HUAC Investigates North Carolina: How Federal Documents Can Help Uncover State and Local History

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Federal Documents in State/Local History

• Often overlooked as a potential source

• Perceived lack of relevance

• Lack of familiarity/esoteric quality

• Intimidation factor
Federal Documents in State/Local History (cont.)

- House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigations related to North Carolina offer a case study in how federal docs might be relevant to state/local history
House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

Source: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/hec.25582/
House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

• Created as a special committee to investigate Nazi propaganda in 1934-5
• Re-established in 1938; continued through 1944
• Became a permanent standing committee from 1945-1968
• Name changed to House Internal Security Committee in 1969
• Disbanded in 1975
House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)

- The committee actually met twice in NC
  - Asheville, May 1934
  - Charlotte, March 1956

- A number of other HUAC investigations touched on North Carolina

- On several occasions, HUAC’s activities impacted political developments in NC
Fascism in the Mountains: William Dudley Pelley and the Silver Legion of America

W.D. Pelley and the Silver Legion of America

- Founded in Asheville in January, 1933 by Pelley
- Known as the “Silver Shirts”
- Radical paramilitary organization
- Reached peak strength of 15,000 in 1934-35
- Anti-Semitic and Anti-Black
- One of the largest and most radical of the 1930s domestic fascist groups
The Special Committee Comes to Asheville

- Rise of the Silver Shirts helped spawn the “Brown Scare”
- Led to creation of Special Committee (1934)
- A subcommittee of HUAC came to Asheville in May, 1934 and held two days of hearings
- 1935: Conviction for financial fraud
- 1939: Buncombe County issues arrest warrant for Pelley
1939 wanted poster for W.D. Pelley. Source: This Day in North Carolina History blog
(https://nchistorytoday.wordpress.com/2013/07/30/asheville-fascist-and-presidential-candidate-william-dudley-pelley/)
End of the Silver Shirts

- February 7, 1940: Pelley testified before HUAC:
  “Mr. Voorhis, I have here a book with 82 attestments by leading spokesmen of the Jewish people in the United States that say they are out to subvert our American Government through what I call the predatory priestcraft.”

- Investigation of Un-American Propaganda Activities in the United States, v. 12, 1940, p. 7218
End of the Silver Shirts

• Pelley leaves Asheville and disbands Silver Shirts soon after

• Imprisoned from 1942-1950 for sedition

• Refrained from political activism until his death in 1965
Silver Shirt Sources


  - Los Angeles hearings contain testimony on Silver Shirts in So. Cal.
Silver Shirt Sources

  
  – Pelley’s testimony is in v. 12, pgs. 7201-7333.
  
  – The Silver Legion is also discussed extensively in V. 6.
Communism in North Carolina: 1929-1960

Source: NCPedia (http://ncpedia.org/scales-trial)
Communism in North Carolina: 1929-1960

- Always a small faction
- Centered in Triad and Triangle
- Focus on union organizing (tobacco and textile)
- Also strong at UNC-Chapel Hill
- Peak of popularity in late 1940s (250 members in 1947)
Communism in North Carolina: 1929-1960 (cont.)

• 1929: Gastonia textile workers’ strike

• 1948: Progressive Party campaign

• FTA Local 22 in Winston-Salem

• Junius Scales: 1947-1956

• Declined in late 1950s
HUAC and NC Communism

• NC did not have its own “Un-American Activities” committee

• Shreve-Regan bill (1949 & 1951)

• Fred Beal testified before Special Committee: 1939

• HUAC came to Charlotte in March, 1956 for three days of hearings

• 1958 Atlanta hearings
HUAC and NC Communism: Sources


HUAC and NC Communism: Sources (cont.)


- Contains the testimony of Fred Beal, a disillusioned former communist who had been involved in the CPUSA’s campaign to organize the 1929 Gastonia, NC textile workers’ strike. Beal’s testimony can be found from pages 6006-6042.
The Spy who Ran for Governor

• In 1948, Mary Wolfe Price (1909-1980), became North Carolina’s first female gubernatorial candidate (Progressive Party)

• Worked in Washington, DC for Walter Lippmann from 1939-43

• Returned to NC in 1946

• Organized NC chapter of Southern Conference for Human Welfare

• Led Progressive Party third party effort in NC in 1948
The Spy who Ran for Governor

- On July 30, 1948, Elizabeth Bentley testified before a Senate subcommittee that Price was part of a communist espionage network, and repeated the allegations before HUAC.

- Price accepted the PP nomination for governor in late August.

- Price denied the charges, but they did hurt her candidacy and that of the Progressive Party.

- By the 1970s, the charges were regarded as McCarthyite smears.
“That’s my memory of it and I fell sure that’s right, because I know that my reaction was that this was a putup job to discredit the Progressive party, when the reporters came to see me in the office in Greensboro, my to my surprise, to tell me about this Elizabeth Bentley before the House Un-American Committee in Washington. She had said that she was an agent of the Soviet Union and she had been assisted by me. She got much publicity, you know. “

• (Documenting the American South: Interview with Mary Price Adamson, April 19, 1976, p. 122)
VENONA Revelations

• 2,900 NKVD cables intercepted and decoded by Army SIS during the 1940s, declassified in 1995

• Supplemented by Vassiliev notebooks

• Helped answer lingering questions about Soviet/CPUSA espionage
VENONA Revelations

• Revealed that Bentley was telling the truth, and that Price had been a Soviet spy (code name: “Dir”) from 1941-1944

• Supplied information from Lippmann’s files to NKVD

• Mildred Price also worked for NKVD

• Ran several other agents, notably Duncan Lee (“Koch”)

• Transferred to political work by 1945
From: New York
To: Moscow
No: 868

8 June 1943

To VIKTOR[i].

[1 group unrecovered] the "IMPERIALIST"[iii] and will go for several months to the "COUNTRYSIDEDEREVNYa"[iv] to her brother, who is the representative there of the ship-building firm KAISER[v], with[b] ^

[ 28 groups unrecoverable ]

she is there

It is intended to use "DIR's" trip for passing on mail to "NORA"[vi]. DIR Will

[ 47 groups unrecoverable ]

No. 478

MAKSIM[vii]

Reference No. 2164[a]

[ 41 groups unrecoverable]

T.N.: [a] Not available.

[b] or "from".

Comments:

[i] VIKTOR: Lt. Gen. P.M. FITIN.

[ii] DIR: Mary Wolfe PRICE, secretary of Walter LIPPMANN at this time.

[iii] IMPERIALIST: Walter LIPPMANN.

[iv] COUNTRYSIDE: MEXICO.
REFERENCES TO THE WORK OF "MAYOR"

Item 2

REISSUE

From: NEW YORK
To: MOSCOW
No.: 1065 29 July 1944

To VIKTOR

[Your no.][a] 3028. Some weeks ago GOOD GIRL [UMNITsA][ii] told MAYOR[MER][iii] that HELMSMAN[RULEVOJ][iv] as a result of a conversation with DIR[y] had apparently decided that DIR must be withdrawn completely from our work in order to employ her fully on FELLOW-COUNTRYMANLY [ZEMLYaCHESKI][iv] work. In HELMSMAN's opinion DIR's nerves have been badly shaken and her health is poor, which renders her unsuitable for our work. In MAYOR's opinion it is possible to get H. [R.][vii] to change his opinion about the advisability of this decision which MAYOR suspects was made under pressure from GOOD GIRL, who for some reason dislikes DIR. MAYOR has informed G. [U.][vill] that if DIR is really ill she will need rather to be withdrawn for a rest, but afterwards be used on liaison [with][a] a conspirative apartment etc. She has been working for a long time and has acquired considerable experience. MAYOR proposes that she should not be employed on active FELLOW-COUNTRYMANLY[vi] work. Telegraph your opinion.

No. 596

[Continued overleaf]

Distribution
“Dir met K. through her sister, Mildred, in the spring of 1942 and recruited him for secret work, ostensibly for the fellowcountryman organization (CPUSA). At the same time, D. began an intimate relationship with K., which she did not tell us about until very recently...In the fall of 1943, D. refused to work with K. As it later turned out, the reason for this was that K’s wife had found out about K and D’s intimate relationship and had had fits of jealousy in front of the latter. Although D. broke off her connection with K. on our line, she continues to have a personal relationship with him...According to D, she is in love with K. and has not lost hope that she will marry him when the latter divorces his wife.”

- NKVD report from Elizabeth Bentley, November 2, 1944. From Vassiliev White Notebook #3, pgs. 104-5
The Spy who Ran for Governor: Sources


  - Bentley’s main testimony against Price is on pgs. 25-27 of Export Policy and Loyalty.
National Security Agency: VENONA
https://www.nsa.gov/news-features/declassified-documents/venona/

Federal Bureau of Investigation: VENONA
http://vault.fbi.gov/Venona

Cold War International History Project: Venona Project and Vassiliev Notebooks Index and Concordance
http://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/venona-project
1965: HUAC vs. the “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

KKK rally in Greenville, NC, October 1965. Source: Daily Reflector Image Collection (http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/3690)
1965: HUAC Investigates the Klan

• In October, 1965, HUAC opened a series of hearings on the Klan

• Investigation revealed that NC had more chapters (“Klaverns”) of the United Klans of America (UKA) than any other state (112)

• Seven in Pitt County alone
The "Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association"
The “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

- Cover name for the Greenville Klavern of the UKA
- Also known as the “Benevolent Association”
- Greenville, NC, resident and former Klansman George Leonard Williams testified about the organization
- About 40 active members (340 on the books)
- Leaders included Charlie Edwards (Police chief of Grimesland)
The “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

“I don't know for sure why, but I was at a cafe on Friday night, tonight a week ago, and it was brought out that Harry Ferguson was at a Good Neighbor Council, East Carolina College, and the chief of police recognized him, and after the chief made his speech he said, "I see we have one of our Klan leaders here." He said, "Maybe he would like to say a few words."

And he said, Ferguson said, “He had never been a leader of anything but a mule.”

The “Pitt County Christian Fellowship Association”

• The negative publicity generated by Klan hearings provoked NC authorities into cracking down on the organization

• The UKA was a non-factor by mid-1967
1965: HUAC Investigates the Klan


  - Pts. 1 and 3 contain information on the Klan in NC
  - Williams testimony in pt. 3, pgs. 2867-2900
Conclusions

• Using federal documents gives a broader perspective to state and local history:
  – Impact of external actors on NC developments
  – Impact of NC developments elsewhere
  – Unique local conditions best perceived by comparison
  – Corrective to excessive focus on local sources
  – Opens new avenues for research
CWIS Blog & LibGuide

- Blog: http://blog.ecu.edu/sites/cwis/

- LibGuide: http://libguides.ecu.edu/cwis

- Slides and bibliography are posted to blog

- *NC Libraries* article
Questions?
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