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ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS OF THE DIVISION OF COMMUNITY SERVICE, RESEARCH AND RECORDS SECTION

Historical Records Survey

In November 1935, President Roosevelt made funds available for the Historical Records Survey (HRS). This project, part of Federal Project No. 1 (Arts Project), was designed to make use of unemployed clerical workers and writers by providing a needed community service. The HRS arranged and inventoried historical records, primarily for federal, state and local governments, and copied or otherwise preserved records of special historical value that were in danger of being lost or destroyed. Few communities were willing to sponsor apparently unnecessary community service projects because of their high cost and limited visibility. For these reasons, many projects of this type, such as the HRS, were WPA sponsored until feasibility and value could be demonstrated.

Several different projects fell under the auspices of the HRS. The Survey of Federal Archives (SFA), originally Federal Project No. 4, was transferred to HRS in 1937. The SFA surveyed federal offices throughout the state resulting in the publication of eight Kentucky inventories. The American Imprints Inventory (AII) was also attached to HRS in 1937. This project began a nationwide survey of early American printed material. Two checklists of Kentucky material resulted from their work. Surveys of church, county, and state archives were the largest HRS projects. The HRS worked in each of the 120 counties, however, only nine inventories of Kentucky county records were published. No inventories of Kentucky church or state archives were published. Manuscript collections were surveyed but nothing was published.

As national defense preparedness assumed a more important role in federal agencies (1941), the HRS assumed activities related more to national defense. Guides to civilian organizations were prepared for local defense councils and the Office of Civilian Defense; guides to public vital statistics records were prepared for the Bureau of the Census; and federal buildings were surveyed for possible use as emergency storage.

The HRS was originally under the administrative direction of the Writers' Project, headed by U. R. Bell, State Director of the Federal Writers' Project. The HRS became an independent part of Federal Project No. 1, in October 1936. When funding was stopped in 1939 for WPA sponsored projects HRS was required to make arrangements for project sponsors and co-sponsors. The Library of Congress Editorial Project was set up to carry on the editorial and technical direction of the HRS and other projects previously having a federal project status.