

THE HISTORICAL RECORDS SURVEY IN JUNEAU COUNTY

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“The success of any good idea depends largely upon those who are charged with its implementation.” So wrote Edward Papenfuse in a special issue of *The American Archivist* which probed the history and accomplishments of the Historical Records Survey (HRS) of the Depression era.¹ Though Papenfuse and the other contributors examined the role of administrators in Washington and in several states, their studies ignored the hundreds of field workers upon whose shoulders the success—or lack of success—of the survey necessarily rested.

It is likely that this omission derives more from the nature of the sources than from oversight, for within the voluminous HRS records there is little substantive information concerning the work of individual employees. One notable exception, however, is a seventeen-page, single-spaced manuscript written in 1939 by Winn E. McGowan, a field worker in central Wisconsin. This report, which is now part of the Wisconsin Historical Records Survey records housed at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, was intended to supplement the many official forms McGowan submitted on his work in one county.

A former bank clerk in Friendship, Adams County, McGowan joined the Wisconsin Historical Records Survey shortly after its creation in

1936. Although the middle-aged McGowan had no advanced training in history, his selection was fortuitous, for he had a lively sense of history and his banking experience had taught him the importance of careful records practices. Obviously committed to the purposes of the HRS, McGowan went far beyond simple surveying of records to cleaning and arranging documents (significantly he saw mice as the chief enemy of old records), and advising local officials on improved procedures. But his success as a field worker required more than commitment; to accomplish his assignment he also had to be part detective, part gymnast, and part human relations expert. In addition, it was imperative that he be totally immune to all sorts of physical discomfort. By these criteria Winn McGowan was clearly a superior field worker and his report provides a vivid, personal glimpse into an important phase in the history of the archival profession.

McGowan's report on Juneau County has been considerably shortened and some editorial changes have been made to facilitate reading of his somewhat informal literary style. Major changes are noted in the text.

* * *

At last the records in the basement of the Juneau County Courthouse [in Mauston] were finished. I was not sorry. When it was first proposed that I should inventory and survey these records I had almost decided to say "No, I don't care to tackle the job." But, weighing the reasons why perhaps I should do the work, and there were some, and endeavoring to rise, as I felt it possible to do, above the reasons why perhaps I should not, and there were also some of these, I started in

The one remaining vault in the [courthouse] basement, three others having been torn out because they had proven too wet to be usable, was indeed a sight. The broken shelving was piled with hundreds of volumes of tax rolls, assessment rolls, and many heavy volumes of various natures, and . . . filing boxes filled with old cancelled vouchers This overflow of records from the upstairs offices might have been at first in order, but it had evidently been looked over, pulled to pieces, and left, until now it had lost all semblance of order or arrangement.

Again I hesitated, thinking of the attitude of the officers upstairs. [Robert R.] Jones, the foreman in charge of the work in Juneau County,

had presented the matter to them and had met with some interest and co-operation from two or three. But County Clerk [Willard E. Franke] was definitely opposed. He had spoken of a recent WPA project that had been carried on in the county offices, had called it a nuisance, and I could easily understand how it could be just that. I did not feel enthused at being told that I was welcome to work in the basement but that the work could not be continued further.

Then I went to work. The janitor, a friendly old man, . . . had no objection to my moving the contents of the vault out into the main room of the basement; he even suggested that I might like to use the table in his room by the furnace². . . . Piling scattered volumes upon the sagging shelves, I emptied the several boxes of their contents, carrying armfuls of scattered records of various kinds out of the vault and piling them in spots of comparative freedom from dirt upon the basement floor. . . .

Little would be gained by dwelling at any length upon the process of cleaning the vault; the puddles of dirty water on the floor; the moldy, smelly records in the bottom of the boxes, some of which would fall into a mass of cold, clammy pulp in my fingers; the cold, stale air that seemed to more than hint of chills, colds, pneumonia, and germs of what-not that might have lurked for years in this dismal dungeon. . . . But now, with shelving wiped clean, braced up and nailed, the floor quite clean and dry, clean boxes of the unbound stuff, and stilts of brick to keep them above the level of the next flood, the return to the vault was accomplished. . . .

And now the question was — where next? Time brings so many changes, perhaps time might bring the opportunity to continue this work without disfavor from the county officers. It might even be that, since some of the officers had become familiar with the work that had been done in the basement, . . . the day might come when the work would not be unwelcome nor regarded as a nuisance.³ In the meantime there were the towns [and villages].⁴

So, for a starting point for the work outside of the courthouse, I went first to the village clerk of Necedah, Leroy Eaton. He seemed quite interested in the proposed work and willing to co-operate. . . . When I had finished with the current records in his possession I went to the bank where I found the older records in the basement and a convenient place to work.

Next, with the thought of road and weather conditions in mind, and

the knowledge that it would require several months to cover the entire county, I headed north . . . and, after about twenty miles of travel and a bit of inquiry, arrived at the home of the town clerk of the town of Finley.

It was washday, and Mrs. Hazel Pech was right in the middle of it . . . my name I volunteered, of course, where I was from, and what I was doing. Also I mentioned the fact that I was not interested in any particular figures in her records or those of any of her predecessors, unless there might be some among them of special historic interest or perhaps some valuable statistical information. The mention of the name of the village clerk at Necedah, an acquaintance of Mrs. Pech, also of the fact that I had already completed a considerable bit of work of the same nature at the courthouse, and I was invited in to help myself to the current records . . .

Noon came and with it the completion of the small amount of current records. Were there not some more, some earlier records somewhere? Yes, in the town hall at the village of Finley, which I had passed that morning, there were many old records. "Go right in," she said, "the door is never locked . . ."

Mrs. Pech was right; there were many records in the hall—how many I did not realize until that night. Then I found that the wooden box of unbound records had possibilities that I had not appreciated. It would mean another full day's work . . . When . . . the wooden box of unbound records was finally done [the next day and I] left Finley, there seemed a great contrast between the "open door" of the little white town hall and the "thus far and no farther" of the courthouse in Mauston.

Then to the town of Armenia. I had asked Mrs. Pech the way to go to reach the home of Roy Scanlan, town clerk, and she had told me as far as she knew then left me to inquire the rest of the way. After long stretches of uninhabited road, huge drainage ditches, occasional habitations, finally a schoolhouse, I reached a neat, little, cottage home beside the road. Mrs. Scanlan and the two children came to the door. No, Mr. Scanlan was not at home. Being an employee of the Wisconsin Conservation Department, he was on duty in the firetower at Cranberry Rock which could be easily seen a mile and a half away. So, on to Cranberry Rock . . .

Resting between climbs, I waited a few minutes until visitors had made their way slowly down the long ladder leading up to the tiny

open air room at the top of the tower. Then I made the last lap of the perpendicular journey. Roy was very willing, but he had only such records at his home as were apt to be needed for daily use. Others he said, were in the town hall several miles away at New Miner. So, after taking a bird's eye view of the course ahead, I set out to find New Miner, the town hall, and the town chairman, John Novotny.

All were easily found and little explanation was necessary. Novotny had the key, and he stopped his work of filling the haymow long enough to get it and give it to me with the advice that I ask the man in the little store across the street to show me where the records were. "Though," he said, "there is nothing there."

But as it was my business to know, I opened the [storage cabinets in the hall] and found a variety of old newspapers, election notices, empty cardboard boxes and general confusion. Picking over, sorting, investigating, at last things began to appear, first several old volumes of different kinds, then a box or two of old unbound stuff. More sorting and rummaging and the day was done. A small box of unbound records has possibilities understood only by one who has been through it.

Arriving at the town hall the next morning, I found the town board in session. No one but Scanlan knew what I was doing; the others were justly curious. We discussed the work and I brought up the matter of the seeming absence of early records. . . . I was advised to ask a man living about two miles from the town hall, a Mr. Winters, who had been town clerk for many years.

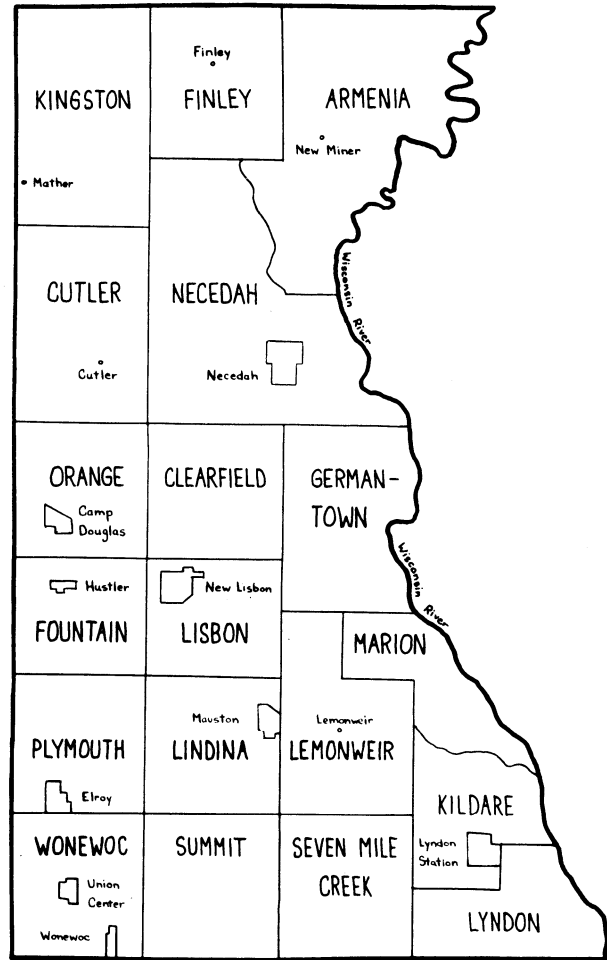
Mr. Winters was at a neighbor's farm threshing and could not leave just then. "But," he said, "if you will wait I will get those records all down from the attic tonight when I go home. We will clean them up and have them ready for you to take to the town hall in the morning, and when you have finished with them you may leave them there. I have said many times that I should like to have those records taken to the town hall where they belong, but I have just never done it. I haven't seen them for years. . . ."

When I left the little New Miner settlement the records of the town, with the exception of current records at the home of the clerk, were gathered all together, volumes neatly piled on the shelves and unbound records packed in boxes in the cupboard. . . .

[McGowan next surveyed the records in the towns of Necedah and Clearfield. In both cases he found the clerks cooperative and the records in relatively good order.]

JUNEAU COUNTY WISCONSIN

Population: 17,264; Mauston (county seat), 2,107 (1930); 511,303 acres; 2,448 farms (1935); rank among 71 Wisconsin counties: 58th in per capita wealth, 50th in per capita income (1934). Sources: Wisconsin Regional Planning Committee, *First Annual Report* (1934); *Wisconsin Blue Book*.



The town clerk [of Kingston], Mrs. Ivan Lattimer, was away from home but her father, I. N. Dewey, a merchant in the little village [of Mather] had charge of her records and willingly gave me permission to work—and a place. It was the best place he had, though I must admit that being set down at the foot of the stairs leading from the back end of the store up into the family's sleeping rooms above, and endeavoring to get records into and out of the drawers of a desk [which was] so crowded in between the wall and a full vinegar barrel that the drawers only partly opened, made the work very inconvenient and very slow. But there they were—take it or leave it. For two or three days I sat on that bottom stair, but I went away with quite a good bit of the recorded history of the town and a desire, which I hope to gratify, to learn much more that is not of record

Mr. Wargowsky [Germantown's Town clerk] seemed just as willing as clerks in other towns and with little explanation helped me to get at the things I wanted. Here it meant running his car out of the garage into the shade of an oak, for it was hot weather, and the records were mostly in a glass front cabinet in the garage. They were all mixed up—too badly mixed to separate by any but one method. Pursuing that method, I hauled out the unbound stuff and sweeping the garage floor, sorted everything into piles according to kinds Mice had, of course, shown their appreciation by using some for nests, but, as I later found, I was to witness mousework beside which this was NOTHING

Current records [were] in the house; Wargowsky brought [them] out onto the front porch where it was convenient and comfortable to work with them. Germantown has not the volume of really old records that many other towns possess. It is probable that they have been destroyed or are stowed away in some old unknown attic, but it seems that there is no clue to anything very old here. It would be interesting to make a thorough search of this town for something more.

Another town that could stand more investigation is Marion. It surely was not that I was not welcome, for when I opened the door in response to Mr. Pokorney's hearty, "come in," to find him mending a shoe, he was very friendly and readily granted access to his books. However, the outlay of records seemed very meager to me I have always had a "sneaking feeling" that there were other records, but . . . perhaps he did not wish to invite me [into the bedroom where the records were stored] or take the trouble to gather up loose stuff. Then again I may be entirely mistaken in this surmise, for Mrs. Pokorney

took the trouble to go upstairs and look around for things she thought might be found. Perhaps the records there are only so scattered that it needs something resembling a housecleaning to gather them together. . . .

Mrs. Tom Tracy [clerk of the town of Kildare] invited me in—it was early afternoon and I stated my errand. She had no objection and I was soon engaged with the usual assessment rolls and other records. It was after noon; they had had their dinner. . . but my dinner was on the table—certainly a very friendly introduction. . . .

We talked considerably about the records of Kildare. There should be more of them, but what she had were all that she knew about. But Mrs. Tracy was new to the office and it might be possible that Mrs. Weber, her predecessor, who had held the office for years, might have some old records or know where they might be found. . . .

[At Mrs. Weber's I found that she knew of no old records except those that] had been delivered to Mrs. Tracy. However, she did know of other old things. She invited me into "the den," as she calls it, a room literally filled with old things, antiques of every description, and she told me of some things she has that are of considerable interest. I expect to be in her neighborhood again within a short time and shall make it a point to stop and get information concerning these things. These will be sent in—such as possess any historical interest.

Then began a search for Mr. Plageman, clerk of the town of Cutler. A neighbor informed me that he is a carpenter and away from home most of the time. As he was expected home the following Saturday night, I made an early trip on Sunday morning. But he too had planned an early trip for Sunday morning and when I reached his home he had gone and no one knew where. Determined that this should not happen again, I started early enough the following Sunday to catch him just as he was getting out of bed. He wondered about the work, and asked some questions. As he planned to be at home the next day, I went early again and, after surveying the current records at his home, he led the way to his farm about two miles away where renters lived and where all the old records of the town are kept in a wooden cabinet on the back porch.

Mr. and Mrs. Knopp, the renters, were very friendly and helpful, and the two or three days spent there on the back porch are pleasantly remembered. Cutler has a lot of old records, and they are not in bad shape, but they could be improved by the spending of more time in sor-

ting them, putting them in order by years, and more definite filing. The Cutler records are some that I wish I might have had the chance to work with at home, as I did with some from other towns.

[Mr. Greeno, clerk of the town of Orange, was absent from home when I called but Mrs. Greeno cordially invited me to help myself to the records]. . . . The oldest records were in the cellar, others were in a cabinet in an upstairs bedroom, and the current records were in a metal safe in the room where we were sitting. We went down cellar, we went upstairs, she opened the safe and showed me where to look for anything that I wanted and told me just to go and come as I pleased. At noon I was in the basement. As usual my lunch was in the car. Mrs. Greeno came to the cellar door—"well, come on up to dinner." I explained to her that I made a practice of carrying my lunch and, as far as possible, tried to stay as far away as my work would allow at mealtime. But no normal person would long refuse her friendly and sincere invitation. Three days at this place, I think, completed the work, and she would have extended the dinner invitation each day even if I had not paid for my meals, as I was glad to do. The records here of the town of Orange are somewhat scattered as to their dates, but so far as they exist they are given care and consideration.

One may have driven many thousands of miles over level country, but he has another chapter to add to his book of experience when he heads his car toward the hills. In the process of getting acquainted with officers whose records I should later wish to see I had previously asked Mr. Peterson, New Lisbon city clerk, how best to reach the home of Duett Braund, clerk of the town of Plymouth. He directed me to the home of a farmer about three miles out of the city where I might stop and inquire the remainder of the way. "Turn to the left just this side of the cornfield down the road," the farmer said. I do not know whether or not he mentioned the hills; I wished shortly that he had. . . .

[I later found that people] who use that road had had to learn how to travel it, and that there were some who never tried to go that way. . . . I was part way up the [winding perpendicular road] when I came upon a flock of turkeys, completely filling the roadway. . . . I did a natural thing. I slackened speed, a fatal thing at that spot and started downhill backward. . . . Behind me at the right the road fell away into a deep ravine, at the left the bank rose high above me with only a narrow ditch full of boulders between. I [believe it must have been Providence that] laid the car gently over against the bank with two

wheels in the narrow ditch, blocked against a stone, and no harm done. I sat down a few minutes to appreciate that fact and be genuinely thankful and to calm my nerves. Then I walked up that hill . . . arranged with a young fellow who was working a team of big horses beside the road to pull me out [and] set off over more formidable hills on foot to find the home of Mr. Braund . . .

With my heart still pounding from the arduous uphill walk, and my nerves jumpy from the recent ride downhill, I was all set for a welcoming smile . . . But, with all respect to Braund, as yet I have been unable to discover where he keeps that smile, if indeed he has one. Certain it is he had none for me that day. He was just not interested. Whether he was suspicious (and I had wondered many times at the ease with which I had gained access to homes, basements, bedrooms, living rooms, cabinets, and safes) I do not know . . .

They had practically no records there, or so he told me. Gradually he unlimbered, and I gathered that he was a new man in the office which had been taken out of the hands of a man who had held it for many years. I had met this touchy spot before. Another young new clerk had already told me that a former, older, longtime incumbent was "funny," but when I had investigated, thinking that there might be more records to discover—and there were—I had found this older woman to be a person of very fine character and extremely interested . . . in things historical . . .

I had not been warmly welcomed, but it is not well to have things always too easy; if I should meet nothing more objectionable in all the rest of the work than Braund's apathy had been I might consider myself very fortunate. It is still my intention to visit the former clerk, Oscar Ritlin, and see if Plymouth has not some bits of records of its life worth seeking.⁶

With the thought of wind and weather always in mind, and blocked roads if they should come, I followed the plan of visiting first those town clerks whose homes or town halls were farthest from the main highway, and leaving to the last those places which could be more easily reached in case of unfavorable traveling conditions. So it was [that after surveying the records of the town of Seven Mile Creek I next travelled to Summit].

Summit—of course I knew the meaning of the word, but that it had in this case a dictionary significance had not occurred to me. But, looking at it from the angle of possible weather ahead, it seemed next

in order. So I headed out to find the home of Arthur Jannusch. There are, it seems, several ways that one might follow, but the great number of short crooked roads that traverse this extremely hilly section make the map look like the early morning tracings in a vegetable garden infested with cutworms. So, after inquiry, I decided to get there via County Trunk G. Arriving at the top of a long hill I looked off to the left and saw the goal. But between us—talk of chasms! I parked my car at the edge of a field beside the road and walked over to investigate. The road went down, no doubt of that; I could see where it emerged on its way up across the valley; I decided to walk . . . Perhaps the Jannuschs would laugh, but I thought of Plymouth and went on walking . . .

I was as welcome there as I had been in any other town, and the volumes of records were at once brought out and everything made convenient for my work. After dinner we talked of old records and he took me out to a building—a granary, yes, and a mill, both in one. Here, in a big empty bin space, stands an old metal safe and, lying on its back upon this safe, there is a large wooden cabinet containing many pigeonholes all filled with old unbound records. Certainly they can be numbered by hundreds. Here was a different, a new problem. The weather was too cold to work in the mill; the records were too dirty—though evidently only dusty dirt—to expect to take them into the house. [Since the town board was to have a meeting the next week] I proposed that [Mr. Jannusch] look over what there might be at the hall. In case they should prove to be as he thought only some old tax roll volumes, he should make a record of the years they covered. If there were other things he should bring them home . . . Then if it should prove agreeable to the town chairman, as soon as I should be working again in Mauston he should bring the records to the courthouse and I would work with them there. So when I left that day we had agreed on that procedure. So far my portion of the agreement remains unfulfilled and now it is my intention to go back within the next few days, explain the matter, and complete the survey of his records begun so many weeks ago. When I told him that I should be back at work in Mauston during the winter months, possibly in January, I did not dream of the vast amount of work and records that were yet to be uncovered in the remaining municipal units.

November found me in the town of Lemonweir at the home of the clerk, Henry Moore. Just a bit of a ways out of Mauston, reaching it.

was a simple matter, but all the towns that I had not yet visited could probably be reached in spite of wind and weather. The work with the current records at Moore's house did not require the entire day, but if I looked forward to a short session . . . , the key to the town hall, which Moore very willingly gave me, was to prove the key to a great surprise.

The town hall, a very old, red, frame building, set back a bit from the bank of the Lemonweir River, stands in an area which makes one think . . . that history must have dwelt there sometime. The village of Lemonweir . . . has long been gone, but there still remains a beautiful village site. Inside the hall, at the left of the door, were two or three boxes and cases . . . of records. Under the voting booth shelves were many volumes of old tax and assessment rolls and some other miscellaneous books. I opened the box of records beside the door; this meant using a hammer. I hope only that I have them arranged as well as when I opened the box, for this was one instance in which someone had done a thorough job of caring for old papers; they were clean and neat and very nicely arranged.

The day was nearly done when I became curious about a cabinet like affiar which stood backed up against a partition in the room . . . I investigated and made a real discovery. It could be moved, and, moving it, I exposed the other side, the face. Shall I say it smiled? . . . Viewing it from the rear, I had failed to recognize a familiar friend—the pigeon-hole cabinet.

As I pulled out the many bunches of varied records I could see work ahead for several days. I had had a fire in the box stove; by the looks of this I should have to have one for two or three days. But I could hardly feel justified in burning up their whole supply of dry wood stacked in the corner of the hall, enough for all the meetings they would hold during the next several months. So I [suggested to Moore that] I would, if entirely agreeable to him, clean out this cabinet, which contained not only old records but also old black, gummy mousenests stuck together where sooty water from the stovepipe above had leaked down and run into the cabinet. [Then I would] take the records to the courthouse at Mauston where I could find a place in the basement and work with them without being in anyone's way. When I should have it finished, I would bring them back in much better condition and arrangement

He could see no harm in such a procedure [so] I left with the intention of returning soon to carry out that plan. By the time I returned I

had determined to try a better plan. If he could trust me three miles away, perhaps he would trust me [to] take them right along home with me [to Friendship] where I could do a much better job with them from every stand point

To shorten the story, I took these records home and gave them the thorough attention and report that I wish the records might have had in every town Among them are many school and road records, hundreds of them, in fine condition and worthy of careful preservation. Some of these old school records dating back to before the Civil War would be prized by many people if they might have them.

Lindina, with records of easy access, I left until most of the other towns were done. It was late in November when the morning's travel led me to the home of Chester Carter. [He] was loading hogs to take to market but had time to listen to my story and that with some degree of favorable interest. Within a few minutes I was located at the table in the living room, he had brought out from an adjoining bedroom all the current records in his possession and had opened the stairway door and shown me where, in a cupboard at the top of the stairs, were such older records as the town possessed. At the end of the second day, . . . the records at the house were finished and as luck would have it, Carter and the other members of the town board were holding a meeting at the town hall that afternoon. So I went to the town hall [and] when it was through and the board members were at liberty I proposed a search for old records. The only possible chance seemed to lie in an old wooden box of immense proportions standing on a raised platform at the rear of the room. Most evident at the top of the box were empty cigarette packages, waste paper, and sweepings from the floor. [After dumping the box I found] mixed in with all the dirt and rubbish many old pieces of school and highway records that bore at the top the interesting inscription, "Town of Lindina, Adams County, 1855." Dirty crumpled, unappreciated, they might have been awaiting use as kindling for the stove

Two members [of the board] looked at me as if they wondered if I was demented, but I did finally arouse their interest when I showed them several very old envelopes bearing peculiar stamps. I noticed that they tore out two or three stamps, but their interest soon waned The town chairman, who had been in attendance at the meeting, took more interest in the matter and was quite in favor of the plan I suggested. So I picked everything of any value out of the dirt

and mess, packed it into a small wooden box and took it home where I might have opportunity to do it justice. A short time ago I took back to Lindina town hall a box of clean, orderly old town records, many of which any person interested in the doings of the past would hail as a real treasure. . . .⁵

Now to the town of Lyndon and to the home of James Mitchell, a few miles out of the little village of Lyndon Station. I had driven out there one day before when I visited Lyndon Station to arrange for doing the work. . . . so when I drove in this time I was not a stranger. I had the good fortune to find him just about to begin work for the day on his tax roll in a room where ample table space made the work quite convenient. A desk in the room, with drawers for holding the records, affords good protection. Dinner, of course, when the time came. One can always pay and, if he feels he ought not to offer, there are other ways. We do not pack all of life into one day nor forget those who have shown us kindness to which they were not obligated.

Next in order came the town of Lisbon. I had been at L.J. Nuttall's before, just about a mile and a half out of the city of New Lisbon. Upon the occasion of my first visit late in the fall, I had found him at work out in the field. I explained the work to him and received a response similar to that of Braund of Plymouth, but before I left he had warmed up a bit, and I felt that I should at least encounter no opposition from him. . . .

And now this cold winter morning when I drove into the yard [I met a pleasant welcome]. A small table was set up in the living room beside a comfortable stove, the current records were brought out, and I was bidden to make myself right at home. In answer to my inquiry about old records he said, "Yes, out in the granary there is a box of old records that was brought here years ago. I have never opened it and I have no idea what is in it."

We went to the granary. The box proved to be nailed to the floor in a corner near the oat bin. A crowbar loosened the box from the floor and pried off the cover. First I took out about a half bushel of old records that the mice had for years used for nests, so finely chewed as to be almost like dust.

I would advise the use of an efficient mask or respirator for the doing of such work, but there was no such thing at hand. After cleaning what remained in the box, and there were hundreds of pieces of unbound stuff still in a fair state of preservation, I took it onto the back porch

where it might be handled. The Nuttalls were very nice and advised my bringing in the very worst of it so that the most of it finally found its way to the table in the sitting room. . . . Staying with the material through the evenings and getting up with the family at any early hour, I was enabled to cover the records thoroughly in a fewer number of days than as if I had gone home. When I left, the records were assembled in cardboard boxes in the house, and a number of pieces of historic interest had a much better prospect of continued existence than when I arrived. This is a town where it is evident . . . that the same attention twenty years ago would have been time and effort very well invested. [Nevertheless, Lisbon still has a] large quantity of records worthy of care and preservation.

I learned that the records of the town of Fountain were at the home of Mr. Heath on a good road only about two miles out of New Lisbon. "Yes," he said, "it is all right with me, but my wife and I are both away from home every day, so it would not be easy to work with the records here." . . . I decided to propose the Lemonweir plan. It was perfectly agreeable to him [that I take the records] along home with me and take my own time about bringing them back. So it was that during many of the worst days of the winter I had our own porch decorated with boxes of old records from Fountain, Lemonweir, and Lindina, and found that at home I could make much faster and more thorough progress than if I had had to work in a cold town hall or in the home of a stranger.

It should, however, be mentioned here that such records should be preserved first of all from mice, for after they have nested among them for years the pungent, nauseating odor of mouse and the fine invisible dust that arises when such papers are even touched make it not only extremely unpleasant but positively dangerous to work with. I found a good, thorough application of the vacuum cleaner the most effective measure that I could use.

Heath seemed to take more than average interest [in the work]. I do not know whether his intended proposition to the town board for the purchase of enough steel cabinet space to file all the records of the town, both new and old, ever came to a head. I understand him to say that he had laid the matter before the board, and he seemed to be quite interested personally. But someone else became clerk . . . this spring and what that will mean to the preservation of the records I do not know

With the thought of getting lined up ahead of time, I wrote to the [Wonewoc] town clerk, August Brockman. His reply to my questions was very prompt, very considerate, and very thorough. . . . When I finally got there I found a welcome awaiting me from both Brockman and Lawrence Hyland, village clerk of Union Center. [Union Center and Wonewoc shared the same building as town and village hall.]

Taking with me my own supply of coal, I soon had the hall warm enough for work. It served the two communities nicely, the records of the town of Wonewoc being on the west side of the hall and those of the village of Union Center occupying the east side. I stayed one night in the little village and made a couple of return trips before the survey was finally completed and things back in better shape than when I came. . . .

For the records of the little village of Hustler I went to the home of John Bolton just on the edge of the village. An unusually pleasant young man, [he] expressed immediate willingness to help me with my work in any way that he could. He went up to his bedroom where he had told me the records were kept. . . . He very soon came down empty handed. Why couldn't I go right up to his room where the records were and work there? . . . So for one whole day and part of another I worked in Bolton's pleasant bedroom, then in the combined jail and village hall. Again it was a case of being given a key and being told where the building was—"Go in and help yourself."

Giving me a seat at one of the little tables in his restaurant, [James Finnegan, village clerk at Lyndon Station] brought out the current volumes which he kept for daily use. All the other records were at the village hall. . . . Finnegan told me that some of the board members were not so favorably inclined toward the work as he [but he] gave me the key to the hall, a bit of kindling, and his offer to assist wherever possible, and I went to work. The records here are in a glass front cabinet in the village hall which is used as well for storing the equipment of the village fire department. . . . The records are in fairly good condition and in a fair semblance of order.

Camp Douglas [City clerk], E. J. Anthony, . . . was very friendly, very courteous, and not unwilling, but he did not feel like taking the whole responsibility himself. He would rather wait until the rest of the village board might have a chance to think it over. That would mean some waiting and much extra travel so I made a proposition. Would it be satisfactory to him if I were to go to the other members, explain the

work to them and get their permission? . . . Within an hour I was back and ready to begin work. Anthony brought out all the records he had which did not include much in the way of anything old, and the one day's work covered them all. If there be any old records, their whereabouts is not known.

Finding the Wonewoc village clerk was not a difficult matter . . . He seemed very glad to show me such records as he had [at home] and in the afternoon he took me to the village hall where the earlier records are kept. Here was the best place to work that I had yet found in Juneau County—a big, clean, well-lighted room; a comfortable fire in a very clean stove; and an abundance of table space on which to assemble records and materials for work. Old records were in a little closet in the wall of the adjoining room which seemed to be used as a catch-all . . . Here it is that such old records as this little village possesses are given better than average care.

Lawrence Hyland, village clerk at Union Center had given me an introduction to the work at Elroy. That is to say, he had told me of his own friendship with B. A. Waterman, clerk of the city, and that I should find him very friendly and co-operative. Of course I did not tell this to Waterman in just these same words, but I have no doubt that my having done the work at Union Center . . . helped to ease the path to the Elroy records.

Waterman's office is in a basement room of the public library, and in a room adjoining where there are chairs, tables, newspapers and magazines for the use of the public I found an ideal opportunity to work. The city records are in a small closet off the clerk's office where they are kept clean and in good order.

New Lisbon presented difficulty, but I could not tell just what it was. I had stopped repeatedly on my way to other points and talked with the city clerk, but I just did not seem to get anywhere. He was not unwilling, but he was certainly not interested. The current records he kept at his filling station where he spent the larger part of his time. Other records, he said, were scattered in various places about the city. I offered to get them together, if he would tell me where they were, but he was always too busy, always in the midst of some big job that involved the use of the current books. I tried to pin him down and found at last that he would be willing that I should see the records if the city mayor would sanction it.

So, off to the mayor; he had no objection of his own, but he would

prefer that I wait until the matter could be brought up before a meeting of the city council. Perhaps I would come over to New Lisbon when next the council met and explain the work to them. Yes, I would, but that was yet some time away and it involved an extra trip that I should like to avoid if I could. Would it be satisfactory if I should go to the members of the council, . . . explain the work and get their approval . . . ? In the course of an hour I had interviewed the six council members and had the willing consent of every one. How simple it would have been if Peterson had told me at first why he was holding back.

The city records, reportedly so scattered, proved to be in an upper attic room at the municipal power house . . . Very willingly they put up a long ladder, the ascent of which and a long straddle through a small door [provided] access to the little unfloored cubbyhole where the records were. Old records there were—some old volumes that the city should be interested in preserving—in good condition and not badly cared for in the old cabinet where they are kept, but worthy of special care and yet their existence probably known to but few . . .

* * *

McGowan's report ends on this abrupt note. But while he did return to complete the survey in Juneau County, his story has an ironic conclusion. Shortly before completing his task, McGowan learned that officials planned to move all of the county records to a courthouse addition, thus invalidating all of his location data. On a more important level, however, his work fell victim to a futility similar to that which beset the national survey. Though McGowan was able to save some records from destruction and to improve the chances for long-term preservation of others, to this day those local government records in Juneau county are administered in an unsystematic fashion.

After leaving the Historical Records Survey McGowan continued to live in Friendship, where he worked as a clerk and insurance salesman. He died on August 4, 1973, at age eighty-eight.

FOOTNOTES

1. *The American Archivist*, 37 (April, 1974). This issue contains an excellent administrative history of the survey in Wisconsin, "The Historical Records Survey in Wisconsin: Then and Now," by Chester W. Bowie.

2. The janitor may have been the Juneau County employee most concerned with the preservation of historic records. In reply to McGowan's inquiry about the absence of early records in a particular series, the janitor commented that "the records prior to 1880 may have been sold in the course of a cleanup sale which . . . took place about five years ago and disposed of about two tons of old records" It seemed, McGowan added, that the janitor was in the hospital at the time of the sale and that he might have saved the old paper so thoughtlessly thrown away had he known that such a sale was contemplated. Wisconsin Historic Records Survey, Records of the County Clerk, Juneau County, Form for Volumes #8.
3. In his report on the County Clerk's records McGowan wrote: "It happened that the County Judge came down to ask if I had found any poll lists. This I had not, as the janitor tells me that he thinks a great number of poll lists were sold for waste paper about five years ago." He did show the judge a census of population taken in the county in 1870. The judge was very pleased to get this and said, "I wish we had had this about three months ago; it would have saved us a lot of work." Although he failed to note it in his report, McGowan also uncovered some interesting private records in the courthouses, principally the records of a store in the long-defunct lumbering camp of Werner. WHRS. Records of the County Clerk, Juneau County, Form for Volumes # 1, 18.
4. In Wisconsin the designation "town" refers not to a village or small city, but to that civil unit sometimes referred to as a township in other states.
5. Whether McGowan succeeded in surveying the Plymouth records cannot be determined, for it is one of nine Juneau County towns for which the WHRS survey forms are missing.
6. "When I return, " McGowan wrote, "I expect to stress better care for them. Possibly they might be kept at the chairman's home; perhaps they will have to go back to the town hall; in either case they are in far better condition now than before, and I may be able to induce the office in charge to give them the care they should receive." WHRS. Records of the Town Clerk, Town of Lindina, Form for Volumes #1.