

The Minnesota War History Committee

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AT THE SUGGESTION of the Minnesota Historical Society, Governor Stassen has established the Minnesota War History Committee to advise and consult with all agencies and individuals engaged in war activities "in the making and preparation of records in order to assure the collection of adequate records pertaining to Minnesota's participation in the war; to insure the preservation of such records; and, to collect and co-ordinate for the Division of Civilian Defense, information pertaining to war agencies and organizations."¹ The committee is responsible to the state defense co-ordinator and to the chief of staff of the Minnesota Office of Civilian Defense. Information collected by the committee is available only to these two officials and to persons authorized by them to use it. Records collected by the committee are to be housed in quarters provided by the Minnesota Historical Society.

The establishment by Governor Stassen of the War History Committee as a state war agency constitutes a recognition by those responsible for the marshaling of Minnesota's resources for war of the importance of record collecting. The agency charged with this specific task now will be able to assemble much material which otherwise could not be obtained or which will not be available later. The War History Committee expects not only to collect and preserve the records of the war, so that after it is won the history of Minnesota's part in the victory may be written, but to assemble information of current value to other Minnesota war agencies.

Dr. Arthur J. Larsen, superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, is chairman of the committee. The Minnesota Office of Military Defense is represented by Major General Ellard A. Walsh, adjutant general of Minnesota. Mr. C. A. Zwiener, chief of staff of the Office of Civilian Defense, Mr. H. C. Schmid, chairman of the

¹ Office of Civilian Defense, "General Orders," no. 13, May 18, 1942.

Human Resources and Skills Advisory Committee, Mr. Herbert J. Miller, chairman of the Industrial Resources and Production Advisory Committee, Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, dean of the graduate school in the University of Minnesota, and Mrs. Lionel R. Upham, president of the Minnesota Federation of Women's Clubs, also are members of the committee. The present writer is its executive secretary and the director of its work.

A state-wide organization is to be established through the appointment of a local representative by each of the 107 chairmen of county and municipal civilian defense councils in Minnesota. The primary responsibility of the local representatives will be the collecting of records originating within the county or municipality—materials which the state committee otherwise might not obtain. Their secondary task will be the collection and preservation of war records for the county or municipality. The local representatives are expected to advise and consult with the heads of other local state war agencies and private organizations about the proper preservation of their records, to impress upon individuals in the community the desirability of preserving business or family records which bear upon the war, and to enlist the aid and services of other people in collecting and preserving records.²

The War History Committee believes that it is as important to organize the material it collects, in order to make it available for use, as it is to collect it. This is no mean objective in view of the immensity of the work of collection.

Certain conditions now exist which make the assembling of war records for a state different from and more difficult than in past wars. There is no need to elaborate upon the great scope of the present war, and upon the fact that we are engaged not only in an unparalleled military effort, but in an unprecedented civilian effort. The first World War involved civilian participation and organization, with accompanying disruption and change in civilian life undreamed of during the Civil or Spanish-American wars. In this respect the last and the present wars are similar. Nevertheless, the

² Office of Civilian Defense, "Circular," no. 9, May 19, 1942.

problem of collecting the records of the present conflict for a single state is more complex than it was in 1917-18.

The present war effort is more centralized nationally than it was in the first World War with respect both to the federal governmental organization and to the manner in which nongovernmental civilian activities are organized. The federal government is relying less upon education and a voluntary program, and more upon centralized direction than in the last war. The United States Food Administration in 1917-18 succeeded in sending food abroad to the nation's allies through the voluntary co-operation of the people, who were induced to save food by an intense campaign of education. The fast pace of the present conflict did not allow time for similar methods with respect either to food shipped to Britain or to the rationing of such commodities as sugar.

The greater centralization nationally of both federal governmental and private organizations makes more difficult the collecting of such materials as mimeographed instructions, bulletins, and other records not intended for public release. They may, however, be obtained by alert collectors who have access to regional offices of federal agencies. Both the federal government and national private organizations have developed the concept of archives since 1918; consequently records are less available to state collecting agencies than formerly. Records of the United States Employment Service, the Red Cross, the Boy Scouts, and alien registration were among those collected by the Minnesota War Records Commission in the last war. The commission was able to collect such material because it began its activity as an agency of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, which had unprecedented authority to direct the war effort within the state. The Office of Civilian Defense, which now performs this function, does not have comparable powers, nor is it likely to receive them. Eventually records of Minnesota significance originating in federal or private organizations—records similar to some collected by the War Records Commission of the last war—may be microfilmed for the files of the War History Committee.

Organization on a national scale now extends into fields un-

touched in the last war. This is true in almost every type of activity. Within fields closely allied to the activities of the Minnesota Historical Society, for instance, there have been established the Committee on the Control of Social Data and the Committee for the Preservation of Cultural Resources, to name but two. Particularly numerous are organizations devoted to furthering the war effort, such as the United Service Organizations, fund raising organizations, like the Russian War Relief, and organizations whose purpose it is to influence opinion. Almost all national organizations have war programs that reach out into Minnesota.

The manipulation of public opinion today is based upon methods and techniques developed from those in use a generation ago. Public opinion and public response to the appeal of a program in Minnesota is influenced and obtained not only through local sources but through national ones. New mediums, such as the radio, have come into use since the last World War.

The immediate task of the War History Committee is to acquaint Minnesota state departments, local governmental units, and private organizations engaged in war activities with the desirability of preserving office records in such form that they may become available for use by historians after they are no longer current. The work of collecting printed material issuing from federal, state, and private organizations will be started at once. In order to avoid unnecessary duplication, the committee will consult with other depositories in the state, such as the Minnesota Historical Society, the University of Minnesota Library, and the public libraries of St. Paul and Minneapolis, about the material they are assembling and preserving. The War History Committee will attempt, insofar as it can, merely to supplement in its collections what other depositories are not obtaining. The committee will be on the alert for records of many kinds—archives of governmental and private agencies, private letters, diaries, account books, ration cards, newspapers, books, pamphlets, leaflets, handbills, posters, photographs, motion pictures, radio transcriptions, phonograph records, musical scores, badges, buttons. In addition, the committee will undertake to accumulate such

items as lists of organizations and their officers, newspaper and periodical files, bibliographies, and specialized lists of publications that may be of value to the Office of Civilian Defense and the agencies under its direction.

The records on which written history is based always have been diverse in character. The foregoing list demonstrates that the records of modern total war are especially diverse. The historian of the present era will be forced to use materials as complex, as varied, and as widespread as the war itself. Thus, the collector of the records of Minnesota at war must take account not only of materials originating in the state, but in the nation as a whole, not only of written or printed records, but of photographs, motion pictures, radio transcriptions, and the like. Such material, all of which requires special handling, must be collected and preserved along with the manuscript and printed records that have made up the archives of past wars.



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