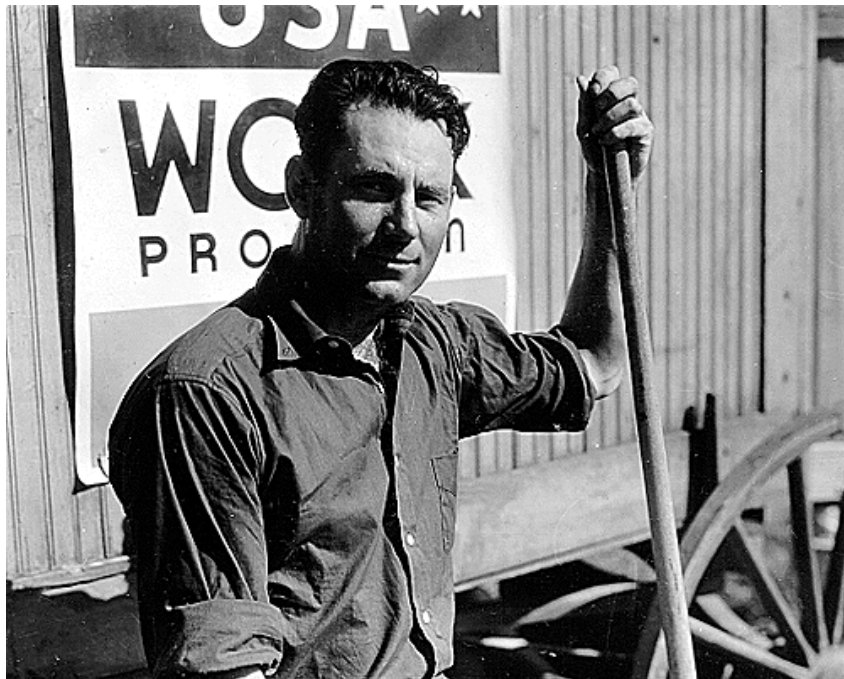


An Ambition to be Preferred: New Deal Recovery Efforts and Architecture in Arkansas, 1933-1943

By Holly Hope



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A Historic Context Written and Researched
By Holly Hope

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The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program is the agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage responsible for the identification, evaluation, registration and preservation of the state's cultural resources. Other agencies in the department are the Arkansas Arts Council, the Delta Cultural Center, the Old State House Museum, Historic Arkansas Museum, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission and the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center.

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INTRODUCTION

In President Franklin Roosevelt’s annual message of 1935, he stated that“we do assert that the ambition of the individual to obtain for him and his a proper security, a reasonable leisure, and a decent living throughout life is an ambition to be preferred to the appetite for great wealth and power.”¹ This sentence seemed to sum up the resignation of Arkansans who sought help from Roosevelt’s New Deal programs during the years 1933 to 1943. Destitute citizens suffering the effects of the Great Depression sent wrenching pleas to Arkansas Governor Junius Marion Futrell: “I ask your help, or where I can get work to do. This is the first time I have ever applied for help but I see nothing else to do. Meanwhile the wolf is at the door.” A resident of Humphrey implored, “Please help us now. We are nearly naked and hungry.”²

Agriculture was the principal occupation of over half of Arkansas’s population in 1930. This specialization contributed, in the long run, to the state’s economic downfall as



1927 flood

natural catastrophes and man-made failings intertwined to drag families and the elderly down to desperate poverty. By that point the Great Flood of 1927 had inundated approximately two million acres of cropland in the Delta, which remained underwater past the planting season and caused the loss of livestock and essential farming equipment. The state’s

farmers were not provided adequate recovery time before the summer of 1930 when a relentless drought began to scorch the state, continuing into spring 1931. State revenues were drained by these two events as well as a 1927 road and bond program that came due in the midst of the Depression. With no other avenue presenting itself, these factors spurred the state to request assistance from the federal government.

¹ Dexter Perkins, *The New Age of Franklin Roosevelt, 1932-45*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 29-30.

² Ralph Beebe to Governor Futrell, Lincoln, 12 July 1933, Marion Futrell Papers 1933-1937, FERA Correspondence A-D; John K. Gray to Governor Futrell, Humphrey, 21 August 1933, J.M. Futrell Papers 1933-1937, FERA Correspondence E-H; C. Fred. Williams, “*Arkansas Independent and Proud; an Illustrated History*,” (Sun Valley: American Historical Press, 2002), 184-192.

Previously, there had been little national intervention in the affairs of the needy in Arkansas but the economy refused to bounce back even after the rains restored the fields and washed away the dust. Industry in the state offered no solution, as the manufacturing sector had not traditionally been diversified because of a lack of capital from struggling rural communities. By 1929 the number of wage-earners in Arkansas fell by more than 24,000. The urgency of the situation forced the traditionally self-sufficient culture of the state to acknowledge and accept the fact that Arkansans would have to open their boundaries and extend their hands in order to survive. For many people this would be their first experience with federal assistance.³

During the first two years of Franklin Roosevelt's first presidential term the national goal of the New Deal was geared more toward recovery through his federal programs that were designed to, ideally, restore families back to a degree of comfort. In Arkansas this was accomplished through two methods: direct relief payments and public works projects. By 1935 Roosevelt was focusing more on reform of the economic situation under what has been termed the "Second New Deal." It was hoped that this would take Americans back to the recovery phase in a more efficient manner and distance them from a policy that was geared toward a dole to one that involved more work relief. The administration felt that it should not become permanently mired in a policy of handouts; rather it should accurately reflect the mood of the nation and provide jobs, which would aid in bolstering the economic confidence of America.

Despite the fact that Arkansas lacked the matching funds that were requested of the states partaking in federal programs under the Roosevelt Administration, the government received grants from various federal entities, enabling them to participate. Thus, many starving, demoralized families received money for food and employment to counter the psychological crush of idleness and destitution. All regions of the state still reflect the legacy of these programs as men were put to work on a multitude of projects including roads, bridges, dams, municipal facilities, parks and landscape features.

³ Michael Dougan, *Arkansas Odyssey: The Saga of Arkansas from Prehistoric Times to Present*, (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Co., 1994), 417, 441; Williams, *Arkansas, Independent and Proud*, 205; Travis Martin Adams, "The Arkansas Congressional Delegation During the New Deal, 1933-1936," (Masters thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1962), 157; "Roosevelt for Work Program," *Courier News*, (Blytheville, AR), 19 October 1934, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 12; "Chance to Create Jobs for Idle," *Daily News*, (El Dorado, AR), 02 September 1934, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 12.

Arkansas provided assistance to its residents through the same “alphabet agencies” that were instituted nationwide but the main agencies that were responsible for physical remnants in the state were the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), Civil Works Administration (CWA), Emergency Relief Administration (ERA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), National Youth Administration (NYA), Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Through these programs the state’s water supply and sewage systems were upgraded or provided for the first time to some small communities. Roads essential for the movement of goods to market and linking rural inhabitants to necessary services were constructed or improved. Schools, hospitals, transient camps, dams and public buildings were erected to better serve the citizens and to provide them with the education and employment they needed as well as to boost emotional well-being through improved surroundings and municipal services. Children and adults benefited from new recreational facilities in city and state parks. Many of these improvements remain and have become part of modern life: cars travel the same roads and cross the same bridges, tourists hike the hand-hewn trails, picnic in the wooded recreational areas and rest in the same rustic cabins. Fraternal groups and communities utilize the same Legion Huts; children attend class in the same school buildings while patients continue to be treated within New Deal-era hospitals.

Federal Emergency Relief Administrator Harry Hopkins stated in 1935 that “WPA projects have advanced the standards of living by fifty years. Communities now find themselves in possession of improvements which even in 1929 they would have thought themselves presumptuous to dream of.” Many rural Arkansas communities were equalized by federal services and buildings and the entire state was provided with benefits that were enjoyed by the public as a whole. As a result Arkansans were exposed to cultural and social experiences that allowed stimulus other than hard work and economic stress and so it is appropriate that these physical resources are retained and recognized as a tether to the spirit of renaissance that necessarily resulted from these New Deal programs.⁴

⁴ Harry Hopkins, *Spending to Save: The Complete Story of Relief*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1936), 184.

THE NEW DEAL IN ARKANSAS

The economic trials that beset Arkansas due to the Flood of 1927 required relief action by Governor Harvey Parnell two years prior to the 1929 Wall Street crash. In July of that year, the state implemented an office in the Bureau of Labor to keep tabs on the unemployment situation and Parnell's 1930 State Committee on Unemployment requested federal aid for roads and public undertakings. However, the governor, like President Herbert Hoover, was not a proponent of federal relief for the purpose of feeding the hungry. Many of his constituents were also not ready to accept the dole as a sole source of livelihood and held fast to the idea that their "can do" attitude would prevail. After all, farmers had experienced falling crop prices since the turn of the century; life had not traditionally been easy.

Most would rather have work; in spite of this, as the 1930 drought continued to stretch on, the number of Arkansas families receiving Red Cross aid in January 1931 climbed from approximately 335,000 to over 500,000 three days later. Starvation and disease due to a lack of proper nutrition had forced families to line up for limited food rations and turnip seeds provided by the Red Cross while supplementing their diet with whatever wildlife they could catch. Bank closures and lowered values of cotton compounded the unemployment problem and the citizens fell into a malaise. Hopelessness was evident as a *New York Times* correspondent reported that the people of Arkansas were "just sitting and looking."⁵



Red Cross turnip seeds

Hoover had issued a statement regarding the economic situation in 1930, which included direct employment on public works as one of three avenues the government could take toward federal relief efforts. Colonel Arthur Woods, appointed to the President's Emergency Committee for Employment in 1930, pointed out the irony of the American economic situation in that there seemed to exist a surfeit of raw materials,

⁵ Floyd Hicks and Roger Lambert, "Food for the Hungry: Federal Food Programs in Arkansas, 1933, 1942," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (Spring 1978): 25; Roger Lambert, "Hoover and the Red Cross in the Arkansas Drought of 1930," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, (Spring 1970): 10, 15-16.

transportation, manufacturing and distribution amenities, yet there were millions of able workers whose hands were idled by plant shutdowns. The committee's proposed solution was that Congress appropriate \$830,000,000 to enable the federal government to remedy the situation by partnering with the states in the construction of highways, public enhancements and repair and maintenance of federal property. Also included in the committee's points were that programs should be put in place for slum clearance, low-cost housing and rural electrification. Woods suggested that Hoover should push for the passage of Senate Bill 3059, offering advanced public works planning and that the administration should provide for a two billion dollar federal construction program. Despite these recommendations and Hoover's earlier statement, the overwhelming message of the president to the nation was that the numbers of unemployed were exaggerated and community voluntarism, private industry and the Red Cross should be sufficient sources of funds, employment and food.⁶

Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot wrote a 1932 article pointing out the ineffectiveness of relying on local sources for relief. In it, he noted that the people who were suffering the most were responsible for providing relief funds through the payment of taxes, which were usually raised in times such as these. Subsequently, the money that was funneled toward higher taxes was then taken out of circulation. Pinchot proposed that federal relief funds could be useful in two ways; the first would be for feeding the unemployed who are not able to get work (unemployables), and the second to provide work on public construction projects for those who are able. He succinctly summed up the issue when he stated, "Local relief means making the poor man pay," an observation that rang true for Arkansas as well as Pennsylvania.⁷

Some members of the United States Senate endeavored to provide federal appropriations to be used for public works in the states but their bills were ordered to lie on the table or they died in committee. A leader in those efforts to create jobs was Senator Robert Wagner (D-New York), who repeatedly introduced a bill that would provide unemployment relief via federal grants and loans to aid businesses in the states through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). A bill titled "Emergency Relief

⁶ Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 16-17, 20, 22-23.

⁷ *Ibid*, 52-54.

and Construction Act of 1932” was finally passed, allowing the RFC to extend \$300,000,000 to the states for relief and work relief. After the states made evident their need for aid, they would be eligible for loans of not more than 15 percent of the total cost of a work project, which would provide funds for public works in the form of construction and improvement projects. The loans would be reimbursed to the Treasury with interest through annual deductions.

Harvey Parnell had once referred to relief programs as “visionary panaceas for all our ills,” and until the end of his administration in 1933 he and the Arkansas General Assembly continued to concur that the Depression was just a temporary setback. Aid to the citizens of Arkansas under Parnell came in the form of borrowing since the government was as destitute as its people. No public relief programs were passed during a special session in 1932 and despite the governor’s acknowledgement in an application for an RFC loan that the state was “now in urgent need of financial assistance,” he remained primarily concerned with road construction, education and taxation, Parnell seemed oblivious to the fact that 245,000 eligible workers were unemployed in the state by 1932.⁸

FEDERAL EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION (FERA)

The RFC was largely ineffectual in Arkansas as county screening committees assigned to investigate individual project applications tended to base their findings on social standing and the commission created by the governor to dispense the funds was bankrupt after just eight months. Frustration with the impotence of the program stimulated support in the state for 1933 Democratic presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt, who once in office approved the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). Principally designed to temporarily put money into the hands of the starving, this was not an ultimately satisfactory answer for the president or Arkansas because of the program’s characterization as a government handout.

⁸ Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 74, 88-91; Dougan, *Arkansas Oddysey*, 419; Louie David Norris, “Years of Crisis: the ‘New Deal’ Administration of Junius Marion Futrell,” (Masters thesis, Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, 1971), 2; Webb, Pamela, “Harvey Parnell: Twenty-ninth Governor of Arkansas, 1928-1933,” *The Governors of Arkansas: Essays in Political Bibliography*, eds. Timothy Donovan, Willard Gatewood, Jr., Jeannie Whayne, (Fayetteville: University of AR Press, 1995),178.

The agenda of the FERA did include work relief but the jobs were initially categorized as “make-work” despite the federal requirement that the tasks be considered useful. The FERA extended grants to State Emergency Relief Administrations, which passed them through to local agencies. Those entities were charged with distributing funds in the form of work relief or direct relief. In order to meet eligibility requirements families who applied for FERA aid were subject to a means-test by a relief department social worker. The distinction between work relief and work programs revolved around the participation of the social worker in the process who determined the level of need displayed by the applicant via an interview regarding his finances, who under FERA was still considered to be a “public ward.” Harry Hopkins referred to work relief as “merely an alternative method of extending relief.” The jobs that were provided did not ultimately result in a lasting benefit to the community. On the other hand, employment on a work program provided labor for projects that were needed by the community whether a crisis existed or not. Under such programs the laborer received wages and did not have to justify his or her need to a social worker by opening up their private life to the scrutiny of a stranger.

Initial FERA job categories primarily involved construction such as road repair and erection of public buildings but there were also “common labor” tasks available in the form of street cleaning and leaf raking in public parks. As the program evolved, individuals on relief would manufacture consumer goods under production-for-use projects, which would be dispensed to other relief clients, used in various work projects or in public institutions. Such products included vegetables from subsistence gardens for consumption or canning and preserving projects and wood chopping for fuel. The best-known production projects were the sewing workrooms staffed by women who assembled or mended clothing and bedding.⁹

CIVIL WORKS ADMINISTRATION (CWA)

By the fall of 1933 policy makers began to recognize the tenaciousness of the Depression and the fact that emergency employment was not meeting the long-term

⁹ Williams, *Arkansas Independent and Proud*, 197; Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 126; Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 114-115; Nancy Allen Rose, *Put To Work: Relief Programs in the Great Depression*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1994), 30-31, 38.

needs of the people. In answer to the changing perception and requirements of the crisis Hopkins proposed a larger, more widespread program that would enable the employment of a projected four million people over the winter. Roosevelt thus created the Civil Works Administration (CWA) under the management of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works by executive order in November 1933. In Arkansas, the FERA and CWA initially operated side-by-side. William R. Dyess of Osceola was chosen by new governor Junius Marion Futrell to serve as the state's relief program director. Under Dyess, R.C. Limerick served as consulting engineer of the CWA. The program was only meant to function for a short period and it was ended in spring 1934; however, the response to its formation in Arkansas was keen and by February 1934, 68,843 citizens had obtained employment through the program. CWA project types included production and rehabilitation of roads, bridges, schools, parks and playgrounds, hospitals, airports, flood control and privies.¹⁰

The Roosevelt Administration transferred some local work relief projects initiated under FERA to the CWA upon its institution. Local governments would serve as



Unemployed woman

sponsors and attention to the categories of the majority of laborers within the community would be taken into account when selecting project types. The new program mainly provided work in construction, which largely precluded women; however, Harry Hopkins and Eleanor Roosevelt recognized that women were suffering disproportionately and they

attempted to broaden the field. After a White House Conference on the Emergency Needs of Women, the Civil Works Service (CWS) was set up under FERA to promote white collar and production-for-use projects, which encouraged the employment of women, as well as technicians, artists, doctors, nurses and professional and clerical personnel.

In Arkansas, the number of women assigned to projects under the CWS by March 1934 stood at 2,415. Those female applicants were still required to submit to a means-test, which meant they needed to be listed on the relief rolls but the men employed

¹⁰ Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 116; Frank R. Allen, *CWA Activities in Arkansas*, Vol. I (Little Rock: State Emergency Relief Administration, 1934), 23-24; Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 127.

on CWA construction jobs were not required to be on the rolls; rather, they could simply be unemployed and thus not compelled to undergo interviews with a social worker in order to take part. The CWS was suspended in January 1934 and was transferred to the CWA in March of that year.¹¹

Dyess called a meeting of the state's mayors and county judges in the fall of 1933, informing them that they were to submit their applications for projects to be completed by the CWA with an inaugural date of November 23, 1933. Plans offered by county supervisors would be reviewed by the state and work assignments would be completed through the Federal Re-employment Office in Little Rock. Thousands of the newly employed were former agricultural workers who had been affected detrimentally by the cotton acreage reduction plan. Wages in the South were placed at 40 cents an hour for unskilled labor while skilled labor received \$1.00 (unskilled workers in Arkansas actually received 30 cents an hour). Rates would be higher if local wages were higher and the prevailing salary of the community would be paid to clerical, office, statistical, survey and professional workers. In Arkansas the weekly average pay check experienced a drop from \$20.34 in 1930 to \$13.36 by the first month of 1934. The level climbed by an average of 96 cents by the first of March 1934, due to the CWA.¹²



CWA road work

Roads were reported to be the principal type of CWA activity nationwide with over \$300,000,000 expended mainly on farm-to-market roads. Other such work included straightening curves, building culverts and repair, rehabilitation and construction of bridges. The Flood of 1927 had destroyed many of Arkansas's roads and bridges and the Depression reduced the state funds received from gas taxes and registration fees so rural and main routes continued to degrade. The 1934 *Pictorial Annex* of the *CWA Activities in Arkansas* made note of several roads in Boone, Craighead, Independence, Hempstead,

¹¹ Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 164; Rose, *Put to Work*, 48; Allen, *CWA Activities*, 45.

¹² Allen, *CWA Activities*, 23, 62, 69, 72; Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 118. Christie McLaren, *Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965*, (Little Rock: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 1999) 10; David Rison, "Arkansas During the Great Depression," (PhD diss., University of California, 1974), 111.

Washington, White, Sebastian, Union and Woodruff counties that were upgraded or constructed in that year, providing improved means of travel and more direct routes.¹³

Depleted state coffers and the incapacity of the citizens to pay taxes resulted in deteriorated municipal buildings. Arkansas had been suffering from the inability to match federal funds since the implementation of the New Deal and Harry Hopkins had commented of the state that “It looks as if we are going to have to pay practically all the bills.” Governor Futrell confirmed Hopkins’ take on the situation when he wrote to a constituent that the federal government and community chests were solely accountable for relief because of the “financial difficulties” the state was experiencing. As a result, the CWA was responsible, in terms of manpower and finances, for much of the rehabilitation and new construction of government facilities and schools in Arkansas. Through the CWA, African American and white schools were repaired and by 1934 the courthouses in Chicot, Hempstead, Garland, White, Jefferson and Independence counties, as well as the City Hall in Pine Bluff, had received attention through the program. Other project examples in Arkansas included municipal stockyards, levees, American Legion huts, college campus landscaping, community buildings, recreational parks, swimming pools, Boy Scout camps, drainage canals and lakes.¹⁴

The CWA provided employment to a variety of age ranges and implemented imaginative project types in the state. Washington County recorded that twenty World War I veterans received employment under the CWA with work at the Veterans Administration hospital and the National Cemetery in Fayetteville, while 142 college-age students were put to work as laborers or in clerical positions. Fayetteville workers participated in a housing survey and tax delinquency study through the University Of Arkansas College Of Agriculture and twenty-nine individuals helped excavate Native-American bluff dwellings near the county seat for the University’s museum under the program.

¹³ Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 120-121; Frank Allen, *Pictorial Annex*, Vol. II, *CWA Activities in Arkansas*, (Little Rock: State Emergency Relief Administration, 1934) NP.

¹⁴ Williams, *Arkansas Independent and Proud*, 198; Junius Futrell to Mrs. R.G. Williams, Goose Creek, Texas, 14 December 1934, Marion Futrell Papers 1933-1937, Public Welfare Correspondence; Allen, *Pictorial Annex*, NP; Stephen Herman Dew, “The New Deal and Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1933-1941,” (Master thesis, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 1987), 66-67.

The total of completed CWA projects in Arkansas at the termination of the program on March 31, 1934, stood at 1,925 and federal funds disbursed on the program were \$11,390,451.77. The total was distributed among men, who received \$8,900,000 for work performed on projects, women, who received, \$615,000 and \$1,787,000 was used for materials. January 18, 1934, was considered the apex of the program in Arkansas with 82,000 listed as CWA employees. The FERA continued to function after the CWA was discontinued; however, it was reconfigured by April of 1934 to provide more work relief for the industrially unemployed under a Work Division. Seven-hundred-fifty-three Arkansas CWA projects that remained unfinished upon the completion of the program were assigned to FERA workmen if the materials were available. Tasks begun after April required that a town must have a population of 5,000 or more and the county and city had to provide construction materials.¹⁵

UNEMPLOYABLES

Certain levels of society suffered mightily even during non-depression years but their problems were compounded further after a 1934 regional conference in Louisiana,



Unemployable mother

during which the federal government informed Arkansas and several other southern states that they were not going to receive funds for those who were considered “unemployables.” The official definition of unemployable was stated in Arkansas Act 26 of 1935, as “one who is physically or mentally incapable of making a living at available employment.” W.R. Dyess further defined this group as consisting of people whose inability to work was due to age or physical disability, or “whose home and family duties would render it impossible for the individual to work.” The Roosevelt

Administration was of the mind that these individuals were social problems to be managed by the state.

¹⁵ Watkins, *The Great Depression*, 128; Allen, *CWA Activities*, 24; “County Work Relief Jobs to be Resumed,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 08 April 1934, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 12; Dougan, *Arkansas Odyssey*, 422-423; “Recipients of Direct Relief Must Work Now,” *Weekly News* (Fordyce), 24 May 1934, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 12; “ERC Programs Being Made by Committee,” *Wynne Progress*, 05 April 1934, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 12.

A report conducted in 1934 by the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) had determined that there were 18,590 families listed on the rolls of the ERA and the Pulaski and Sebastian County Welfare rolls. The ERA offered categories of unemployability and found that 360 out of the total displayed three or more of those categories. By 1935 the total of unemployables in the state stood at 41,000. In order to receive aid, which was to be paid by the community or county they lived in rather than with government funds, the applicant needed to fall under one of these classifications:

- Mental conditions
- Tuberculosis
- Cripples
- Chronic illnesses
- Blind
- Deaf
- Mute
- Old age
- Mothers of children under 10.¹⁶

During this time Futrell was being eyed critically by the federal government as he was not providing the state's share of funds for relief and it appeared as though the job of caring for the needy in Arkansas was overwhelmingly becoming a federal responsibility. Upon his acceptance of the office, the main goal of the governor was to cut down on expenses as a way of dealing with a drained state treasury and an operating deficit above a million dollars; however, it was 1935 before Arkansas was financially stable enough to provide a share to its own relief applicants. The federal government was put in a position of accountability for financing an endangered education system as well as relief in the state after the General Assembly passed legislation that allowed redemption of unpaid property taxes for the past three years through the payment of one year's tax. The property tax was the primary source of school funding and by 1934 FERA officials had provided close to \$700,000 for education, which was then undercut through a reduction of tax revenue by the state.¹⁷

¹⁶ Emergency Relief Administration, *Unemployables in Arkansas*, (Little Rock: ERA, 1934), Butler Center Little Rock Central Library, 1-2, 4; Rison, "Arkansas During the Great Depression," 104; W.R. Dyess to State Emergency Relief Commission, Little Rock, 18 December 1934, J.M. Futrell Papers; Department of Public Welfare, *Summary of Laws of the Welfare Department*, J.M. Futrell Papers, 2.

¹⁷ David Rison, "Arkansas During the Great Depression," 63, 75, 81.

Harry Hopkins considered this an inappropriate use of federal funds as the state should have been using government money for relief of the hungry and unemployed instead of paying its teachers and funding its districts. He also felt that the state should be ponying up its percentage in return for government support. In light of this situation he



Elderly unemployable

opted to cut off the next year's funding until Arkansas came up with the money to take care of its own shortfall. Futrell and Arkansas Senator Hattie Caraway were able to persuade Hopkins that if this came to pass the children would suffer irreparable damage so he approved funds for 1935. Hopkins' patience was taxed yet again after Arkansas's pension law was declared unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court and the elderly, sick and disabled were cut adrift. After a second threat to pull FERA funds a Department of Public Welfare was created by the Arkansas

legislature in order to provide old-age pensions; however, no funds were supplied. It was expected that the state should provide \$1,500,000 for aid to unemployables, which was obviously not forthcoming. Hopkins had enough and discontinued all federal relief in spring 1935, stranding 400,000 relief enrollees for a month. This finally prompted the Arkansas legislature to legalize and tax hard liquor sales and gambling on horse racing and attempt to pass the Hall Sales Tax Bill - a 2 percent sales tax on all commodities but specific foods and medicines - so the state could provide for its own through the State Welfare Commission, formed on April 1, 1935.

By 1936 the Arkansas Department of Public Welfare was distributing \$8.00 a month to the elderly and blind, \$6.67 to dependent children and \$4.00 to "other unemployables." A match of one dollar of federal money was provided for every dollar of state funds expended on pensions for the elderly and blind and dependent children received a federal match of 50 cents for every state dollar.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 83; Dougan, *Arkansas Odyssey*, 424; Rison, "Arkansas During the Great Depression," 102; State of Arkansas Department of Public Welfare Report, 24 July 1934, J.M. Futrell Papers.

EMERGENCY RELIEF ADMINISTRATION (ERA)

Once the liquor bill was signed by Futrell, Hopkins was finally convinced of the state's ability and intent to support the indigent so funding was returned to the state in spring 1935, with a grant of \$1,528,415. Although bickering and contention in the legislature over Arkansas's financial responsibilities roiled over the years 1934-1935, the idea that work was the best social medicine for the state's unemployed remained the theme of federal and local New Deal programs.

After the demise of the CWA there was concern by Roosevelt that the program would return to the bad business of total relief. He felt that the form and function of relief as it stood in 1934 lowered the morale of the country and the best way to remedy this was to assist as many people as possible in getting off the direct aid rolls and into a job of some sort. One of the avenues for provision of this work was through the formation of the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) in Arkansas. In the chain of command for the program the county organization under the state administration was split into three divisions: Rural Rehabilitation, Case Work Division and the Work Division. Rural Rehabilitation was for farmers only and provided loan agreements for farm and home budgets. The local Work Division was under the supervision of the State Work Division, which investigated and approved or disapproved all submitted work projects. The Case Work Division consisted of direct relief clients who were subject to case worker and home nurse visits.¹⁹

The Daily News in El Dorado, Arkansas, reported in the spring of 1934 that ERA officials in the state were implementing plans for capable people enrolled in the Case Work Division of the county ERA organization to receive positions on civic projects. It was held by the ERA that some people remained on the relief rolls because they were physically unfit due to temporary illnesses brought on by their dire conditions and substandard living environments. Many such people were members of large families that could not survive any other way so they were allowed to work on certain projects while continuing to receive relief funds. The mayor, county judge, school board, state highway

¹⁹ Rison, "Arkansas During the Great Depression," 106-107; Dennis Roth, "The New Deal," Online article found at www.nal.usda.gov, accessed 04 May 2006; Works Progress Administration, *A Review of Work Relief Activities in Arkansas, April 1st, 1934 to July 1st, 1935*, (Little Rock: Parke-Harper Company, 1935), 14-16.

department, heads of state, city or county institutions and other civic officials within a community could submit applications for laborers from the relief rolls and those under the Case Work Division who were employed were obliged to work a certain number of hours to cover the cost of aid they had already received. Up to 500 men or women within the state's counties could be retained on the rolls.²⁰

ERA jobs under the Work Division were designed to employ the dominant class of workers in specific areas and the civil and political entities that applied for projects would provide the materials and funding in those localities. The Social Welfare Division was responsible for certifying workers from Work Division client rolls. It was reported that job types under ERA would cover local public works projects, which included manual labor such as construction and improvement and repair jobs on schools, churches, roads and local street work. The total of projects under all job categories numbered 6,014 by July of 1935 and 2,885 supplemental projects was recorded at that time as well.

Data assembled by the Works Progress Administration in 1935 documented the following numbers for road projects constructed by the ERA in Arkansas:

Total mileage of road construction (Including dirt, macadam and concrete roads).....	1455.7
Total sidewalk, bridge, culvert, overpass and roadside beautification construction	1330

Data for construction of ERA public buildings by 1935 was as follows:

Total schoolhouses, municipal garages, firehouses, bus and car shelters, city and county halls, jails and prisons, relief offices, airports, airport buildings, emergency landing fields poor farms (state, county and city), and community canning center construction	492
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Numbers of public utility projects stood at:

Total abattoirs, pumping stations, sewerage disposal plants, septic tanks and sanitary privies.....	10,424
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²⁰ "Roosevelt for Work Program," *Courier News*, (Blytheville, AR), 19 October 1934, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook, 12; "Announce Changes in Relief Program," *Daily News*, (El Dorado, AR), 19 May 1934, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 12; Works Progress Administration, *A Review of Work Relief Activities*, 19.

Construction of recreation facilities totaled:

Total grandstands, children’s playgrounds, parks,
athletic fields, swimming pools, recreation buildings
.....77,201

Flood control projects numbered:

Total levee (miles), bulkheads, dams, wells and lakes
.....45

ERA housing projects included:

Total resettlement family homes350²¹

WOMEN IN THE ERA

Since 1933 Governor Futrell’s office had received numerous pleas for help from women, lending insight into the extent of human suffering that needed to be addressed by the program. Entire families were touched by not only the obvious circumstances of starvation or want through the lack of funds, but by the disruption or total deprivation of a normal childhood or social life caused by disease, a lack of education, a wardrobe of rags or a life on the streets. Mrs. Jane Brown of Pineville wrote “Our small children ask would Santa come I told them I guessed he might maby he would bring us bread as that is what we need so bad... maby we wont starve.” (sic) A mother from Arkadelphia related to the governor “I have been swing old things other people throw back to bad for them to fix to keep my children from sun blistering...We have sold things we realy need to get grocies and we have sold all we can see.” (sic)



Depression era mother

Lower wages for women was an accepted fact and such disparity was institutionalized by the National Recovery Administration (NRA, under the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act), which was defended by officials who stated that such differentials “represent long established customs.” Recognition that farm wives and widows with small children needed jobs to supplement a sparse or non-existent family income inspired the ERA to continue in the vein of the CWA and offer a diverse job

²¹ Works Progress Administration, *A Review of Work Relief Activities*, 19-20, 23, 30, 35, 40, 42, 45, 49-50, 59, 61, 64, 68 (See for a breakdown of number and category of ERA construction projects).

roster. The Division of Women's Work under the direction of Mrs. Edward Cornish began functioning in Arkansas by the summer of 1934. Cornish was responsible for consulting on projects tailored to women, interpretation and communication with other divisions and agencies. Field worker Mrs. T.J. Newman maintained contact with county work supervisors and fostered interest in the work of the women's division as well as development of projects.

By fall 1934, 161 ERA projects employing 5,663 women had been approved by state program officials. Thus some of the specific categories of work performed by the program besides the rigorous tasks of mosquito control, construction, clean up of creeks and bayous, highway landscaping and Capitol grounds beautification included work in mattress and toy factories, canning factories, adult education and start up and staffing of nursery schools and librarian jobs, which could be performed by women. After the 1935 directive from Washington that unemployables be supported by their home-state or local relief organizations, relief client numbers dropped and in the summer of 1935 the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was formed to take the place of the ERA. The former program was thus liquidated and those remaining clients were either cut from the rolls or were shifted to WPA projects.²²

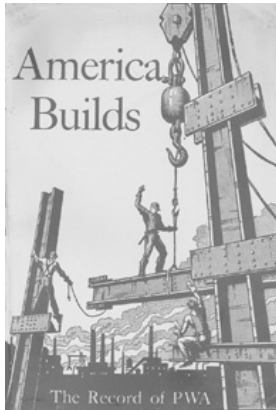
PUBLIC WORKS ADMINISTRATION (PWA)

In the early days of Roosevelt's administration the President enacted the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) to circumvent the effects of business closures on the American public. The act would provide for price increases and permit trade associations to standardize wages, work environments, production and costs. As an element of the act he included the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works (Public Works Administration or PWA), created on June 16, 1933. The theory behind the formation of the PWA was that the government would benefit from boosts in federal construction during depressive periods; thus, such projects should be forestalled until the economy

²² "Recipients of Direct Relief Must Work Now," *Weekly News*, 24 May 1934; Mrs. Jane Brown to Junius Futrell, Pineville, 1933, J.M. Futrell Papers, 1933-1937 FERA Correspondence A-D; Carrie Case to Junius Futrell, Arkadelphia, 02 August 1933, J.M. Futrell Papers, 1933-1937 FERA Correspondence A-D; Work Progress Administration, *A Review of Work Relief Activities*, 89; Rose, *Put to Work*, 36; Arkansas Emergency Relief Administration, *Development and Administration of Emergency Programs: Traveling Recovery Road. The Story of Relief, Work-Relief and Rehabilitation in Arkansas, August 30, 1932 to November 15, 1936*, (Little Rock: 1936), 20.

required it. It was recommended that while the economy was flourishing, states should build up “prosperity reserves” that they could dip into in emergency situations or use for borrowing purposes and they could then be in a position to begin public works projects, which would provide employment and a market for materials, when a depression hit.²³

President Hoover had attempted to create a division of public works under the Department of the Interior, chiefly to re-organize public works agencies rather than to



PWA poster

provide jobs; however, he was defeated by Roosevelt before issuance of the order. Only a few months after the new president took office the bill creating the NIRA passed both houses with a program of public works that was intended to quickly put people to work via expenditures for works projects in the form of grants and loans or a combination of both. It was not considered a construction agency; rather, the program funded federal public work projects initiated by the PWA, or proposed and constructed by private contractors or other

federal agencies. States and their subdivisions were eligible for grants totaling 30 percent of labor and the cost of materials. Loans could be obtained to fund any part of the remaining balance. By 1935 the grant allocation for the states was raised to 45 percent.²⁴

Eligibility requirements were stated by NIRA as “any projects of the character heretofore constructed or carried on either directly by public authority or with public aid to serve the interests of the general public...” A more detailed list of such projects was issued by the government, which included categories of works that could be found in Arkansas, such as construction and repair of public highways, buildings used or owned by the public, hospitals, reservoirs, pumping plants, and improvement of railroad transportation facilities.

During the formation phase of the PWA, Public Works Administrator Harold Ickes and his staff decided that the state-level program would consist of an engineer-administrator and a three-man advisory board under the direction of a regional adviser.

²³ “Successes and Failures of Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ Programs,” Available at www.bergen.org, accessed 08 August 2005; Jack Isakoff, *The Public Works Administration*, (Urbana: University of ILL Press, 1938), 9-10

²⁴ Isakoff, *The Public Works Administration*, 16-18, 20.

The board and the adviser would make recommendations on the acceptance or rejection of individual projects. Applications that would be given primary consideration were those projects that displayed social desirability, resulting in a beneficial resource - not simple “make work.” Such projects were required to be ready for immediate implementation upon receipt of allotments and they were to be executed by a reasonable deadline. They were to be located in areas of high unemployment and dispensation of allotments was based on the number of relief workers in those areas. The characteristics of the typical PWA project were differentiated by the government from later works program tasks through the stipulation that PWA applications were desired to be for new construction projects not involving repair or upkeep, with a low-end cost of \$25,000.²⁵

A Congressional appropriation of \$3,300,000,000 for the NIRA was designated from the federal grant allocations out of which, \$400,000,000 was to be distributed to the states for highway purposes. Arkansas’s share was \$6,748,335.00 to be used for construction of primary or interstate highways, including trunk line roads, and secondary highways, which covered a system of connecting roads. Arkansas was one of several states that received a special waiver for matching allotments for PWA highway grants due to its financial situation. Grants-in-aid could be also be used in place of state funds to provide matches on the balance of previous federal subsidies received by the state.

During consideration of NIRA the Director of the Budget stated that restricting PWA funds exclusively to federal projects would foster redundancy and the treasury would be stuck in a cycle of constant upkeep. Congress recognized that public services were usually linked with local and state governments, thus it provided for the construction of public endeavors subsidized by non-federal agencies in states and municipalities. Communities receiving grants from PWA would have to meet certain federal requirements in their applications. Social and economic significance would need to be attached to the project, which would also need to provide a certain level of employment and purchasing power in the area. Preference was given to a small list of project types: waterworks, sewer projects and sewage-disposal required for health and

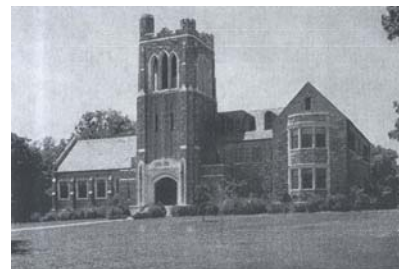
²⁵ Harold Ickes, *Back to Work: The Story of PWA*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1935), 46; Isakoff, *The Public Works Administration*, 18-19, 21, 103, 107; State of Arkansas, *Eleventh Biennial Report of the Arkansas State Highway Commission*, (Little Rock: State Highway Commission, 1934), 17-18.

convenience and construction of highways, bridges, tunnels and electric transmission facilities, which fostered further construction while utilizing unskilled labor.

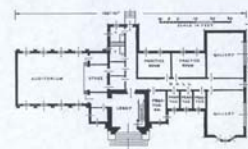
Non-federal PWA building types in Arkansas that were constructed or enhanced before 1942 using Public Works Administration funds included numerous schools, associated educational facilities, university buildings and dormitories that came to a total of \$5,441,408 in loans and grants. One-hundred-twenty-four municipal water projects including waterworks systems, disposal plants, sanitary sewer facilities and filtration plants in Arkansas were completed in that same period through loans and grants of \$9,280,449. Courthouse, city hall and jail construction in the state financed by the PWA totaled \$2,118,987.

Total PWA employment obtained through the Federal Re-employment Office in Arkansas as of December 1933 stood at 21,092 men and 47 women, and private employment provided through the service was 3,317 men and 420 women. The PWA had originally been authorized for a two-year span; however, under the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935 it was allowed to carry on until June 1937. In a May 1937 letter from Roosevelt to new governor Carl Bailey, the President stated that the PWA would not be continued as he felt that the materials utilized by the program had adequately invigorated the business sector. In fact, if the governments were to encourage further large public works projects at that time the rise in price of durable goods would surpass wages, creating a tenuous situation for recovery efforts. Roosevelt advised Bailey that the states and municipalities should maintain “readiness plans” for public works projects until such time when the government felt that the economic environment called for further appropriations.

Despite Roosevelt’s words to the governor, in that year the Public Works Administration Extension Act was passed, which assured the continuance of the PWA until July of 1939. This extension allowed for PWA-financed projects that were not finished to be carried forth to completion as there was still an accessible balance in 1937,



Fine Arts Building, State Agriculture College, Monticello, Arkansas



Fine Arts Building, Monticello

which at the time, precluded the need for further Congressional appropriations. In 1938 the Public Works Administration Appropriation Act was approved and the PWA liquidation date was set for June 1941. Under the 1938 Act the agency was infused with an appropriation and loans totaling \$1,365,000,000 to be used for projects that could be completed by June 1940.²⁶

CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS AND NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION (CCC), (NYA)

Besides the PWA, President Roosevelt enacted two subsequent programs in the early 1930s that would serve the nation's youth by occupying them in jobs that would provide resources and wages and take them off the streets. The Emergency Conservation Work Act (ECW, changed to Civilian Conservation Corps, CCC, in 1937) presented to Congress in 1933, grew from the president's empathy for the nation's endangered natural resources. The National Youth Administration (NYA), created by executive order in June 1935, was administered by the Works Progress Administration and was organized to circumvent the effects of the Depression on the nation's young people. This program sought to assist females as well as males, between the ages of 16 to 25 through relief, work-relief and employment. Most NYA construction projects were executed by the boys while girls participated in homemaking, crafts and service projects. Both federal programs provided Arkansas with prolific examples of municipal, recreational and administrative buildings and structures and they were responsible for transforming the state's landscape while providing citizens with valuable amenities.

During Roosevelt's tenure as governor of New York he demonstrated his concern with the natural environment by instituting a Conservation Week in the state and attempting to stimulate employment with reforestation and forest fire fighting jobs. He carried forth this agenda within the CCC. Work in the forests was proposed for unemployed men between the ages of 18 and 25 (changed to 17-28 in 1935). When the ECW was created there was no park system or Forestry Department in Arkansas but

²⁶ Public Works Administration, *List of All Allotted Non-Federal Projects, All Programs, By State and Docket*, (Federal Works Agency Project Control, 1942); Isakoff, *The Public Works Administration*, 23, 28, 88-89, 139, 151-152; Franklin Roosevelt to Carl Bailey, 26 May 1937, Box 87; Allen, *CWA Activities in Arkansas*, 18.

within the first year a Department was created through private contributions, which enabled projects to be organized on state-owned forest land and private property. Two national forests had been set aside in the state, Ouachita National Forest in 1907 and Ozark National Forest in 1908; however, by the time of the ECW Act they were suffering from the effects of drought and uncontrolled forest fires. With the organization of the state's first project at Eagleton and the first occupied camp site in Crystal Springs, the CCC became the main force in conserving forest land and contributing to natural and man-made environments utilizing natural materials.

The CCC left the most visible evidence of its work in Arkansas's state parks and national forests. The first three state parks projects that also served as homes to camps



CCC camp bulletin board

were, Mount Nebo, Devils Den and Crowley's Ridge Park. Each of the parks and consequent recreational areas feature rustic architecture that provided a pleasant blend with their environment in the form of hand-wrought picnic shelters, cabins, bathhouses and lodges. The CCC was also responsible for overlooks, trails and fire towers, which remain throughout the state's national forests and parks. Most of the frame buildings linked to CCC camps were dismantled or moved at the onset of WWII but concrete foundations and rustic masonry structures and objects like

wellsheds, gatehouses, fireplaces, bulletin boards, sidewalks, culverts, walls and springboxes remain at campsites throughout the state.

Among the most prominent and popular of the state parks displaying CCC elements in Arkansas is Petit Jean State Park in Morrilton. The park maintains a high number of CCC resources situated throughout the original 1,700 acres acquired by the state for the park by 1935 (now grown to over 3,000 acres). CCC labor consisting of veteran's camps began work in that year on the rustic Mather Lodge, which included a lounge, dining room, a ten-room "dormitory" and stone and log cabins. Besides the ten miles of hiking trails that had been constructed by 1935, the *Arkansas Gazette* reported in that year that the CCC was in the process of building 20 public camp grounds and 4 camp

ground buildings, a pump house and water tank, 6 foot bridges, 4 horse bridges and 6 vehicle bridges. Such construction was typical of most CCC handiwork in the state's parks and the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program has overseen the nomination to the National Register of hundreds of CCC-related resources through its multiple property context, *The Civilian Conservation Corps in Arkansas, 1933-1942*.

The number of CCC camps in Arkansas hit 65 in 1935 but by 1937 it had gone down to 38. With the beginning of WWII unemployment levels dropped because of related industrial jobs and military enrollment. It was decided by the Joint Committee of Congress that the program would be liquidated by 1942 and the state's camps were sold to private owners or made into recreation areas.²⁷

NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION (NYA)

The effect of the Depression on the nation's youth was palpable as unemployed parents thrown from their land or homes often had multiple children who also endured the deprivation. Hungry, homeless children wandered the streets or huddled in hobo camps and shanty-towns. Community schools closed down or children simply stopped attending because of a lack of proper clothing and the need to find work. College enrollment dropped between 1932 and 1933 and by 1935 it was estimated that nationwide, approximately 2.9 million children were members of families on government relief rolls. Fears arose that the children and the country would come to no good as their lack of education and work experience did not bode well for the economic and cultural future.

The Office of Education entered into a contentious collaboration with the WPA and Roosevelt to organize a federal work program for youth that would go above and beyond what the CCC offered. Besides job training and hands-on projects the federal government hoped to offer educational, financial and psychological guidance for the future of those children living through such horrific times. The NYA in Arkansas found

²⁷ Sandra Taylor Smith, *The Civilian Conservation Corps in Arkansas, 1933-1942*, (Little Rock: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 4-8 (for an in-depth history of CCC resources in Arkansas); War Manpower Commission, *A History of the National Youth Administration in Arkansas, June 26, 1935-July 3, 1943*, (Kansas City, MO: 1943), 26; Civilian Conservation Corps, *Official Annual: Civilian Conservation Corps Arkansas District, Seventh Corps Area*, (Little Rock:1937), 10; "Petit Jean and Mt. Nebo Examples of What Federal Government Desires to Do for Arkansas, Provided State Gives Co-operation," *The Arkansas Gazette*, 1935, 8.

that the inefficiency of the dole was carried through to its children. The state NYA office wrote in its 1942 final report, "Measures that did not offer youth the opportunity for work, and to pay his own way, met with little response from young people." The physical results of the work program were beneficial in removing the problem of idleness from the situation but there remained pervasive negative impacts such as poor health, bad "living habits" and substandard home environments.

The bulk of Arkansas's out-of-school youths who had enrolled in the Work Program had received no vocational training and approximately half of them had dropped out prior to completing high school because of deficient family incomes. Twenty-five percent were recorded as having withdrawn from school because of discouragement and a resultant lack of interest in education. Most of them came from a background of poverty so the desire to learn a trade and improve their financial situation was often cited as the primary impetus in taking part in the program.

The NYA presented a four-tiered objective for the betterment of the nation's youth, a format that was followed by the program in Arkansas. Agency goals included:

1. Providing funds for part-time employment of out-of-school youth between 18 and 25, the purpose being to present work experience and benefit their communities (known as work projects). These applicants were required to be from certified relief families, registered with the National Re-employment Office and currently out of school.
2. Set up job training, counseling and placement services for those youth on work projects.
3. Developing leisure activities to keep youths occupied and out of trouble.
4. Providing student aid funds in return for the part time employment of those between the ages of 16 and 25 in attendance at a school or college (designated as education aid).

Those projects completed by enrollees were specifically designed to provide them employment on the production of resources that would be available for their use when completed and in the nurturing of their skill levels for future life experiences.²⁸

Relief funds were applied to the operation of the NYA and during the first four years of the program's existence, the WPA was responsible for financing its administrative functions, payrolls and various costs of operation. In the first few months of the NYA, jobs in Arkansas consisted of recreation and clerical tasks and work projects revolved around repair and maintenance of grounds and buildings. By the beginning of 1936 the program for out-of-school youths encompassed new construction work in the state.

The national organization of the NYA was administered by Harry Hopkins, administrator of the WPA. The executive director under Hopkins was Aubrey Williams, who appointed J.W. Hull, president of Arkansas Tech in Russellville, as the Arkansas NYA director. State offices were situated in Russellville and district hubs were based in Camden, Russellville, Little Rock and Batesville. NYA Works Program applicants were assigned by the state office to WPA projects or on local tasks set up by sponsors who were selected by state and local Advisory Committees.

Four classes of projects under the sponsorship of local public agencies were designed for execution by the NYA:

1. Projects for youth community development and recreational leadership.

Physical results of this type included construction of athletic fields, recreational and community centers and landscaping of school campuses. Community activities and extension of social services were also included in this category.

2. Projects for rural youth development.

Rural youth were paid to build recreational centers to be used in their vicinity and received training in farming, health and sanitation as well as jobs in forestry work.

3. Public service training.

²⁸ Patrick Boyle, "How FDR's New Deal for Youth Got Deckerd," Online article found at www.youthtoday.org, accessed 23 August 2005, 1-2; War Manpower Commission, *A History of the National Youth Administration*, Administrative reports of NYA in Arkansas, 8, 12-14; National Youth Administration, *State of Arkansas Fiscal Report, 1935-1938*, Administrative reports of NYA in Arkansas, 2; Carl Buchanan, Transcript of radio speech at KARK, Little Rock, Administrative reports of NYA in Arkansas, 3.

This area provided young people with jobs within a variety of public service areas beyond their local services.

4. Research projects.

Under this project youth were employed on the promotion of interest in local history and cataloging local records.

Resident training projects under the NYA were implemented in Arkansas by early 1935 and possibly the first such project nationwide was situated on the campus of Arkansas Polytechnic College in Russellville. Much like the CCC camps the projects were designed for group living environments with an emphasis on work training. Such projects were for boys and girls but boys' resident centers included construction work while girls' centers concentrated mainly on secretarial and homemaking skills.

The resident training project at Dierks, established in 1938 introduced a distinctive feature to the program with its "portable village." Mobile units for housing, cooking, dining and recreation provided shelter at the center while administrative, sanitary and educational needs were met by mobile offices, a library, bathrooms, study hall and a shop. An early experiment in recycled housing, the units were meant to be moved to new centers as needed. Other centers for males and females utilized abandoned CCC camp buildings.²⁹

In 1938 the Works Program recorded that in the past fiscal year 6,500 out-of-school youths had been assisted under the program and the total was split between 4,333 boys and 2,167 girls. The Student Aid Program calculated that 6,800 – 3,800 boys and 3,000 girls – were the recipients of funds for work. From 1935-1938 federal funds expended toward NYA work projects in Arkansas totaled \$1,612,427.04 while matching funds from co-sponsors came to \$533,586.



Boy's NYA resident center

²⁹Edwin Dean, Transcript of speech to Camden Lions, Camden Rotary, Arkadelphia Rotary, Administrative Reports of NYA in AR; War Manpower Commission, *A History of the National Youth Administration*, 10-11, 15; National Youth Administration, *State of Arkansas: Fiscal Report, 1938-1939*, Administrative Reports of NYA in AR, 18; Buchanan, Radio Speech at KARK, 1-2.

The typical Arkansas NYA construction, maintenance or remodeling project was completed by a crew of 20 to 30 youths and by circa 1943 the state program had completed 87 school buildings and erected 44 shop buildings, 67 vocational agriculture buildings, 50 home economics cottages, 15 teacherages and 36 gymnasiums on educational campuses across the state. The total of all Arkansas buildings constructed by the NYA came to 447. Three-hundred-twenty-five miscellaneous projects involved repair and remodeling of deteriorated buildings.

A reorganization plan in July 1939 brought the NYA under the Federal Security Agency, which transferred the program from its categorization as an emergency program to one with a permanent governmental function. By 1938 Aubrey Williams had begun to restructure the program to include work duties that would benefit the defense movement and in 1940 the program's function changed to that of defense training agency for the provision of instilling youth with job skills applicable to war industries. In 1942 the NYA was formally placed under the authority of the War Manpower Commission.



NYA youth

In the year between July 1941 and June 1942 the NYA in Arkansas continued its regular projects while orchestrating a tactical change to defense training and war industry projects. Winter 1941 saw a total of 6,198 enrollees broken down into 3,820 in regular "shops" and 2,378 in defense employment. Spring of the next year there were 6,545 enrolled in the program including 5,198 in regular work and 1,347 in defense work. Enrollment in the state program dwindled by 1942 because many young people moved out of state to take advantage of jobs on war construction assignments offering higher rates of pay. As a large part of the population were leaving their hometowns to enlist in the military, local jobs in retail and restaurant work became available, which were then filled by former NYA youths.

Prior to 1941 the NYA had taken hits from critics in the National Education Association (NEA) who feared that the program was trying to centralize education, and labor leaders who saw it as a threat to veterans' chances at a fair wage. Americans

confronted with the totalitarian regimes of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin were suspicious of the NYA's collective character while at the same time the nation's leaders were starting to concentrate on culling government spending. The approval ratings of the program in Arkansas remained favorable and monthly activity reports from 1935 to 1939 as well as the 1943 final report of the NYA for Arkansas maintained that it had garnered constructive public opinion locally throughout its implementation. Despite reconfiguring the program's format to meet the needs of the War and Williams' unwavering defense to congressional leaders in the early 1940s, the need for re-allocation of funds for defense called for the liquidation of the NYA in July 1943.³⁰

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION (WPA)

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was visualized as a return-to-work program plan by the Roosevelt administration and an opportunity for the nation to distance itself from the relief rolls, seen as a dead end as far as a resolution to unemployment (The title of the program was changed to the Works Projects Administration in 1939 under Reorganization Plan No. I and the agency became one of several placed under the Federal Works Agency). The ERA had been providing work relief in Arkansas since 1934 but it was not seen by the state administrator as being ultimately successful and a work program was perceived as the best measure to not only boost the economy, but also restore useful employment and a sense of normalcy.

Roosevelt launched the WPA in 1935 under the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, which also included a federal works program. The works program encompassed all emergency public works, non-federal PWA projects, the CCC, a federal-state highway program and regular federal department projects. The WPA was one of three new agencies also provided by the Act. Unlike the ERA and CWA, which provided funds for direct and work relief, the WPA strictly financed work relief activities, but the requirement that projects were to benefit the public health and welfare was similar to the goal of the earlier programs. The WPA was further differentiated from the ERA and the

³⁰ Tillman Morgan, *State of Arkansas Fiscal Report, 1935-1938*, Administrative Reports of NYA in Arkansas, 1938, 2; War Manpower Commission, *A History of the National Youth Administration*, 15, 29, 36-37; Boyle, "How FDR's New Deal for Youth Got Decked," 6.

CWA by the fact that it maintained projects in concert with local and state governments, though they were managed with local agency staff and budgets.

The WPA was directed by Federal Emergency Relief Administrator Harry Hopkins until 1939 when he was replaced by Colonel F.C. Harrington. The chain of command was then split into three levels: regional offices, state administrations and district offices. W.R. Dyess was installed as the Arkansas Administrator of the Works Progress Administration until his death in 1936; his executive secretary, Floyd Sharp, succeeded him. As such, Dyess and Sharp were responsible for public relations and public contacts while administrative regulation and office management was handled by the deputy administrator, H.C. Baker. Eight district headquarters were placed at Jonesboro, Pine Bluff, Little Rock, Russellville, Fort Smith, Camden, Hope and Batesville and four major divisions further oversaw the program within the state: Women's and Professional (non-construction projects), Operations (construction projects), Finance and Employment. Two divisions added in 1941 were the Re-employment and Training Division (responsible for vocational training and employment in public and private sectors) and the Supply Division.³¹

THE CHARACTER OF THE WPA

The WPA is often confused with the PWA; however, it differed in several key areas. The intent of the WPA was to remove people from the relief rolls and, as long as necessary, retain them on work-relief; in the meantime the PWA was formed to promote private employment whether an economic emergency existed or not. Funding from annual Emergency Relief Appropriation Acts consisted of federal grants only and was dispensed through the WPA while the PWA provided grants and loans. The sponsor would sometimes pay small amounts for materials and equipment but the bulk of the cost would be borne by the federal government. WPA project types encompassed non-construction projects for white-collar workers in addition to construction projects; PWA

³¹ Hopkins, *Spending to Save*, 166; Works Projects Administration, *United States Government Manual, Works Projects Administration*, (Washington D.C.: Works Projects Administration, 1939), 386; Works Projects Administration, *Administrative History of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Civil Works Administration, and the Work Projects Administration*, Final Report of the WPA in Arkansas, 54-55, 57; Works Projects Administration, *Final Report of the Arkansas Work Projects Administration*, (Little Rock: 1943), Final Report of the WPA in Arkansas, 1, 6-7, 54; Wikipedia, "Harry Hopkins," Online article found at www.wikipedia.org, accessed 26 May 2006.

concentrated only on construction jobs. Estimates on PWA construction were required to be more than \$25,000 and by 1939 WPA funds were designated for smaller projects with a cap of \$25,000. The source of WPA funding through annual appropriations influenced the size of building projects undertaken as administrators felt that they would need more than a year to plan and effect larger tasks.

The primary character of the WPA as a construction program was used to advantage by Dyess and Sharp in Arkansas. The state level of the agency acknowledged that with 80% of the labor force being agricultural, there was a need to utilize rural labor in activities that would revitalize their communities and boost the economy; such as, farm-to-market roads, rural schools and area facilities. Sharp noted that with the completion of 11,000 miles of county roads by 1943 and local school improvements under the program, citizens of rural areas of the state were exhibiting an interest in their surroundings, maintaining their homes, barns and fences and introducing soil conservation, thus demonstrating the strength of such recovery efforts.³²

In August of 1935 the Arkansas state comptroller released \$2,313,441 in federal funds, commencing 150 WPA projects and employing 30,000 people. Seventy-five percent of the work force was placed in the construction or Operations Division and 25 percent were employed in the non-construction, or Women's and Professional Division. Roads and street projects employed the majority of WPA applicants over the lifetime of the program in Arkansas, utilizing 65% of total labor. Buildings followed with 12%, public utilities used 10% and parks and landscaping and health and sanitation each used 5% of the labor force. Other WPA project categories included conservation, transportation, education, professional, service duties and sewing.

General disorganization prevailed at the beginning of the program because of the need to quickly put large numbers of people to work, which resulted in several projects

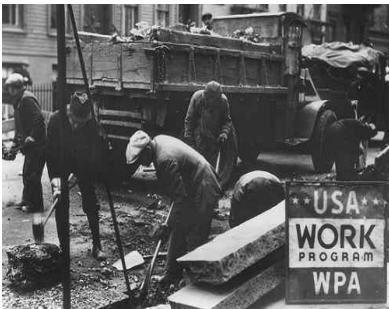


WPA publicity

³² Isakoff, *The Public Works*, 25-26; Works Projects Administration, *Administrative History*, 57; Work Projects Administration, *Final Report*, 2, 5.

being called off within the first year of operation in the state. Order was eventually asserted and a definite outline of procedure was put into practice. To receive approval for a job, WPA district offices were initially contacted by project sponsors for consideration of eligibility, labor and finances. If all was agreeable to both parties, the district or state office would assess the project situation for available labor and materials and check for feasibility of the work site. If approved, agency engineers would submit an application to the national administrator's office and the Budget Bureau, and then it would go on to the president for his signature. However, before the state office would approve any work, area or district engineers had to confirm that the project was on public property and was to ultimately serve the public. The chief purpose of all WPA project inspections was to substantiate that the citizens would indeed be the beneficiaries of the advantages offered by such undertakings.

Once a WPA project was approved, requisitions for workers were submitted to the Division of Employment. Those who had been previously certified with the division



WPA workers

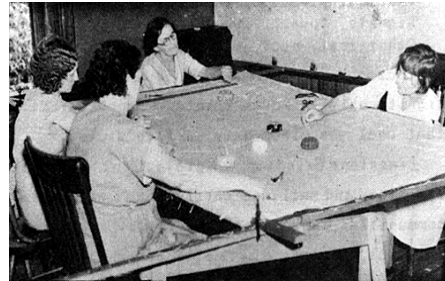
were placed in a pool of workers designated as “available for assignment,” which eliminated down time for labor searches and allowed operations to begin as soon as possible. Occupational classifications were listed as skilled, unskilled, intermediate, professional and technical. Those chosen for jobs were selected on the basis of relative need, qualifications for particular functions and geographical distance to the job site for the worker. Accurate and efficient provision of relief in the state was made easier if qualified WPA labor in Arkansas was placed according to their previous experience through certification via local welfare agencies, home visits and reference checks.³³

The majority of applicants in the state were from the agricultural sector followed by those from the construction and vocational areas. Women and white-collar workers comprised a major share of WPA applicants as well, which required the consideration of additional job types since most such people in the state had not been engaged in industrial

³³ “First Money Released by WPA for State,” *Independent* (Newport), 08 August 1935, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 5; “Arkansas Gets \$43,000,000 of WPA in 4 Years,” *El Dorado Sunday News*, 24 July 1938, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 4; Work Projects Administration, *Final Report*, 8, 10-11, 40-42, 45.

work even though many performed labor of some form. Nonetheless, desperation drove those who were not qualified for construction work to engage in “pick and shovel” jobs. The fact that they were not being placed in areas that fostered their skills in architecture, music, law, education or art added to the pall of the Depression and so the administration managed to add some diversification, as it had previously with the CWA.

The Women’s and Professional Division organized in July 1935, was the earliest manifestation of this type of work within the WPA. Sewing rooms consisting 100 percent of women from ERA client rolls, were continued under the WPA as were other former ERA project types such as home visits, nursing, gardening and canning, adult education, library work and Kiddie Kamps for tubercular children.



Sewing room

In 1936 white-collar programs involving indexing and surveying of city and county records, and inventorying historic resources began. The local sponsors of these types of jobs purposely excluded women workers in any position at the beginning of the program, as the national office hoped to avoid bad publicity for hiring “too many women.” As a result, the level of female employment through the WPA was limited to one-sixth of the total rolls nationally. The Arkansas offices maintained the practice of largely rejecting women workers until 1939 when females overwhelmingly infiltrated the ranks of non-construction jobs.³⁴

PREPARATION FOR LIQUIDATION

By 1937 Arkansas had a new governor, Carl Bailey, who exhibited more liberal tendencies than Futrell and was more accepting of New Deal programs; however, he had inherited the inability of the state to match grants and repay loans. Just as Bailey was installed in office, Roosevelt reduced WPA expenditures causing the elimination of 13,959 Arkansans from the WPA rolls between 1936 and 1937. This caused an economic downturn and per-capita income in the state fell by \$20. WPA deputy administrator Aubrey Williams wrote to suffering St. Francis County farmers in November 1938 that

³⁴ Works Projects Administration, *Final Report*, 12; Rose, *Put To Work*, 101.

the federal government was reducing spending in order to stretch its funds through the appropriation period.

Roosevelt recognized by spring 1939 that a reduction in WPA expenditures was not yet the answer for the nation and the conflict in the Pacific was introducing new issues that needed to be addressed, so he proposed to Congress a \$9,000,000,000 budget for 1940 in order to continue recovery efforts and bolster defense. Specifically, he asked for \$875,000,000 for continuance of the WPA from February to June 30, 1939. Congress approved a reduced appropriation of \$725,000,000 for finance of WPA through July 1st of that year, which stalled Arkansas rolls at 52,000 for the months of February and March. A supplemental appropriation of \$100,000,000 for the WPA was passed by the Senate but by the end of March, Floyd Sharp had been instructed by Harrington that there were to be no new clients added to the Arkansas rolls and to accept no replacements unless they met certain criteria.³⁵

In the summer months of 1939 the Roosevelt Administration began plans for a restructuring of the Works Progress Administration. A house appropriations subcommittee submitted that the WPA reduce its size and distance itself from its “social welfare” character. Consequently the committee proposed some changes to the program including a 60-day lay-off of WPA clients listed on the rolls for 15 months in order to stimulate a rise in private employment, the suspension or elimination of some white-collar projects (these were ultimately retained) and a name change to Works Projects Administration. The Works Progress Administration went out of existence June 1, 1939 when Roosevelt signed a new federal relief bill. This led to the shut-down of all WPA project activities in Arkansas for four days in order to establish new regulations in field offices.

³⁵ Rison, “Arkansas During the Great Depression,” 159; “WPA Funds Are Running Low,” *Forrest City Times Herald*, 22 November 1938, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 4; “State WPA to Delay Firing,” *The Rogers Daily News*, 09 February 1939, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 1; “Freezing of WPA Rolls in State in Effect,” *Fort Smith Southwest American*, 15 March 1939, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 4; “WPA Expenditures in State in 1938 Are Announced,” *Fort Smith Southwest American*, 01 January 1939, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 4; “More Than Two Billion Dollars,” *Fort Smith Southwest American*, 15 April 1939, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 4.

Before the start-up of the new program Sharp publicized some changes in the state set up:

1. Reduction of WPA rolls facilitated in part by mandatory dismissals of WPA workers continuously employed for 18 months for a 30-day period with no guarantee of re-hire
2. Establishment of a 130-hour work month and a security wage, providing pay even if a project was postponed by uncontrollable issues.
3. Requirement that workers take jobs offered at prevailing wages or forfeit the job
4. Formation of the Re-employment and Training Division, which ascertained the qualifications of workers for certain jobs and performed training for those who were not eligible. Concentration of the division was on training for defense jobs and organization of vocational schools
5. Monthly employment quotas for the state, amounts differing by county³⁶

As the program began to wind down in the state Floyd Sharp offered a capitulation of the WPA project types and totals of structures erected across the state up to 1939. Program reports listed 773 new buildings, reconstruction or rehabilitation of 587 buildings and 45 additions. Forty percent of total WPA construction was represented by new schools at 297 and the erection of 81 gymnasiums and 34 stadiums, grandstands and bleachers. Recreational activities accounted for 29% of program construction with 8 new community auditoriums and facilities including 3 fairgrounds and rodeo grounds, 16 playgrounds, 38 athletic fields 73 tennis courts, 14 swimming pools, 2 wading pools, 4 bandshells, 2 outdoor theaters and 1 golf course. Field houses, pavilions, shelters and lodges were also constructed by the WPA. Additional structure types were 16 hospitals, 3 jails, 4 fire stations, 29 public garages, 21 storage buildings and 5 armories with the number of new “miscellaneous” public buildings placed at 153.

State public utility construction provided 11 new plants consisting of 2 incinerator plants, 3 pumping stations, 5 sewage treatment plants and 1 water treatment plant. The

³⁶ “60-day Vacation for WPA Workers Part of Program,” *Star Progress* (Wynne), 01 June 1939, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 1; “Arkansas Rushes Work Organizing New Relief Body,” *Sentinel-Record* (Hot Springs), 02 July 1939, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 2; “WPA Will Seek Jobs for All Relief Clients,” *Heber Springs Times*, 10 July 1939, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 1.

WPA also provided 31 miles of water mains, aqueducts and distribution lines and 33 miles of sanitary and storm sewers. Workers installed 730 water consumer connections and 287 sewerage connections, dug 34 wells, built 10 tanks and cisterns and 800 manholes and catch-basins. Rural areas of the state received 49,731 sanitary privies and 100 miles of drainage ditches were dug.

Between 1933 and 1938 Arkansas had received \$445,051,649 in federal expenditures including grants and loans. The 1938 expenditure on the WPA in the state came to \$41,594,948 and out of that total \$15,179,819 was disbursed in wage payments to program workers. At the beginning of that year the number of enrollees rose from a low of 17,069 in October 1937 to 23,632 workers in the spring of 1938 and by November the number topped at 56,351. Total WPA expenditures in the state from 1935 to the change in 1939 stood at \$70,573,247 and workers received \$8,092,013. The peak of employment in February 1939 was 53,110 and the low in September was 31,378. WPA allocations in 1940 came to \$19,856,008 and worker wages totaled \$17,583,792.

LIQUIDATION OF THE WPA

By 1941 the concentration of the WPA and the nation was on defense jobs, leading to a downsizing of the program. A Special Economy Committee called for a reduction of \$1,131,075,000 on spending for non-defense projects and advocated the elimination of the CCC and NYA. The first order for cutbacks in Arkansas affected those jobs that were using materials and labor that were essential for defense. At that time Floyd Sharp extended the use of all WPA facilities to the War and Navy departments and only beneficial construction would be carried on in localities with no opportunities for military and private industry or farming work. Defense related jobs included camp roads and buildings, defense industry facilities and airport updates to aid movement of military aircraft.³⁷

³⁷ "Most of State Benefited by WPA Projects," *Pine Bluff Herald*, 21 March 1940, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 22; "Government Agencies Have Spent \$445,051,649 in State During Past Five Years," *Forrest City Times Herald*, 12 October 1938, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 4; "\$70,573,247 Spent by WPA in Arkansas," *Dermott News*, 27 July 1939, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 1; "\$26,000,000 Spent by WPA in State," *Fort Smith Southwest Times-Record*, 31 December 1939, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 4; *Texarkana Gazette*, 26 December 1941, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 8; *The Arkansas Gazette*, 13 February 1940, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 6; "WPA on Full Time War Program," *Bentonville Review*, 12 December 1941, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 8.

Governor Carl Bailey felt that Arkansas was in a strategic position for approval of WPA military projects because of potential troop movements across the state in every cardinal direction. To take advantage of this he presented Floyd Sharp with a list of 11 military defense projects for the state from the military and highway departments in 1940. Federal expenditures of roughly \$77,292,000 was proposed with a breakdown of \$75,625,000 to go to improvements on federal trunk line highways with military importance, \$393,000 for a 63-mile gravel road and wooden bridge offering access to the cinnabar mines in Pike County and \$1,274,000 for construction and renovation required by the Arkansas National Guard. The breakdown of military department projects was for construction of six National Guard armories at Little Rock, Prescott, Walnut Ridge, Hope, Russellville and Forrest City; renovation of five armories at Fayetteville, Harrison, Mena, Monticello and Clarksville and improvements to Camp Joseph T. Robinson. The state also requested \$8,000,000 for a four-lane bridge across the Mississippi River to Memphis, and expansion of US 70 to three lanes from Memphis to Lonoke and four lanes from Lonoke past Little Rock.

The Re-employment and Training Division of the WPA assisted the state's unemployed through education that presented them with industrial skills they could utilize to find employment in the private sector. By 1940 the division had opened three new defense training schools in collaboration with the state department of education in Fort Smith - training for work on internal combustion engines; El Dorado - sheet metal work instruction, and Jonesboro - welding. In 1941 the war department chose three cities in Arkansas for location of defense plants; a proving ground for testing of shells and materials in Hope, a picric acid plant in Marche and a fuse and detonator plant at Jacksonville.³⁸

The total of Arkansans registered with the state employment service as available for defense work was placed at 69,600 in April 1941. Twenty-eight-thousand were employed at the time on WPA projects while 19,000 were placed on waiting lists. The number of Arkansans projected to be employed at the two new Pulaski County plants was

³⁸ "Governor Bailey Submits \$77,000,000 Defense Program for Arkansas to WPA," *El Dorado Daily News*, 16 June 1940, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 4; "Training Schools to be Opened for WPA Workers," *Texarkana Gazette*, 17 August 1940, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 2; "Proving Field Near Hope and Picric Plant at Marche Are Assured by War Department," *Log Cabin Democrat*, 07 June 1941, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 2.

placed at 9,000; thirty percent was comprised of women workers. By the next year the efforts of the WPA to fit workers into new niches created by the war shrank the reservoir of laborers awaiting jobs to its lowest numbers since the implementation of the program in Arkansas. The rolls in the state reached a low in October 1942 of 7,500 from a peak of 56,205 in 1938.

The improvement of the economic situation due to military industries and the subsequent drop in WPA waiting lists nationwide spurred Roosevelt to call for the



Female defense workers

complete liquidation of the relief program in December 1942 and State WPA Administrator Floyd Sharp was instructed to facilitate the liquidation phase of the program. Those jobs that were considered necessary for the defense effort or the welfare of the state were continued under other government agencies or through new sponsorship.

The deadline for the elimination of the program was fixed at May 1st for every state and only the process of micro-filming final accounts would continue past that date. Any government sponsored projects – including those of the Army and Navy - that needed to be extended would have to be independently financed and staffed. Soldiers received the services of women from WPA sewing rooms who transferred their skills to darning enlistees' socks and mending their shirts while equipment utilized by the program was transferred to the Army, Navy and Public Building depots. Electric irons, lumber, wheelbarrows, surveyor's instruments, safety goggles, rubber boots and sheet-metal sign facings used to line temporary buildings were shipped to the troops while broken tools and unusable metal were put in a scrap metal pile. With such a symbolic gesture the WPA came to an end.³⁹

³⁹ "Essential WPA Jobs to go to Other Agencies," *Arkansas Democrat*, 04 October 1942, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 9; "Proving Field," *Log Cabin Democrat*; "WPA Program to be Liquidated by FDR's Order," *Arkansas Democrat*, 04 December 1942, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 9; "WPA Will go out of Existence in Every State May 1," *The Pine Bluff Commercial*, 23 January 1943, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 9; "Women of WPA Sewing Room Projects May go to Work for Army," *The Pine Bluff Commercial*, 17 February 1943, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 9; "WPA Equipment Put to Use in War Projects," *Paragould Daily Press*, 19 February 1943, Floyd Sharp Scrapbook 9.

SUMMARY

In the mid-1940s the New Deal in Arkansas was effectively replaced with improved job prospects offered by the war effort and a diversified economy that allowed its citizens to learn new skills and truly enjoy the benefits of relief and recovery. After many long years men and women who had experienced the continuous stress of deprivation and poor health were able to provide basics like food, medicine and clothing for their families. Private businesses in the state thrived on federal support, further elevating the buying power of Arkansans. With this new purchasing strength and increased prospects the voices that once pleaded “Mr. Frutrell (sic) I am asking you in the name of suffering humanity to do something for us,” were replaced with those that advocated a state slogan of “Land of Opportunity.”⁴⁰

Although the New Deal had come to the end of its tenure in the state and the nation, amenities and buildings provided by various relief programs since 1933 were incorporated into the fabric of this new life for Arkansas. The water tanks, bridges and rock walls built as New Deal projects may seem mundane objects that do not exhibit any particular architectural beauty and are unlikely to be marked with identifying plaques; nonetheless, their significance to the state is inestimable. The necessity for such programs should be recognized as should the results that ultimately contributed to the architectural and environmental character of Arkansas and the character of its people who were offered the chance to help themselves through the New Deal.

⁴⁰ Ben Eredante to Junius Marion Futrell, Huntington, 05 June 1935, J.M. Futrell Papers, FERA Correspondence, A-H.

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