed. Microfilming might be one solution to this, although last carbons are poor material for that process. If the selective process should be carried on at all, there would be no point in retaining the chronological arrangement as a residual file.

Of almost equal importance to establishing the criteria for selection are the qualifications of those who do the screening. Not only must there be an awareness of the value of records and their probable use, but there must be knowledge of the operation of the organization and its background in relation to other agencies of the government,

the public, and to current events. A fragment mentioning a luncheon meeting of Arthur Davis with W. L. Batt might be overlooked if one did not know that Davis was chairman of the board of ALCOA and Batt, chairman of the Requirements Committee. In a way, it requires the same knowledge and attitude required in recommending records for disposal: At what stage in the echelon of organization does operation become policy? When does a case file become an example of policy making or breaking? At what level does repetition of material occur between staff and operating and field levels? It is simply a further refinement of that process.

Notwithstanding this credo, the idea behind the Policy Documentation File has undergone a gradual metamorphosis. In the beginning, the idea was to make this a top policy file, a synthesis of the really "hot stuff." As time went on, the policy analysts writing their histories of WPB activities demanded lesser material to fill out the detailed and comprehensive stories they were writing. Since they showed a disinclination to search in the original files themselves, because of the great amount of effort entailed in finding desired material, reliance was placed entirely on the records staff for providing them with material not still in the current files of the office in their specific subject area, and as a result screening became more liberal. This convenience proved of immeasurable value to the analysts in the saving of time and ultimately in the cost of their operation. The final stage was due probably most of all to the success of the PD file. It worked so well that it was decided to make it the only permanent file of the board. So the emphasis changed from skimming the cream of topside recorded actions to the complete collection on a subject level of material worthy of permanent retention.

The documents do not wholly lose their identity in screening. They are stamped with the accession number of the file from which they were screened, so that, if desirable, reference may be made to the records accession report in seeking information about the source of the document or, in the interim before final disposal, the original file may be searched for additional records and thus serve as a check on the validity of screening techniques. Charges are not left in the original collection after it has been weeded, although some duplicate correspondence may be left in the file. Cross reference sheets are removed, however.

Once the policy of segregating the important records of the board and consolidating them had been established the mechanics of organization of the file were begun. On the effectiveness of these procedures rests the case of the entire enterprise. Therefore, this phase has received the most careful attention and, rightfully, the greatest emphasis in the section's activities.

The arrangement of the selected documents was premised on a combination of library and records techniques. Because of the cohesive interrelationships of the subject matter—production for war—a decimal system was used. The advantages of this system are that similar subject matter is brought together, leading from the general to the particular, so that each subject area is held together within a number category of tens, which may be extended as broadly as a hundred or refined as specifically as five (in this file) digits to the right of the decimal point within that same hundred area. In other words, specific information may be consulted alone or in relationship to a gradually widening frame of reference. Thus, cotton duck comes under the large area of cotton broad woven goods, which comes under cotton textiles, which is under the still larger area of textiles, clothing, and leather. Although the classification scheme is basically subject, strictly administrative and organizational material is filed separately, and the distinction between the successive agencies, NDAC, OPM, SPAB, and WPB is maintained insofar as possible.

In compounding a workable classification scheme, reconciliation had to be made between the classification of subject matter and its logical relationship to other subjects and the manner in which the items were handled administratively by the War Production Board. For example, industrial instruments constitute a subject in themselves, but, since they were handled by the Radio and Radar Division and the material was so interrelated, they had to be set up as a section under radio and radar in the scheme. Similarly, distinctions between general industrial equipment, power equipment, machine tools, and builders' tools were sometimes so tenuous that even the industry specialists could see no logical reason for the way the product was assigned to a certain division within the board, and arbitrary decisions had to be made. In the end, common sense, general knowledge, experience with records and reference requests, and sound classification technique proved more valuable than elaborate and intensive industry classifications and other predigested arrangements

in devising a classifications scheme. The organization section of the scheme was particularly difficult because of the shifting lines of authority within the agency. While the predecessor agencies could be classified according to the organizational outline at the time of termination, which was the period of broadest expansion of those agencies, the scheme for the board had to be worked out while the agency was still in existence. It was decided therefore to have the classification scheme outline the organization at its broadest period of expansion, around the beginning of 1944, and thereafter to make changes and additions in minimum to care for new offices but not taking into account the constantly changing lines of authority.

The ten basic categories of the file are:

000 Organization
100 Control of Materials
200 Production
300 War Industries (Aircraft, Shipbuilding, Radio and Radar, Ordnance)
400 Construction and Equipment
500 Commodities and Products
600 Utilities and Services
700 Relations with other Agencies, States and Territories, and Foreign Countries
800 National War Economy
900 Demobilization and Reconstruction

In order to control the material under each of the numbers so that there will not be folder after folder with the same number arranged chronologically, a system of secondary numbers was designed to further classify the material. These numbers can be applied to any basic number in the 000's, the Organization section, *i.e.*,

1. Establishment
2. Personnel
3. Budget
4. Administration
5. Meetings
6. Functions
7. Organization
8. Reports and Issuances
9. Termination

Another system of secondary numbers applies to the specific subjects in the 300, 400, 500, and 600 categories, *i.e.*,

1. Raw Materials and Stocks (Supply)
2. Requirements
3. Priorities and Allocations
4. Production
5. Orders
6. Conservation
7. Types of Products
8.
9. Rationing

There are additional breakdowns under each of this last group of numbers further refining the meaning of the terms. These numbers follow, as far as is feasible, the functions outlined in the 100 and 200 categories so that the same functions treated in general there are applied to specific subjects in the industry and commodity categories.

Considerable emphasis has been placed on assembling complete series, perhaps most of all because complete series seldom if ever reach the Historical Records Section intact. This factor is particularly noticeable in the case of procedural and organizational manuals, divisional issuances, etc., which are periodically superseded in part. The new sheets are circularized with the notation to insert and destroy the obsolete copy, which direction the file clerks faithfully carry out. Only months later does a legal technicality or some other matter comes up which requires referring to the rules promulgated at a certain time, only to find that no record has been kept of the superseded material. Sections of other series, classified secret and confidential, were recalled by the security officers at intervals for destruction. For that reason, the Historical Records Section has contrived to get on as many distribution lists as possible to insure the retention of all issuances. This is in addition to the issuances of top committees which the section normally receives in its role as official custodian of the records of the executive secretary's office.

One of the problems in files is duplication. The policy of unique files has its drawbacks as well as its advantages, because even in the best records establishments, where there is considerable use and above all considerable loaning of records, some are bound to get lost, or several people might request the same document at once. The factor of wear and tear is not too genuine any more because of

photostating and other reproductive possibilities. But mainly in order to limit the size of the files, duplicates are discarded in most cases. For even when occasional extra copies are discovered there is the embarrassing scene with the user: "Here you have two copies of this document together; I need this record urgently for my work; I don't see why I can't have it."

Nevertheless, in the Policy Documentation File, there is provision for some conscious duplication. The minutes and documents and other issuances of the major committees and boards of the War Production Board cover the whole field of the board's activities and constitute some of its most important policy material. An extra set of the documents and reports of these committees are filed by subject throughout the file. In a more limited degree, the minutes of meetings of these committees are cut up and filed by subject (in writing up the minutes, each subject discussed is a separate item). The excerpts of the minutes are stapled to sheets of paper giving the source and date. This device is for the purpose of getting all the material on a subject together, but when that objective would not be furthered it is omitted. In other words, there is no need to file duplicates of records of the Steel Requirements Committee, the Automotive Production Committee, or the Joint Aircraft Committee. But with overall committees like the board itself, the Requirements Committee, the Production Executive Committee, and so on, these records are of such top importance that the chance of their being overlooked is too great a risk to take.

There are counter arguments that any researcher worth his salt would check the indexes to those top committees anyway, and that may be true as far as the well-known committees are concerned. But there is such a multiplicity of committees that only a very comprehensive search would cover the field, and five or ten years from now when the organization of the agency is not so well known, very important material might be easily overlooked. For example, who would remember to look for the Materials Control Plan Committee in studying steel, although it initiated the Steel Budget Plan? The number of committees for which minutes have been excerpted is about twenty; committee documents and other series filed in duplicate number several times more. The total number of separate series so far in the file is about a thousand.

The practice of excerpting minutes and duplicate filing of docu-

ments has not meant that the value of indexing records of important committees has been ignored. On the contrary, it is the goal of the section to index these series and to make at least tables of contents for less important series, and much has already been accomplished in that respect. The indexing of the minutes of WPB, OPM, SPAB, and the Advisory Commission has already been completed or is in process.

There is also an insignificant amount of duplication in the matter of important letters or reports which cover two diverse subjects (aluminum and magnesium, for instance). When extra copies are readily available, a copy is filed under each subject. Double filing is not carried out as a rule with respect to industry orders and forms, as these are so voluminous and because priorities publications provide an easily used index to this material.

The screening of duplicate publications and formal printed or processed reports can serve another worthy purpose if funds and attention are ever directed to such a project. These records have been retained by the section whenever they do not create an acute space problem, and they could be distributed to libraries, government agencies, or research institutions. It would be first of all a considerable job to collate, arrange, and list the material before any sort of distribution is possible, and complete sets of long series would be virtually impossible to compile, so actual facts may in the end defeat good intentions. Such a program is further impeded by the fact that the divisions often destroyed most of the duplicate copies of publications before transferring their records to the HRS.

The real key to the Policy Documentation File is the index, which aims at being a comprehensive subject catalogue of the information available in the files. Because of the enormous amount of separate documents in a file of this type, there are no entries by name of the correspondents, as a rule. However, titles of publications, names of companies and private associations, other government agencies, foreign countries, authors of special reports made for WPB by people outside the agency, and catch-word titles are brought out. The index has followed a library pattern in the style of subject headings to insure uniformity of wording and homogeniety of filing, and the cards include brief summaries of the contents of the material with names of correspondents and dates. Series material is, of course, catalogued as a unit. The documents, except for dossiers and ex-

changes of letters, are separately indexed. The microfilming of this index for distribution to large libraries and research institutions to provide an alphabetical checklist of the resources available has been discussed as a future possibility.

Another worthwhile undertaking has been the indexing of press releases. The value of this form of information is often overlooked because it is not considered "primary source material" or it is easy to say, "look it up in the *New York Times Index*." (Have you looked under National Defense in that *Index*?) Actually, press releases are the only source for many WPB actions—announcements of the issuance of industry orders, materials restrictions, certain statistics, personnel actions, and important speeches declaring or explaining policy. Division Administration Order No. 1, which set up the entire priorities system under OPM, is available only in press release form. A separate index was prepared for this body of material, because no other key to it, including the OWI index, was able to satisfy the demands upon it.

One of the significant factors about the Policy Documentation File, and one which has contributed to its success, is that it is a current as well as an inactive file. Because of the need for supplying the policy analysts with current distributive material and because of the need for collating complete sets of issuances, as mentioned before, the file is of timely as well as retroactive importance. Besides, the inactive record, as defined in WPB, can be a record three months old not in active use in current operations, although it might be considered active in most archival circles. It has already been discussed how the file has satisfied the needs of the policy analysts for written information within the limits of what has been turned over to the section, and indeed has provided them with a breadth and scope of information which would not have been open to them otherwise.

Even greater satisfaction as to the current usefulness of the file has been afforded by the response of staff and operating personnel and certain authorized personnel from other agencies who have used it. These people are perhaps best qualified to comment because they have had to depend upon typical office file rooms for the filling of their requests, and their reaction to seeing the orderly and professional manner in which their and other material is made available has increased their confidence in leaving their files behind. As a matter of fact, they often find their own material more readily than

when it was in their own office file rooms. In particular, they are delighted to find pertinent subject matter stripped of the usual courtesy correspondence and junk as well as of the enormous amount of cross reference sheets leading to a rat's maze and arriving nowhere. The index has proved a revelation to them, for it has enabled them to choose exactly what they wanted to see and to reject irrelevant material. It so happened that the size of the Policy Documentation File had just reached a point where it contained a sizable cross section of the major records of the board and its precessors, up to the point where many operating divisions still kept their important files (around the fall of 1943), when the divisions began gathering material to write the histories of their organizations before the demise of the agency. In its first real test with people other than academicians the file has fared well. Likewise, the response of searchers from other agencies has been complimentary and many have used the PD file to locate records which actually originated in their own agencies.

Another point in favor of a single consolidated file stems from its helpfulness to the records staff. The Historical Records Section, up to V-J Day, had received over two thousand separate accessions of records. Many files were accessioned on a periodic basis to save filing space, but the cut-off lines were decided by the importance of the material as well as by date. Even with careful indexing of the accessions and detailed records description, the time and effort necessary for filling a request would be considerable. Moreover, once a document was found, that experience could only be saved by keeping a special index of requests. Besides, the space problem and the disposal problem would not have been solved. With the Policy Documentation File, if a document cannot be found, one can be reasonably sure it was never in the file as accessioned by the section. Time and time again, in servicing requests for records from files which had been screened, when the record could not be located through the index to the PD file, the original file was searched exhaustively to see if it might have been overlooked, and invariably the answer was negative. This process was followed for the satisfaction of both the searcher and the staff, and the result has cemented the belief that once a file has been screened it is not worth keeping thereafter.

The Policy Documentation File has thus become the only permanent record of the War Production Board and its predecessors, aside from certain administrative records, such as personnel, budget, and compliance records. It is estimated that upon completion it should

comprise about 1,400 linear feet. That from a total records collection of about 300,000 feet. There are, of course, some case files and statistical and industry records which have legal value or immediate value to old-line agencies, and which have been recommended for retention for periods varying from three to over ten years. The records policy of the agency has aimed at proving that current expenditures for proper care will undercut, by far, the cost in money that would have been incurred for storage and excessive servicing throughout the years or the cost to knowledge while the records are of timely interest, if that care had been delayed.

Aside from its value as the end product of records administration in the War Production Board, how does the device of a Policy Documentation File fit in with the whole picture of the administration and retention of government records? It is granted that this is a peculiar collection. WPB and its predecessors were created to perform specific functions covering a comprehensive area of information and activity, and they were terminated when that activity ceased. The total period covered was slightly less than five years. The subject matter is of especial interest for it records our production efforts, covering every phase of our economic life. It should be of interest to scholars and to government not only as a study of how we won the battle of production but for use in future economic planning; and the realm of public thinking is veering more and more in that direction, be it for or against.

It is true that records are not a complete reflection of what has actually happened, because much of what transpired was handled verbally, without so much as a memorandum or telephone transcript of the proceedings. However, human memory dims or enhances with time; only documentary evidence is constant, so it should not be underrated. Some of the unwritten history has been captured by the policy analysts through personal interviews for use in their studies and by operating divisions in their final histories. The executive secretary made a determined effort to get staff officials to leave behind accounts of their activities, the results of which are doubtful. But these reports and histories, comprehensive as they intend to be, or even books and commentaries written by Mr. Nelson and other key figures, will not preclude various lines of investigation and questioning by scholars and government administrators whose appetites may be only whetted by writings originating in or as a result of connection with the agency. It is doubtful if scholars will ever lavish upon these

records the manifold studies they have made of the military and political phases of war, and furthermore the impetus to scholarship seems to decrease in inverse ration to the amount of source material available in these days of mass record-making and reproduction, but our society may suffer the more if they are ignored. It is chiefly for this reason, and not only for purely cold administrative calculations, that the possibilities of this experiment with files has captured the imagination and redoubled the efforts of those associated with it. As a sidelight, it may be interesting to compare in the future years the usefulness of these files with those of OPA, which has been somewhat similar in organization to WPB, but which has had a less purposeful records program. On the other hand, it might be revealing to compare the reports of the historians of WPB with those of agencies where the records program has not been so closely allied with the writing program.

However, it should not be concluded that because WPB is unique its records program has no bearing upon other records programs, even those of old-line agencies. One of the problems of bureaucracy is the records it creates, and to streamline and modernize records retention is to make more accessible the knowledge accumulated and to cut down the large expense and wasted effort involved in keeping useless or unused files. Records disposal as ordinarily practiced is not the whole answer, because that concentrates on chipping off useless parts rather than really cutting into the heart of the collection. Basically, the function lies with the operating agency. In that light, the experience of the Historical Records Section and its relationship to and influence upon other offices of WPB is important, both for what it was able to do and for what it might have done had it enjoyed earlier administrative support.

Though the creation of a Policy Documentation File may have no feasibility in certain agencies, it is a contrivance which may solve the records problems of some agencies or offices producing a large amount of subject correspondence. Or it may be freely used as a base from which to improvise new methods in the realm of document selection, arrangement, and retention. Most of all, it provides an example and sets the pace for creative records management.

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