

Rockefeller Support and the Growth of Public Welfare Programs in North Carolina in the 1920s

By Anna L. Krome-Lukens

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

annakl@alumni.virginia.edu

© 2011 by Anna L. Krome-Lukens

In the 1920s, North Carolina earned the moniker the “Wisconsin of the South” for its progressive social programs.¹ At the heart of its progress was a network of devoted reformers. These reformers could not have been effective without numerous public-private partnerships, which fostered the growth of North Carolina’s public welfare system. Rockefeller funds underwrote the cooperative efforts of university leaders and state officials, as well as each group’s unilateral efforts to transform the state. In the course of Rockefeller interactions with North Carolina, moreover, Rockefeller officials’ decisions shaped the boundaries and future direction of public welfare, social work, and social science research in the state and region. The records at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC)—in particular, the records of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF), and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM)—describe the evolution of the state’s welfare programs, and establish links between North Carolina’s welfare programs and national philanthropic efforts.

Foundations with ties to the Rockefeller fortunes backed multiple projects in North Carolina. By far the best known are the public health campaigns spearheaded by the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission (RSC) and the RF’s International Health Board (IHB), including efforts to combat malaria and hookworm. These public health efforts were not confined to North Carolina or the South. Indeed, they extended around the world, and North Carolina was one of the testing

grounds where Rockefeller-funded researchers experimented with techniques later used elsewhere.²

In addition to public health projects, Rockefeller money underwrote experimental public welfare initiatives and research in the social sciences. Between 1924 and 1940, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial and the Rockefeller Foundation funded five projects related to social welfare in North Carolina: the Institute for Research in Social Science (IRSS), founded in 1924; a “Four-County Demonstration” of public welfare between 1924 and 1927 that benefited both the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare and UNC’s School of Public Welfare; the state Division of Work among Negroes; a study of school attendance from 1928 to 1931; and a study of mental health from 1935 to 1937. In this report, I focus on the four-county demonstration and the projects that grew out of it.

The records of these projects, which serve as fascinating examples of public-private partnerships in the interwar period, offer a glimpse into the world of public welfare and social science. Historically, churches and private charities have provided relief to the poor. The early twentieth century was a time of great flux in social welfare systems in the United States. Although progressive-era reformers had succeeded in convincing state leaders that caring for dependent citizens—the poor, orphans, and the mentally ill, for example—was a public responsibility, most states were far from actually providing adequate social services. Progressive public officials in the years between the first and second world wars experimented with ways to increase and improve publicly financed social services. Rockefeller-funded projects in North Carolina exemplify innovative collaborations between public and private entities that ultimately produced a stronger welfare state. Together, state officials, academics at the IRSS, and philanthropic professionals at the RF and the LSRM, incubated programs suited to the South’s

demographics, economy, and culture. In the process, North Carolina became a leader in social welfare research, particularly in its efforts to address the problems of the rural South.

In 1920 North Carolina was strikingly poor. Roughly eighty percent of the state's residents lived in rural areas, and almost half the population were farmers. The per capita income in the late 1920s was \$394 compared with a Southern average of \$424, and a national average of \$703.³ Both the tax base and the government were small. Moreover, political leaders' conservative approaches to religion, labor, and race were roadblocks to social change. Although North Carolina's progressive reformers fought to expand social services, the state welfare bureaucracy had limited staff and funding. Until 1917, the Board of Public Charities employed only one person, and relied on the goodwill and charitable efforts of citizens and private groups to supplement the threadbare services it provided.

In 1917, North Carolina's welfare system was reorganized in response to pressure from a number of influential reform-minded citizens, into a "county unit" system that paved the way for further expansion. Under the new system, public relief and other welfare services were centralized in each of the state's one hundred counties, overseen by three-member volunteer county boards of public welfare. In addition, a law passed in 1919 requiring larger counties to employ a full-time county superintendent of public welfare. In other counties, the superintendent of schools was required to serve the legal function of superintendent of public welfare.⁴ The Raleigh-based staff of the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare ("the Board") had the difficult task of coordinating the work of all the counties, aiming to standardize training and procedures. Both state and county employees served a population with high rates of rural poverty. They administered funds and services including Mothers' Aid, county homes, and "outdoor relief" for poor families; facilitated access to medical care; enforced school attendance

and child labor laws; and inspected institutions for orphans, the mentally ill, and “dependent and delinquent” children and adults—all while trying to foster clients’ moral fortitude.

The 1919 law and the development of qualifications for county superintendents created a new demand for trained social workers. While local politics still governed the selection of the superintendent, state law required that the state board approve of each superintendent, giving board officials some say in minimum qualifications. The Board’s new standards, such as requiring superintendents to have “some college work” and a willingness to take a training course, reflected state officials’ belief that to achieve meaningful social change, county agents must have some professional training.⁵

North Carolina’s desire for trained social workers reflected a national trend. In the 1920s and 1930s government agencies began to require professional training in “social work.” Schools of social work sprang up to serve the swelling ranks of would-be social workers who hoped to establish their credentials. In 1919, seventeen schools of social work were affiliated with the Association of Professional Schools of Social Work (later renamed the American Association of Schools of Social Work), which served as an accrediting agency. For residents of North Carolina however, few options were readily available. Most of these schools were in the Northeast and Midwest, and only two were in the South.⁶ Moreover, the field of professional social work was born in an urban environment, and most social work training was based on urban case work. Although North Carolina had a few cities with typical urban social problems, many of its citizens lived in rural poverty. North Carolina and the rest of the rural South needed social workers trained specifically for work in rural areas. Beyond knowing the basics of case work, social workers in rural counties needed a distinct set of skills to navigate local customs and combat rural poverty. North Carolina officials argued that “to take a highly trained worker,

accustomed to city work, where adequate facilities are available to handle practically any social problem, and put him in a small town or a rural community where the worker has not only to solve the problems, but be ingenious enough to make the facilities, is exceedingly discouraging to the worker.”⁷

In 1920, the University of North Carolina (UNC) created a School of Public Welfare, stepping into the vacuum to fill this need for workers trained in solving rural social problems and demonstrating its intention to support the growth of public welfare. UNC President Harry Woodburn Chase, who was elected in June 1919, envisioned a strong social science program as part of his larger plan for the expansion of UNC.⁸ During his eleven-year tenure, Chase transformed UNC from a decent liberal arts college into a nationally recognized university.⁹

Under Chase, UNC straddled the divide between public and private. Thanks to Chase’s effective advocacy in the state’s legislative chambers, UNC’s budget increased from \$270,097 in 1918-1919 to \$1,342,974 in 1928-1929.¹⁰ Despite its reliance on the legislature’s largesse, however, under Chase’s leadership UNC vehemently maintained its right to intellectual freedom.¹¹ The University received funds from multiple private organizations for professorships, institutes, and special research projects. Although nominally a public institution, UNC had more autonomy than a purely state-funded bureaucracy.

Chase hired Howard W. Odum, his friend from graduate school, to oversee the creation of a department in sociology and a school of public welfare. A native of Georgia, Odum had completed doctoral degrees in social psychology and sociology and then returned to the South as a professor at Emory. He had seemingly endless energy and a penchant for grand plans.¹² Odum and his colleagues at UNC created a curriculum in rural social work, fashioning training from their own theoretical expertise and the experiences of North Carolina’s welfare officials.

For the first few years, UNC's School of Public Welfare was a cooperative venture between the university and the Red Cross, which needed a base for its regional summer training program.¹³ The Red Cross provided salaries for two faculty members and a staff member. Otherwise, the school drew its faculty from the department of sociology, supplementing the curriculum with guest lectures by state officials and other social welfare experts.¹⁴

The school also worked with the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare to create summer programs. Beginning in 1920, the school hosted a six-week "summer institute" for county superintendents of public welfare. Twenty-two county workers attended the first summer's institute. More county workers participated in subsequent years, especially as the duration of the program was reduced.¹⁵ In 1926, for example, ninety-eight of the state's one hundred superintendents attended a one-week institute. These summer Institutes of Public Welfare were a mainstay of the state's training program for its county workers. UNC's extension bureau also offered correspondence courses and materials for workers who could not afford the trip to Chapel Hill.¹⁶

From the beginning of his tenure in Chapel Hill, Odum fostered a community of like-minded social scientists. In the spring of 1924, Odum approached Beardsley Ruml, the director of the LSRM, with the idea of creating a new center of social science research dedicated to solving the South's problems of rural poverty and economic stagnation. The result was the IRSS, which served as a forum where an interdisciplinary team of scholars could bring their theoretical expertise to bear on the social problems of the region. Funding from the LSRM and the RF was absolutely crucial to the existence of the institute for its first two decades.¹⁷ Even with the strong support of President Chase, Odum constantly struggled to find state money for the institute. North Carolinians, including many UNC faculty, were suspicious of "sociology,"

readily equating it with “socialism” or other radicalism.¹⁸ Under Odum’s direction, the IRSS published dozens of studies and monographs, as well as the journal *Social Forces*. The IRSS brought acclaim, along with its share of controversy, to UNC, launching it as a center of social science research.¹⁹ Amy Wells, a scholar of higher education, has pointed out that the IRSS grants, and similar grants to the Universities of Virginia and Texas, “brought momentum to these state universities precisely when they need it to bolster their research efforts.”²⁰

As the man at the center of a southern network of researchers and reformers, Odum envisioned himself and his colleagues as publicly engaged intellectuals who could help chart the future course of the state and the region. In Odum’s plans, UNC’s social science program would help change social attitudes of southern leaders as well as southern commoners.²¹ Odum unquestionably saw himself as the coordinator of all these efforts. Although he worked closely with state officials and served as a consultant to the state board, he did not see himself as beholden to their desires. Odum had his own ideas about what the region needed. At the same time, he and the institute served as mediators between the public and philanthropic foundations. They brought together all parties in ways that served their disparate but mutually reinforcing needs. The LSRM and the RF were interested in promoting cutting-edge social science research, but were equipped only to provide money to other parties. North Carolina’s state welfare officials knew they had problems, but had neither the personnel nor the financial resources to experiment with solutions. Odum was the missing link. He put state officials and Rockefeller staff in touch, and he organized the academics and professionals to propose and research solutions.

In 1924, the LSRM granted money to a joint project of the School of Public Welfare and the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare that intended to prove the efficacy of employing

trained social workers. Odum described the impetus as a need for better public understanding of public welfare.²² The Four-County Demonstration, as the project came to be known, seems to have been instigated by Odum and Jesse Steiner, one of his colleagues, with the Commissioner of Public Welfare Kate Burr Johnson's approval and President Chase's support.²³

The project proposal, submitted to the LSRM in May 1924, demonstrates the potential synergy of cooperative efforts involving the LSRM, UNC, and the Board. The Board could demonstrate to the legislature and to county officials the efficacy of welfare programs: "not only will evidence be gathered for presenting to the proper authorities to show the best ways of strengthening the work, but the demonstration itself will be available for training present superintendents and their assistants and for popularizing certain aspects of the work." Indeed, the LSRM saw this "popularizing" effect as critical to advancing its mission. The LSRM hoped to foster the growth of the social sciences and professional social work training, and they knew that philanthropic organizations would have to lay the foundation for this growth. As Sydnor Walker wrote in her study of schools of social work, "One of the most important functions of the privately supported agency is to set standards for tax-supported welfare activities ... [T]he state tends to be more conservative and less flexible than private organizations in its methods." Walker explained that the state restricted its interests to the maintenance of established services, and that "private philanthropy still must point the way in meeting new situations."²⁴

For the School of Public Welfare's first four years a graduate student "was required to coordinate, in so far as possible, the field work of students with actual conditions in Orange County," where Chapel Hill was located. This plan had some shortcomings, including "lack of continuity" from year to year, "insufficient time on the part of this person whose principal objective was the pursuance of graduate studies," and "the absence of any work in the three

summer months which to a considerable extent offset any progress attained during the regular college year.”²⁵ Odum was well aware of the deficiencies of the fieldwork program, writing in the memorandum that the school, “while it has provided ample theoretic instruction and correlated work in the social sciences, must needs have some intensive field work if it is to train social workers in the larger sense of the word, and if it is contribute something of the sum total of knowledge and method in such training.”²⁶

Both Commissioner Kate Burr Johnson and Odum hoped that the demonstration would spur the state to increase its financial investment in their programs. The Board hoped “to show such results of the program put on in these counties as will be the means of stabilizing and strengthening the public welfare work generally throughout the state.”²⁷ Odum wrote to Ruml that, “The more I think of this project the more promising it seems as a clear cut piece of demonstration work invaluable to the State Department and to the School of Public Welfare, both of which give every promise of being able to absorb these things at the end of the period.”²⁸ Of course, Odum’s assurance that the state and UNC would eventually assume the cost of the program was an important part of his fundraising strategy, since the LSRM was always concerned that its pilot programs would founder after the initial grant expired.

LSRM officials were wary of working directly with a government agency, perhaps because of the IHB’s experience in funding public health projects in the south. Before Ruml agreed to present the idea to the LSRM’s Executive Committee, he pressed Johnson to elicit “an opinion as to whether the Department of Public Welfare could receive funds from an outside source for this purpose.”²⁹ Ruml and his colleagues had reason to be nervous about committing funds to a state agency, since North Carolina’s political climate in the 1920s was somewhat hostile to social welfare efforts. One scholar points out that “public welfare represented an

accretion of power by government, an extension of its tentacles into a sphere that private efforts had dominated.”³⁰ Luckily, Governor Cameron Morrison was reasonably progressive and gave the project his full endorsement: “I believe that this will be an excellent use of funds, and I understand that Dr. Rankin, Secretary of the State Board of Health, has utilized some of the funds to good advantage.”³¹ The previous Rockefeller involvement in the state clearly laid the groundwork for Governor Morrison’s ready acceptance of this scheme, as he referred to the State Department of Public Health’s existing cooperation with Rockefeller entities.

The LSRM funded the proposal in the full amount requested, granting the Board and the school \$10,000 each, for three years, totaling \$60,000. Johnson’s response to the news of the grant indicates the difficulties of the Board’s situation. She told Ruml that “This information could not have come in better time. We are having a special session of the legislature, and a bill had been introduced which would have crippled the powers of this Board. I think we had the bill defeated without a doubt, but our being able to announce this grant from the Memorial had much to do with our winning an overwhelming victory.”³²

The project began in the summer of 1924. Although the Board and the school were in theory cooperating to demonstrate public welfare work in four counties, each entity took responsibility for two counties. The school took charge of Orange and Chatham. The Board oversaw Wake, the home of the state capital, as well as Cherokee, a mountain county in the far southwest corner of the state. A staff member of the state board supervised the field of work of the students from the school who worked in all three local counties. Because the populations of Orange and Chatham were too low to require a full-time welfare superintendent, a member of the school’s staff served during the demonstration as a part-time superintendent for both counties. Although this faculty member was technically an assistant to the superintendent of schools, he

was for all practical purposes in charge of each county's welfare system, an arrangement that blurred the lines between public and private responsibilities, but was nevertheless effective.³³

The School of Public Welfare's preliminary report on its activities gives some sense of the challenges of improving North Carolina's public welfare system. Both Orange and Chatham for example, were "often referred to as 'pauper counties.'" A few cotton mills and other small factories dotted the mostly rural landscape, where farmers struggled to "make a poor living on poor soil, utilizing poor methods and poor equipment . . . Poor schools and churches, too much farm tenancy, bad roads, unrepaired and unpainted buildings—these factors add to the portrayal of a situation which is indeed distressing." Moreover, the students involved in the demonstration faced such basic problems as the complete lack of usable maps to use in their fieldwork. In what must have been a massive undertaking, the demonstration workers made their own maps. In Orange County, "the entire county was then actually covered by teams of two persons who revised the old [1919 soil survey] map and made important additions. By means of Fords equipped with speedometers, reasonably accurate measurements of distances were secured and recorded . . . True, there were many portions of the county where the lack of passable roads, or for that matter, the lack of any roads at all in some sections, made it impossible to plot the desired information." They repeated the process in Chatham, "although under greater difficulties than encountered in Orange because of the lack of any county map to begin with."³⁴

The school's leaders also concluded that at this stage in the development of public welfare, coordination with local volunteers and non-governmental organizations was absolutely necessary to reach basic levels of service and coverage. During the Demonstration, workers even created other organizations where necessary. There was no active Red Cross Chapter in Orange or Chatham to deal with veterans' cases, so one of the project staff was appointed "Home

Service Chairman of the Chapel Hill Chapter of the Red Cross,” as well as “Service Officer of the local America Legion Post.” In both counties, workers tried “to stimulate interest in general welfare work by the organization of small local groups” or “welfare committees.” These informal groups of citizens built on community traditions of church- or school-based welfare work, but the creation of new groups allowed demonstration workers to promote their own welfare goals. The school’s preliminary report on the demonstration listed as one of its major findings the importance of fostering informal local committees, especially by using schools, which were often the only county-wide organizations of any kind. In Orange, for example, workers appointed “an influential resident” in each school district “who can be consulted in regard to cases in his jurisdiction and whose aid can be secured in handling emergency situations.”³⁵ The report highlighted this call for the use of local volunteers as one of the ways case work techniques had to be modified to suit rural situations. While urban case work supervisors could afford to rely on a fully professional staff, rural welfare superintendents did not have this luxury.

Even more difficult was the situation in Cherokee County, where the Board oversaw demonstration work. Cherokee was untouched by the modernization of the New South and disconnected intellectually and geographically from Raleigh and Chapel Hill. Many roads were “impassable from November to May. Parts of the northern section are approachable during this time only on horseback or muleback. Even in summer it is often necessary to walk six or seven miles up a mountain trail to make a family visit ... Little log cabins and weathered frame cabins follow along the lines of the creeks and tiny farms are almost perpendicular on the hillsides ... Families are large and it is not uncommon to find from thirteen to eighteen children ... The little churches, chiefly Baptist, are poor and forlorn indeed; tiny, weather-beaten meeting houses

which do not furnish the barest living for their ministers, who have to eke out subsistence by little farms of their own.” Still, the Board at least stood a chance of being welcomed, since a group of residents had heard about the demonstration and asked the Board to use the county as one of its locations.³⁶

Using LSRM funds, the Board paid the salary of Miss Elizabeth Smith, a social worker who had completed an MA in Social Science at UNC. Smith managed to oversee eighty-five cases at once, although with no stenographic help, her case records were restricted to the basics. Transportation difficulties were a constant impediment to her work. In one case, she drove seventeen miles, walked ten, and found help to carry a crippled boy eight miles on a stretcher so he could see a doctor. She must have made an impression on Cherokee residents with her dedication, resourcefulness, and ability to plow fields, fix tractors, and kill rattlesnakes.³⁷

The demonstration produced some of its intended results, at least in the counties overseen by the Board. Smith’s work under the LSRM grant proved the usefulness of public welfare work to county officials, who agreed to continue the work done under the demonstration after Smith left.³⁸ In Wake County, the county assumed the financial cost of public welfare work. In addition, Walker noted that “there is evidence that the State is looking to it as a center of information upon county welfare administration. There are constant calls for information and requests that representatives should come for conferences to various parts of the state.”³⁹ The School of Public Welfare was less successful in prompting Orange and Chatham counties to absorb the expenses of welfare workers, but remained “hopeful” that they had at least laid a foundation.⁴⁰

The state board took advantage of the demonstration results to request further funding from the LSRM for projects in school attendance and social work among African Americans. In

their final report to the LSRM, Johnson and her staff signaled their desire to take on the problem of school attendance, which grew out of Elizabeth Smith's work in Cherokee County. Despite the poor conditions of roads and schools, Smith managed to increase school attendance by forty-two per cent.⁴¹ Johnson believed that Smith's innovative work in enforcing the state's compulsory school attendance law could be replicated elsewhere in the state.

In the process of deciding whether the LSRM would fund the study, LSRM officials made judgments about the boundaries of "public welfare." Johnson believed that improving school attendance "is now the greatest need in rounding out our social program," but LSRM officials questioned whether enforcement of the school attendance law was more appropriately an issue for education officials and philanthropies such as the General Education Board (GEB). Odum supported Johnson's plea, writing to Walker that, "you will recall that the assignment of this function to the State Board of Charities and Public Welfare constituted one of the distinctive features of the NC plan. It seems to me that the distinction which was made, namely that this was a matter of public welfare and not of education, was a good one."⁴² The Superintendent of Public Instruction, at the LSRM's request, threw his support behind the project as well.⁴³ Johnson's arguments, and the acquiescence of the relevant North Carolina officials, convinced Walker and Ruml that school attendance work was in fact relevant to public welfare.

The LSRM granted the Board \$11,475 for the study, to cover part of the salary and expenses of a director and a secretary. The Board agreed to furnish from state funds the remaining \$6,240 necessary.⁴⁴ Later records indicate that the school attendance project, like many of North Carolina's public welfare efforts, was fraught with difficulty. The legislature never set aside funds for the study. Moreover, as Johnson wrote to Walker, the onset of the Depression meant that, "In addition to not receiving an increase in appropriation by the last

Legislature we, along with other state departments and agencies, have had the appropriation that was given us cut from ten to fifteen percent.” Using the LSRM’s grant, the study’s single staff member collected and published statistics about school attendance in six representative counties. Despite the financial difficulties that plagued the Board during the late 1920s and early 1930s, the study provided the first comprehensive view of school attendance problems and suggested “methods to make enforcement adequate.” Although North Carolina lacked the funds to act immediately on the study’s findings, the new Commissioner of the Board, Annie Kizer Bost, justified the study in terms of its value to other states.⁴⁵

The LSRM’s funding for the Division of Work among Negroes had a more lasting effect. The first funding came as part of the four-county demonstration project, with part of the grant set aside for the salary of a black member of the state staff. The need for social services among the state’s African American population was great, and the project took off accordingly: “In the beginning it was planned that there was to be a Negro Worker who should devote his time to work among the negroes in the four chosen counties. But soon there was such a demand for his services in other counties that necessarily his field broadened to the state with the rapid growth of a new division in the State Board.” Thanks to the work of the demonstration, by 1927 the state legislature had recognized the need for increased social services for African Americans, and legislators appropriated funds for two additional staff members in the new Division of Work among Negroes.⁴⁶ In addition, by 1926 individual counties and cities began making appropriations or raising private funds for “Negro Public Welfare.” To be sure, most of these funds came from “Negroes,” presumably individual citizens or black religious and civic organizations.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the LSRM’s original grant clearly marked the beginning of a shift in the state’s attitude about social services for blacks.

Given this promising start, Johnson requested additional funds in February 1927, as the demonstration came to a close. Maintaining that North Carolina had done “pioneer work, certainly so far as the south is concerned,” she requested \$27,000 to be spread out over five years.⁴⁸ Johnson argued to Walker that “the negro work” was the Board’s most pressing concern at the moment. The LSRM continued to fund the Division of Work among Negroes as a stand-alone project until 1931, when the legislature took over financial responsibility for it. The same year, the legislature enlarged two other pieces of the Board, the Division of Mental Health and Hygiene and the Division of Institutions. All three changes increased the state’s investment in solving social problems exacerbated by the Depression. The Board’s report pointed out that “financial losses, of mental and physical suffering” had been “disproportionately shared” by African Americans. Still, state officials would doubtless have been reluctant to devote precious tax dollars to solving the problems of the state’s black citizens unless the program was already proved effective. Moreover, the investment required by the state was relatively small because of the structure of the program. The Division of Work among Negroes was mostly focused on organizing existing “social forces in Negro communities” and “the stimulating of self-help activities among Negroes.”⁴⁹ The LSRM-funded program demonstrated that even with minimum financial resources, a trained state staff could tackle social problems among blacks. In this sense, the Division’s structure was an excellent compromise between conservative legislators and more liberal reformers.

While the state Board of Charities and Public Welfare continued to receive funding from the LSRM, Odum’s quest to fund an expansion of the School of Public Welfare was not so successful. Odum made multiple plans to fund the school over a period from 1925 to 1930, none of which found favor with the LSRM or the RF. In the same period, the Tulane School of Social

Work received multiple grants from the LSRM and the RF, as did the Atlanta School of Social Work (which trained black social workers).⁵⁰ In contrast, Odum's plans were met with skepticism for multiple reasons. Odum appeared to be more interested in building the IRSS and LSRM, and the RF officials were concerned that Odum was overextending himself. According to Commissioner Kate Burr Johnson, the School of Public Welfare struggled to fulfill even its extant mission of training state superintendants of public welfare.⁵¹ In addition, Odum's dreams often exceeded the university's financial resources, and both the LSRM and the RF were reluctant to grant funds for projects that stood no chance of being absorbed by UNC or the state.⁵² The School of Public Welfare fell into this category, as the state's limited commitment to funding social work training was further crippled by huge cuts to higher education budgets between 1929 and 1933.⁵³

Without private funding, the school was slow to grow. Walker noted during a visit in 1927 that only seven students were enrolled in "the professional course."⁵⁴ In 1931, the Association of Schools of Professional Social Work asked Odum to have the school resign from membership in the Association. Walter Pettit, a member of the Association's Executive Committee, drove his point home in a letter to Odum, writing, "It seems to me that the point of the matter however, is not the interest you may have, but specifically, is North Carolina maintaining a School of Social Work at the present moment, and are there students in training there?" As Pettit made clear, Odum's plans for the school mattered less than whether he brought those plans to fruition.⁵⁵ Without the RF's help, it was not until 1937 that the school once again became "a full-fledged member of the American Association of Schools of Social Work."⁵⁶

The cooperative projects funded by the LSRM and the RF produced mixed reactions among foundation officials, who were pleased with North Carolina's efforts, but often frustrated

by the results. For the state of North Carolina, however, these projects were critical steps toward the growth of a public welfare program equipped to tackle pressing social problems. North Carolina's legislators were reluctant to fund programs whose worth had not been established. Philanthropic funding that supported public welfare demonstrations was thus critical in speeding state take-over of social service programs. In addition, the establishment of North Carolina's Division of Work among Negroes, which was a direct outgrowth of a LSRM-funded demonstration, highlights the role of private agencies in sparking real social change in the segregated South. In the process of funding exploratory public welfare efforts in North Carolina, Rockefeller officials helped to define the future shape and meaning of public welfare across the region and the nation. Through their funding decisions, they supported native Southern progressive efforts to realize a broad vision of public welfare. Although the Depression and the Civil Rights Movement later revealed the limits of this Southern progressive vision, the growth of North Carolina's public welfare system in the 1920s was nevertheless remarkable.

Editor's Note: This research report is presented here with the author's permission but should not be cited or quoted without the author's consent.

Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online is a periodic publication of the Rockefeller Archive Center. Edited by Erwin Levold, Research Reports Online is intended to foster the network of scholarship in the history of philanthropy and to highlight the diverse range of materials and subjects covered in the collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center. The reports are drawn from essays submitted by researchers who have visited the Archive Center, many of whom have received grants from the Archive Center to support their research.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.

ENDNOTES:

¹ George Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967, p. 225.

² John Ettling, *The Germ of Laziness: Rockefeller Philanthropy and Public Health in the New South*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981.

³ Guy Benton Johnson and Guion Griffis Johnson, *Research in Service to Society: The First Fifty Years of the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, pp. 30-31.

⁴ Initially, counties with a population of 25,000 or more were required to have a full-time superintendent. This population figure was later increased, presumably in response to the state's growing population.

⁵ Marjorie Bell, "A Brief Study of Social Work in Rural North Carolina." August 1, 1927, p. 7, Folder 661, Box 6, Series 3, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Archives (LSRM), Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY (RAC).

⁶ Lyda Gordon Shivers, "The Social Welfare movement in the South: A Study in Regional Culture and Social Organization." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill, 1935, pp. 207-209. The Southern School of Social Sciences and Public Service in New Orleans was the first social work training program in the South. It was formally organized in 1917, with limited course offerings. Not until 1921 was the program formally established as a one-year training program at Tulane, which later developed a Masters program with Rockefeller funding. See Nili Tannenbaum and Michael Reisch, "From Charitable Volunteers to Architects of Social Welfare: A Brief History of Social Work." Ongoing Magazine, Fall 2001, available online at: <http://www.ssw.umich.edu/ongoing/fall2001/briefhistory.html> and John A. Kayser, "The Early History of Racially Segregated, Southern Schools of Social Work Requesting or Receiving Funds from the Rockefeller Philanthropies and the Responses of Social Work Educators to Racial Discrimination." 2005, Grant-in-Aid Report to the Rockefeller Archive Center, available online at: www.rockarch.org/publications/resrep/kayser.pdf.

⁷ *Biennial Report of the North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1920-1922*. Raleigh, North Carolina: The Board, 1922, p. 15.

⁸ Louis Round Wilson, "Harry Woodburn Chase." In William Stevens Powell, editor, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* 1. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979; Johnson and Johnson, *Research in Service to Society*, pp.10-13.

⁹ In 1922, thanks partly to Chase's work, UNC was accepted as a member of the Association of American Universities. Louis Round Wilson, *Harry Woodburn Chase*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960, p. 6.

¹⁰ These figures, given by Louis Round Wilson, probably include either state appropriations for the physical plant or outside funding such as that obtained from the Rockefeller Foundation (RF). See Wilson, *Harry Woodburn Chase*; and Wilson, *Historical Sketches*. Durham, North Carolina: Moore Publishing Company, 1976, p. 40. Elsewhere, Wilson gives the following figures: "The annual appropriation for maintenance for 1919-1920 was \$215,000. It rose to \$880,000 in 1928-29, and then declined to \$848,100 in 1929-30." Wilson also lists the state appropriations for expansion of the physical plant as \$5,424,000 for the period of 1921 through 1930-1931. Wilson, *The University of North Carolina, 1900-1930: The Making of a Modern University*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957, pp. 591-592.

¹¹ The most notable examples of UNC's determination to maintain its independence were the controversies over evolution (1925-1927) and the textile industry (1925-1928); see Johnson and Johnson, *Research in Service to Society*, pp. 35-36 and pp. 200-215 for an explanation of these events; see also Chase, *The University of North Carolina, 1900-1930*, pp. 511-526.

-
- ¹² For wonderful descriptions of Odum, see Johnson and Johnson, *Research in Service to Society*, especially pp. 3-27.
- ¹³ Wayne D. Brazil, *Howard W. Odum: The Building Years*. New York: Garland, 1988, pp. 346-350.
- ¹⁴ Johnson and Johnson, *Research in Service to Society*, p. 14; Brazil, *Howard W. Odum*, pp. 352-353, and p. 360.
- ¹⁵ Brazil, *Howard W. Odum*, p. 352.
- ¹⁶ Bell, "Social Work in Rural North Carolina," p. 10.
- ¹⁷ For each fiscal year of Odum's tenure as director, the Institute received more of its funds from foundations than from UNC. Between 1924 and 1940 the Institute received a total of \$502,500 in Rockefeller funds. It was not until 1929 that UNC made a regular budget appropriation to the Institute, and then it was only \$4,500. Johnson and Johnson, *Research in Service to Society*, p. 105.
- ¹⁸ Branson to John Sprunt Hill, September 9, 1919, Branson Papers, UNC, quoted in Brazil, *Howard W. Odum*, p. 369. Also see *ibid.*, p. 357.
- ¹⁹ The biggest controversy involved the Institute's research into conditions in North Carolina's textile industry.
- ²⁰ Amy E. Wells, "Considering Her Influence: Sydnor H. Walker and Rockefeller Support for Social Work, Social Scientists, and Universities in the South." In Andrea Walton, editor, *Women and Philanthropy in Education*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, p. 136.
- ²¹ Brazil, *Howard W. Odum*, p. 355.
- ²² Howard Odum, *Systems of Public Welfare*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1925, p. 210.
- ²³ Odum to Ruml, May 15, 1924, Folder 786, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ²⁴ Sydnor H. Walker, *Social Work and the Training of Social Workers*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1928, pp. 43-44, and p. 178. Amy Wells cites some of these passages and makes similar arguments in her excellent biographical article on Sydnor H. Walker, "Considering Her Influence;" see especially p. 133.
- ²⁵ "Preliminary Report of County Demonstrations of Public Welfare Conducted Jointly by the North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare and the School of Public Welfare of the University of North Carolina, July 1924 to January 1927," no date, pp. 13-14, Folder 787, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ²⁶ Memorandum, "A Four-County Demonstration in Public Welfare," (May, 1924), Folder 786, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ²⁷ Copy of Resolutions of the Board, enclosed in Colonel William A. Blair to Beardsley Ruml, Sept 9, 1924, Folder 786, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ²⁸ Odum to Ruml, May 15, 1924, Folder 786, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ²⁹ Ruml to Odum, May 15, 1924, Folder 786, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ³⁰ Brazil, *Howard W. Odum*, pp. 358-359, and p. 369.
- ³¹ Governor Cameron Morrison to Johnson, July 16, 1924, Folder 786, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC. Despite his opposition to women's suffrage, his mobilization of white supremacist politics, and his identification with the conservative wing of the Democratic Party, once in office, Governor Morrison promoted several measures important to business progressives, including a modern highway system and increased funding for education. Nathaniel F. Magruder, "Morrison, Cameron." In William S. Powell, editor, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* 4. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991, pp. 328-330.
- ³² Johnson to Ruml, August 20, 1924, LSRM, Folder 786.
- ³³ "Preliminary Report of County Demonstrations," p. 2, and p. 15.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10, and p. 18.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27, p. 44, p. 52, and p. 57.
- ³⁶ Bell, "Social Work in Rural North Carolina," pp. 20-21, and p. 23.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-26.

-
- ³⁸ Memorandum of interview, Walker with Johnson, November 8, 1927, Raleigh, Folder 1076, Box 106, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ³⁹ Memorandum of interview with Sydnor H. Walker and Lieutenant Oxley, with Mrs. Johnson, Miss Mitchell, Lieutenant Oxley, and Raleigh, March 7 1927, subject: North Carolina State Department Public Welfare, Folder 787, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁴⁰ "Preliminary Report of County Demonstrations," p. 30, and pp. 54-55.
- ⁴¹ Johnson to Ruml, January 4, 1928, Folder 1076, Box 106, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁴² Odum to Walker, January 16, 1928, and Odum to Walker, January 18, 1928, Folder 1076, Box 106, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁴³ Walker to Johnson, January 20, 1928; Johnson to Walker, January 23, 1928; and A. T. Allen to Walker, January 23, 1928, all in Folder 1076, Box 106, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁴⁴ "Proposed Funding of Program," (January 1928) and Ruml to Johnson, February 14, 1928, Folder 1076, Box 106, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁴⁵ Bost to Ruml, July 24, 1931, Folder 1076, Box 106, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁴⁶ Final Report of the Board on Demonstration under Grant, enclosed with Johnson to Ruml, September 20, 1927, Folder 787, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁴⁷ Odum to Leonard Outhwaite, May 22, 1926, Folder 786, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁴⁸ Johnson to Ruml, February 18, 1927; and memorandum of interview with Walker and Oxley, with Mrs. Johnson, Miss Mitchell, Lieutenant Oxley, Raleigh, March 7 1927, subject: North Carolina State Department of Public Welfare, Folder 787, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁴⁹ *Biennial Report of the North Carolina State Board of Charities and Public Welfare, 1930-1932*. Raleigh, North Carolina: The Board, 1932, p. 10, and pp. 96-97.
- ⁵⁰ See Kayser, "Southern Schools of Social Work."
- ⁵¹ See correspondence among Johnson, Odum, and Walker in 1927 and 1928, Folder 787, Box 75, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁵² Amy Wells points out that part of Sydnor H. Walker's role as a grant official was "reining in the enthusiastic academic when he sought additional funding" for dreams that were "bigger than the university's ability to support them." Wells, "Considering Her Influence," p. 138.
- ⁵³ Between 1929 and 1933, the state's higher education budget was cut by fifty-five percent; see "Frank Porter Graham," part of the "University in Crisis" section of the "Carolina Story," available online at: <http://museum.unc.edu/exhibits/crisis/frank-porter-graham-1886-1972-2> See also Wells, "Considering Her Influence," p. 140.
- ⁵⁴ Memorandum of interview, Beardsley Ruml and Sydnor H. Walker with Odum, subject Walker, November 7-11, 1927, Folder 785, Box 74, Series 3, LSRM, RAC.
- ⁵⁵ Walter W. Pettit to Odum, February 20, 1931; Pettit to Odum, March 5, 1931; Odum to Pettit, March 18, 1931; and Odum to Walker, March 22, 1931, Folder 146, Box 12, Series 236S, RG 1.1, RF, RAC.
- ⁵⁶ Odum to Walker, October 27, 1937, Folder 130, Box 11, Series 236S, RG 1.1, RF, RAC.