

# Manuscript Collections:

## The Papers of Edward Thomas Devine at The University of Wyoming

David Crosson

*In the interest of encouraging the research and writing of Iowa history, The Annals is inaugurating a series of short articles describing several manuscript collections, and their repositories, that pertain to Iowa and the Midwest. The major repositories in the state are The University of Iowa, Iowa State University, the University of Northern Iowa, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, and the Iowa State Historical Department (Division of the State Historical Society, and Division of Historical Museum and Archives). Among the lesser-known repositories in the state are the Putnam Museum in Davenport, the Sioux City Public Museum, and the Waterloo Museum of History and Science. There are, in addition, manuscript collections repositied in archives outside the state.*

*Rich lodes of source material are waiting to be mined; exposure in this journal may lead to articles, monographs, and books. Each short article will outline the contents of a collection, evaluate its significance, and suggest possible uses.*

*Thanks are due to David Crosson for inspiring this series, and for serving as coordinator and editor.*

—J.G.

Can a country boy from Union, Iowa find fame and success in the swarming metropolis of New York and be happy, too? For Edward Thomas Devine, one of the founders of modern American social work who helped establish the Red Cross program of national disaster relief, the answer was a resounding "yes." His career, from the pristine prairies of Iowa, to directing public philanthropy and relief in New York City and around the world, is a prototype of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century success. The five document boxes of manuscripts, journals, publications, and correspondence of Edward T. Devine are available for research in the Archive of Contemporary History at the University of Wyoming in Laramie.

Edward Thomas Devine was general secretary of the New York Charity Organization Society from 1896 to 1917, founder and director of the New York School of Philanthropy, Schiff Professor of Social Economy at Columbia University, and author of fifteen books and innumerable articles on social welfare and economics. In 1906 he helped the American Red Cross initiate and administer its first national program of relief for the victims of the San Francisco earthquake. He again served as agent for the Red Cross, directing relief to Dayton, Ohio, after the 1913 flood, and he directed international relief to German prisoners of war being held in Russia in World War I.

University of Wyoming archivists have called Devine "one of the most important figures in the development of modern American philanthropy and social service." The Devine manuscripts collection contains thirteen of his fifteen books; thirty-one articles and reprints; four scrapbooks on his work, university career, speaking engagements, and lecture tours; thirty-one reprints, articles, and miscellaneous publications; and thirteen personal manuscript journals. The journals are actually diaries of Devine's trips to Germany in 1910-11, Russia in 1916 and 1923, Italy in 1917, France in 1918, and undated trips to England and France.

In addition, the collection contains file folders with the following headings: Coal, Red Cross, National Tuberculosis Association, Dayton Flood, National Conference of Social

Work, Al Smith for President, Papers and Articles, Federal Council of Churches, Bellevue-Yorkville Health Demonstration, Clippings, Personal, and Seventieth Birthday and Retirement. As a composite, these files, along with the scrapbooks, publications, and journals, provide a biographical history of an Iowan that had a significant impact on the development and direction of public and private philanthropy in the United States.

Edward Thomas Devine was born in Union, Iowa, in 1867 and graduated from Cornell College twenty years later. He received a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School in 1893, lectured at Oxford University in 1892 and 1894, and studied at the University of Halle in 1889-90. From 1896 through 1912 he was general secretary of the New York Charity Organization Society, and he served as secretary until 1917. At the same time, from 1905 through 1919, Devine was Schiff Professor of Social Economy at Columbia University, and he was a founder of the New York School of Philanthropy and a director from 1904 to 1907 and again from 1912 through 1917. In 1906 he was president of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections.

During this period he developed very definite and very modern opinions about social welfare. "Unscientific charity," he wrote, "is clearly absurd and as indefensible as unscientific medicine." He was thoroughly convinced of the necessity of national and permanent organizations for disaster relief. Through his work, lectures, writings, and teaching he developed and encouraged the establishment of modern charity and welfare organizations similar to the Community Chest and United Way.

Some of his suggestions were farsighted predictions of future public concerns. For instance, he argued for legislation to severely punish industries, residences, and businesses that polluted the air more than thirty years before air quality legislation became federal law. In another statement in 1900, Devine voiced his concern with one of the unfortunate side-effects of welfare, a difficulty that remains unsolved today. "The family is the ultimate unit of our social organization," he warned. "The breaking up of a family by any outside

agency is justified only when it is merely the outward expression of a destruction which has already taken place."

After the disastrous earthquake in San Francisco in 1906, the American Red Cross chose Dr. Devine to direct its national relief efforts, the first such nation-wide undertaking attempted by that organization. He stoutly defended the local administration of relief funds and was universally commended for his honest and efficient administration. Again, in 1913, he undertook the direction of a similar relief program after a flood in Dayton, Ohio.

In 1916, with the assistance of the American Red Cross and upon the request of both the German and Russian governments, Devine was appointed special assistant to the American Embassy in Petrograd to arrange for the relief of German war prisoners in Russia. In this unique situation, the expenses of the entire expedition were paid by the German government and administered by the American Red Cross, but Devine was officially employed by the U.S. Department of State. It was an extremely delicate diplomatic mission, the success of which was at least comparable to the more publicized efforts of Herbert Hoover in Belgium.

The Devine collection at The University of Wyoming contains eight personal journals that record his Russian experiences of 1916 and a return trip in 1923. It is interesting that even in Russia, nearly thirty years after he left Iowa, Devine still remembered childhood experiences from the Hawkeye State in comparison with what he saw abroad. "Returning to the churches," he wrote in Moscow, "I was most struck by the informality of the proceedings—reminded me . . . of a district singing school in Iowa."

Partly because of his success in Russia, Devine was appointed chief of the Bureau of Refugees and Relief for the American Red Cross in Paris in 1917. His journals contain entries on these efforts and the further activities of the Red Cross in Italy during the same period. These journals provide insights into Devine as a person and administrator and the Red Cross in the pioneering days of international relief.

Devine had come a long way from the Iowa farmlands. He returned from the war to continue editing *The Survey*, which

he founded in 1897 and from which he retired in 1921. From 1919 through 1928 he crossed the country from conference to conference as an independent lecturer, and in 1922 he was appointed to the U.S. Coal Commission to study that troubled industry. Devine was appointed Dean of the Graduate School of American University in Washington, D.C., and served until his espousal of the presidential candidacy of Al Smith in 1938 was received with less than wild enthusiasm by the administration of that very "dry" Methodist school. He then served as the director of the Bellvue-Yorkville Health Demonstration in New York for a year, was chairman of the social ideals committee of the Federal Council of Churches from 1928 through 1932, served as Executive director of the Housing Association of New York City from 1930 through 1931, and finally retired in 1935 after acting for four years as Executive Director of the Nassau County Emergency Work Bureau. He died a decade later in 1947.

The papers of Edward Thomas Devine suggest several possible uses. First, and most obviously, Devine, himself, deserves a full-scale biography, which would actually be a history of the development of a social welfare "profession" in the first three decades of the twentieth century. The Devine papers could also be used profitably in any study of the development of Red Cross national and international relief efforts. The urbanist could examine the Devine collection for insights on city housing, planning, development, and living conditions at the turn of the century. And, finally, Devine's Russian, French, and Italian journals of 1916 through 1918 are indispensable to the diplomatic historian who is interested in the problems of international relief during World War I, particularly German-Russian cooperation in aiding war prisoners.

How much of Edward Thomas Devine's broad humanitarian outlook can be traced to his Iowa childhood and religious upbringing is open to conjecture, but there can certainly be no question that he was one of the state's most successful and, in his field, most influential native sons. The man and his career deserve further study.

*For more information concerning the collection or its availability, write: The University of Wyoming, Archive of Contemporary History, Box 3334, University Station, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.*

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