

## Federal Project 1047

Officially our organization for work on the Upper Iowa goes into the records as Federal Project 1047, Iowa State Planning Board Project 9, Historic and Scenic Features. Board committee: Arthur E. Rapp, Council Bluffs, Chairman; Mrs. Grace Gilbert King, West Union; Mrs. H. S. Vincent, Fort Dodge. "Collection and assembling all available information on the historic and scenic resources of the state with a view toward preservation and restoration and proper use by the people. This also includes supervision of certain unskilled work in excavating ancient village sites and Indian mounds now threatened with destruction." Personnel of 1047: Supervisor, Charles R. Keyes, Mt. Vernon; Assistant Supervisor, Ellison Orr, Waukon; Field Worker, Fred Orr, Waukon; Field Worker, Harrison Toney, Waukon. In addition to these directors, Iowa Project 9 has an imposing list of technical advisers. And besides Federal Project 1047, there were at the end of August twenty-four other projects and sub-projects in actual operation under the Iowa State Planning Board, Professor P. H. Elwood, Ames, Director-Consultant. With



all its complex organization, the Iowa State Planning Board is but a part of the organization for District 7, under the National Planning Board.

During Iowa's hottest recorded summer we toiled steadily day after day on the terraces of the Upper Iowa. Our labors were very real. No running of a trench ever carried us beneath the trees. Those terraces are and have always been prairie remnants, treeless therefore, uplifted to the direct rays of the sun, exposed to relentless heat. Fortunately our Project started in early June and we gradually worked into it. By the end of the first month, when the worst began, we had become a hard-boiled lot. Rain or shine, no work day was ever missed, nor, when those record days of July and August were upon us, was a limp figure ever carried from our trenches to the shade. Weary and sweat-stained when the day's work was done, some one always had enough life left to shout: "Well, boys, we didn't get much done to-day, but we'll give 'er hell tomorrow." This was a way they had of showing how well they liked their job.

Every Saturday night the County Relief Engineer of Allamakee County, Mr. Lloyd D. Walter, had ready for us the work sheet for the following week. Such and such men were to be available on Monday, others on Tuesday, and



so on through a work week of six days of eight hours each. No one man ever got more than three days of work in a single week, generally not over two, sometimes only one. Their compensation was fixed at thirty cents an hour. Such an arrangement quite naturally raised doubts as to whether anything like an efficient working force, with a spirit of solidarity and enthusiasm, could possibly be evolved.

Our doubts were not allayed when, in that first week, we picked up our first assignments of human material. Two or three of the men were obviously past their days of most efficient labor; one was known to be well along in his seventies; one was a gassed world war soldier, rather short of breath; one wore numerous straps and braces to keep himself upright after an attack of infantile paralysis; others had ailments that would have caused their rejection from any contract job before their first day was done. And these men were expected to put in an eight-hour day moving earth with hand shovels! In asides to each other, Mr. Orr and I were inclined at first to question the good judgment and fairness of the Relief Engineer.

It is a pleasure to record here that our misgivings concerning the personnel assigned us were unfounded and that Mr. Walter not only did



well by us initially but continued through the whole summer to supply us with a usable and effective force. Some of the men had used shovels all their lives, on railroads or in sand-pits, and had lost nothing of their technique. Nearly all were willing to learn and nearly all were strictly honest. On work such as ours this last quality was a prime consideration. Any man's shovel might at any time uncover an object of interest and value, and it was important that the supervisors should know of this find at once and that it should not slip into some workman's pocket. It was important then that our men should also train their eyesight. Most of them learned to recognize the objects that called for scrutiny or preservation. They learned because they got interested in their work.

Gradually, as our men became adjusted to the kind of work for which they were best fitted, and as they came more and more to appreciate the meaning and method of archaeological procedure, our organization grew steadily in efficiency and took on real esprit de corps. The spirits of the men rose and fell according to what they considered the success of our labors. During the entire summer only four men were assigned to us who were confirmed shirkers and withal so foul of mouth that the other men, not particularly squeamish themselves, resented their presence.



Word sent in to the Relief Engineer resulted in the disappearance of the four names from the work sheets — after one of the four, in addition to being a non-worker, had proved to be light-fingered. These four were all young fellows, strange to say — or isn't it?

As we settled into our work, we found the organization that produced the best results. Fred Orr, long experienced as an engineer and foreman in telephone construction work, took direct charge of the men who did the primary excavating; that is to say, the heavy work of opening up the trenches. It was his duty also to watch the vertical walls of his trenches and to clear frequent horizontal cross sections, so as to note any changes of color or texture that might indicate approach to a feature that demanded a special technique. As the trenches sometimes reached a depth of six to eight feet, only the seasoned and physically most competent men could be used. A shovel with a five-foot handle was their effective digging tool. As all trenches were finally refilled, black earth on top, and then smoothed over (most of our work was done in cultivated fields, and it was desirable to keep the payment for damages to a minimum), the men less competent on account of any infirmity were used in making refills or in handling the lighter hand sieves.



Ellison Orr and I planned, of course, the various points and methods of attack and were on hand to read, if possible, any story that might be hidden beneath the surface of mound or village site. We uncovered, with small hand trowels or brushes of various sizes, any features that needed to be studied as they lay: strange arrangements of limestone flags; the motley contents of a refuse pit, consisting of potsherds (they might possibly fit together to form a whole pot), bones of various animals; whole and broken implements; possibly a human burial, with or without accompanying objects; a deposit of flint implements, without any apparent associations. We made our notes; we took photographs; we preserved such specimens as were needed to back up the permanent records; we debated the problems presented by our finds in an effort to arrive at a reasonable interpretation. Mr. Orr alone was competent to make the necessary surveys. He ran levels on all the sites where we worked and tied up with the government surveys all the trenches that we opened.

Our all-round pepster should also be given his due, the man with the perfect memory for every good joke he ever heard, the man with the hearty laugh and the capacity for turning every situation into real good fun. Harrison Toney was worth keeping around just as a reviver of spirits, though



in addition to this he was the careful driver of one of our two cars and an equally careful excavator after delivering his passengers and unloading the jingling tools from the trailer.

Numerically our organization was never a large one: it could hardly have been so in our type of work and still have been efficient. Ordinarily we picked up three or four men at the city hall; occasionally we had as many as six or seven; a few times only, through error or some unexpected happening, we got down to one. July 5th was a rather bad day. One of the "boys" got gloriously drunk on the Fourth and was unable to appear — rather sheepishly — until the sixth. We forgave him. He was a good workman all summer, with only this one lapse. As the men assigned us were in addition to the four regulars, we had thus a working force that was never under five men and never over eleven. During the summer we moved a total of about four thousand cubic yards of earth, all with hand tools, and slightly over one hundred of these were put through small sieves with a half-inch mesh. We are quite willing to have these figures analysed by those who understand this type of excavation. And they may remember, or not, that our work was done in the summer of 1934.

CHARLES REUBEN KEYES