



Jeanne Nienaber Clarke. *Roosevelt's Warrior: Harold L. Ickes and the New Deal.* Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. xvii + 414 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8018-5094-3.

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Students of the New Deal have thoroughly examined the careers of many key individuals in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, and none has received more attention in recent years than Secretary of Interior Harold L. Ickes. One of only two cabinet members to serve for the entire length of Roosevelt's presidency--Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, the other--Ickes was a forceful and frequently controversial public figure whose well-publicized battles with conservative politicians and newspaper tycoons contributed to his reputation for contentiousness. He avidly nurtured that image in his autobiographical works, *The Autobiography of a Curmudgeon (1943)* and *the three-volume The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes (1954)*. In *Harold L. Ickes: The Aggressive Progressive, 1874-1933 (1981)*, *Linda J. Lear discussed the influences on Ickes' pre-cabinet career that presaged his performance in Washington during the New Deal years.* In *Harold L. Ickes of the New Deal: His Private Life and Public Career (1985)*, *historian Graham White and psychologist John Maze applied the principles of Freudian psychoanalysis to explain the apparent contradictions between Ickes' public and private lives.* *T. H. Watkins' massive Righteous Pilgrim: The Life and Times of Harold Ickes, 1874-1952_ (1990)* was a full-scale biography that devoted particular attention to the Interior Secretary's environmental record. Jeanne Nienaber Clarke's recent volume deals almost exclusively with the years 1933-1939

and focuses on Ickes' contributions to New Deal reform.

Although Ickes' biographers detour from his public career to varying degrees, they all recount the turmoil that seemed to characterize his private life. The emerging portrait is not flattering. A long-suffering insomniac, Ickes was irascible and short-tempered. Hungry for power and jealous of his rivals' successes, he was sometimes duplicitous and mean-spirited. Despite being an outspoken champion of civil liberties, he requested wiretaps on Department of Interior employees. Ickes seduced his adopted daughter, physically abused his first wife, and bilked his stepsons out of their inheritance. As rumors of his infidelity circulated around Washington, "Honest Harold" conducted a number of extramarital affairs and, after telling his wife about them, provided sinecures to one of his paramours and his fiancée. He found some measure of domestic peace only after the death of his first wife and his subsequent marriage to his stepson's sister-in-law, a woman forty years his junior.

Ickes' salacious behavior notwithstanding, Clarke agrees with the other biographers that their subject compiled a sterling public record. Apparently able to ignore the wreckage of his home life, he transformed the Department of Interior from one of the most disreputable federal agencies into a nearly scandal-free paragon of bureaucratic efficiency. In his thirteen years at the

helm, he did more than any other Secretary to make Interior the federal government's principal conservation department, and his policies left a lasting imprint on the landscape of the American West.

During the economic crises of the Great Depression, Ickes also headed the Public Works Administration (PWA) and chaired the Federal Oil Conservation Board. Although many contemporaries criticized his cautious and deliberate approach to the construction of public works, the dearth of scandal at the PWA and the impressive final list of large-scale projects completed under his leadership constitute an impressive record. As loathsome as his personal conduct may have been, Ickes proved to be an able administrator whose successes FDR rightly viewed as significant contributions to New Deal reform.

If Clarke's study of Ickes in the New Deal years offers anything new to the picture, it would be the emphasis on the Interior Secretary's political role within the Roosevelt regime. The author argues that Ickes was the cabinet's most consistent and aggressive spokesman for progressive causes and that he served as the president's "liberal lightning rod." A vituperative public speaker who enjoyed locking horns with prominent conservatives, Ickes often carried the New Deal colors into public debates and gave speeches that advanced unpopular or controversial ideas. But though he willingly did much of the president's dirty work, Clarke asserts, Ickes was no sycophant and indeed frequently urged exceedingly ambitious policies on a sometimes cautious Roosevelt. As the administration's preeminent liberal, he made his greatest contribution to the New Deal by convincing the president to forgo the financial retrenchment urged by conservative advisers and resume pump-priming in response to the economic recession of 1937-1938.

Roosevelt's Warrior: Harold L. Ickes and the New Deal is largely based on copious official agency records in the National Archives and the rich

trove of Ickes materials at the Library of Congress, as well as on other primary sources. Unfortunately, the author has paid little attention to secondary sources, an omission that robs the book of a richly detailed context. The endnotes and bibliography fail to mention many of the books recently published on the New Deal and, although the relevant Ickes biographies are cited, no attempt is made to connect this book to these other works. Thus, there is no historiographic context for the author's interpretations. The prose is generally clear and the book enjoyable enough to read, save for the author's tendency to retell some stories repeatedly. Particularly problematic in this regard is chapter 19, "Ickes' Book of Revelations: The Personal Memoirs," which recounts in great detail certain key events in Ickes' life that had been fully explicated earlier in the text.

These criticisms aside, historians of the New Deal will find Clarke's treatment of the complex, enigmatic Ickes a useful addition to the literature.

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