

Review Essay Series

KANSAS HISTORY AND THE NEW DEAL ERA

by Peter Fearon

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Peter Fearon has added a wonderfully researched and written article to our review essay series. He tackles the New Deal, an important topic that has been explored little, even though it is one of the most significant of the twentieth century. Because of his strong background in the area, Professor Fearon has managed to meld together a keen examination of the existing scholarship with much needed new information on the New Deal in Kansas. Just as significantly, he also indicates new directions that historical studies might take.

One of the most significant arguments in the article is the ultimate importance of the enormous infusion of money from the federal government into Kansas. The survival of many, for example, ultimately rested on the \$119 million Kansas received for Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs that put people to work. Another related point is that the federal government worked to see that the needy—such as African Americans, women, and workers in mining and other depressed industries—received enough help to sustain life. In the same vein Social Security supplied money to support the elderly, blind, dependent children, and the needy for whom there was no work. At the same time Fearon points out that Roosevelt, like many Kansas politicians, found the dole

The Great Depression, which began in 1929 and was at its worst in 1933, was the most serious economic shock experienced by the United States during the twentieth century. Contemporaries soon realized that its effect was even more devastating than the savage slump of 1920–1921. All modern historians are familiar with the indicators used to measure the severity of America's greatest depression. Estimates of the numbers unemployed show a deeply disturbing rise from less than 4 percent of the labor force in 1929 to approximately 25 percent in 1933. Joblessness remained the curse of the depression decade. Even in 1937, the best year for the economy during the thirties, unemployment was an unacceptable 15 percent and many had been jobless for more than a year. Deflation—that is, a rapid drop in prices—added to the general misery. A catastrophic decline in farm income was an inevitable consequence of the sudden fall in crop and livestock prices. Many farmers who had taken out mortgages when times were more favorable found it impossible to discharge their debts and, as a result, faced the stress of foreclosure. The nation's financial system went into meltdown. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered his stunning inaugural address in March 1933, governors had already closed the banks in most states.¹

Although knowledge of national policy is essential for an understanding of the New Deal's aims and philosophy, the multitude of programs that began life in Washington could only operate with the close cooperation of state and local officials. The changing relationship between the cen-

Peter Fearon, professor of modern economic and social history at the University of Leicester, United Kingdom, recently published *Kansas in the Great Depression: Work Relief, the Dole, and Rehabilitation with the University of Missouri Press*.

1. Full but readable accounts of the economic history of the depression can be found in Lester V. Chandler, *America's Greatest Depression, 1929–1941* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Peter Fearon, *War, Prosperity and Depression: The U.S. Economy 1917–1945* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1987); Gene Smiley, *Rethinking the Great Depression* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).



WPA logo. Photolithograph, 1936, courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

distasteful and preferred programs such as the WPA that provided work relief. New Deal programs were complex and unprecedented, however, and they did not always work. Some Kansans responded with strikes, demonstrations, and riots.

The New Deal also created programs that were aimed at keeping people on the land in this rural, agricultural state. Initiatives such as a mortgage moratorium saved many farms. Payment programs, which sought to reduce production in order to drive prices up, as well as the Cattle Purchase Program, kept many farmers and ranchers solvent. Unfortunately, farm workers and tenant farmers fared less well, while larger more wealthy owners received the greatest amount of assistance from the federal government.

Finally the changing relationship between the federal government and Kansas is a very important but understudied topic. The monies that came from Washington are only a part of the story. Professor Fearon also argues that the impact of state actions significantly influenced what the federal government did. One example is the excellent work done in Kansas to reform welfare administration at the state and local levels. In addition, New Deal programs brought enormous lasting change to the state's physical infrastructure: federal plans and funding greatly expanded the highway system and created many new lakes, parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, bridges, sewers, and public buildings.

The impact of the New Deal has been important in Kansas and was a major force in moving Kansas further into the national mainstream. As Professor Fearon has shown here, the money helped prevent major catastrophes for many people and policies generated at the federal level transformed many aspects of Kansas life. It is worth reiterating that Kansas made significant contributions to the New Deal as well.

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tral government, states, and localities during the depression decade is a fascinating area of study that, unfortunately, has attracted the attention of too few scholars.² Congress approved massive increases in public spending that could not have been anticipated when Roosevelt was inaugurated. In particular, Washington funded a variety of relief and farm programs, which transformed the lives of many Kansans. It is not surprising that as the federal government paid the piper, it was entitled to call the tune. State administrations were obliged to obey new rules and even to amend their constitutions in order to ensure that the assistance on which they were becoming increasingly reliant continued to flow. On the other hand, although the federal government expanded during the New Deal, it was never large enough to operate programs without grass roots participation. Compared to the major western European industrial powers—Germany, France, and the United Kingdom—the central government in the United States was small. Washington did not possess the army of civil servants required to centrally manage a multitude of initiatives. Consequently, the response of Kansas institutions to an increase in federal involvement is just as significant as the reaction of the public. It was also possible, however, for states to take the initiative in policy making and it would be wrong to assume that in all cases Washington led the way. Regional studies provide an essential insight into the complexities of local reaction to crises.

One of the factors that makes a study of the New Deal in Kansas particularly fascinating is that from early 1933 through 1936 a Republican administration controlled the state. Indeed, the Kansas governor, Alfred "Alf" Mossman Landon, was the Republican candidate for the presidency in 1936.³ Political tensions inside Kansas often erupted as Democrats fought for ownership of popular New Deal programs and for control of the patronage that accompanied these initiatives. However, historians see the development of a working relationship between Topeka and Washington as the most significant issue during this period of unprecedented federal intervention. Were there, for example, significant ideological differences between New Dealers and Kansas Republicans that ultimately disadvantaged the state and its citizens? Or did the state's Republicans accept the central thrust of the New Deal's reform, recovery, and relief measures, doing all that they could to maximize federal assistance?

2. Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); D. Jerome Tweton, *The New Deal at the Grass Roots: Programs for the People of Otter Tail County, Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988). These books use very different historical methods, but both are good examples of local studies.

3. As is well known, Roosevelt soundly defeated Landon in 1936, when the Kansan won neither his state nor his own home county. The best biography of Landon is still, Donald R. McCoy, *Landon of Kansas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966). Valuable statistical information relating to Kansas politics and concise biographical information is provided in, Homer E. Socolofsky, *Kansas Governors* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990); also useful is Francis W. Schruben, *Kansas in Turmoil, 1930–1936* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969).

HISTORIANS AND THE NEW DEAL

Much of the New Deal was a concerted attempt to engineer a rapid economic recovery, to bring about a revival in farm income, and to assist, until prosperity returned, the millions of people whose lives had been blighted by the capricious slump. A myriad of policies called for widespread intervention by the federal government on a scale never before witnessed during peacetime, and for congressional approval for levels of public expenditure that were also without precedent.⁴ At the beginning of this bold venture it was not assumed that the rules and regulations, which were deemed essential to tackle the immediate crisis, would become permanent. If the New Deal's economic recovery strategy was successful, unemployment would disappear and there would be no need for a vast state apparatus to provide relief. Likewise, farmers would be able to cope with the vagaries of the market once financial stability and a fair share of the nation's wealth was theirs. In fact, the New Deal was unable to deliver full employment or prices that satisfied farmers.

The failure to generate immediate economic recovery and the need to address U.S. Supreme Court decisions that attacked key parts of the New Deal program, were amongst the reasons why the administration felt the need to periodically embrace fresh initiatives. Indeed, the policies introduced in 1933 had changed radically by 1940 to the extent that most scholars detect two, or even three New Deals. The first of these took place between 1933 and 1935, when the benefits of planned scarcity for both farm and factory seemed the way forward. The second New Deal was introduced in 1935.⁵ The country's welfare system underwent a radical change, legislation was introduced to assist the growth of organized labor, and industrial policy now stressed the benefits of competition rather than monopolistic



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4. John Joseph Wallis and Wallace E. Oates, "The Impact of the New Deal on American Federalism," in *The Defining Moment: The Great Depression and the American Economy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Michael D. Bordo, Claudia Goldin and Eugene N. White (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 155-72.

5. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 162-65.

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cooperation. The largest and most influential of all New Deal programs, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), was developed as a part of the second New Deal to return the unemployed to the work force. The serious depression that developed during 1937 and 1938 persuaded the president that spending, rather than a strict adherence to balancing the federal budget or a return to planning, was needed to revive the economy. This Keynesian inspired approach could be seen as a third New Deal. Although a three-part division is a helpful tool for understanding the complexities of this period, it should be noted that the New Deal agricultural programs exhibited a greater degree of coherence than a tripartite division would suggest, as did the administration's commitment to reform legislation. The marked policy shifts after 1933 were seen by Roosevelt's supporters as a praiseworthy example of pragmatic, flexible, non-doctrinaire policymaking. His opponents, however, criticized the president for a damaging commitment to political opportunism, for vacillation, and for failing to develop a consistent philosophy that appreciated the positive role of private business in the American economy. Few contemporaries were neutral in their view of Roosevelt. The president inspired affection and admiration amongst the majority but by a significant conservative minority he was seen as divisive, manipulative, and mendacious.

Historians too have differed significantly in their judgment of Roosevelt's peacetime presidency.⁶ There is widespread agreement that FDR was at the very center of the New Deal, and that the Democrats gained great political victories, especially in 1936, primarily because the electorate enthusiastically embraced Roosevelt's programs. However, judgment on the president's character and of the short and long term effects of the legislation passed by Congress has attracted extreme forms of support and hostility. The earliest works on the New Deal were composed by historians who had lived through the depression years and still bore the scars inflicted by a direct experience of the suffering caused by unemployment and farm distress. They had witnessed first hand a traumatic period when it appeared that the market economy had failed the people, and they believed that supportive federal intervention was essential to provide a welfare safety net. The successful management of the wartime economy provided further evidence for policy makers who believed that the guiding hand of the state was essential for permanent economic stability. This cohort, who shared liberal sympathies, had a very positive view of the outcome of governmental intervention in a wide range of economic and welfare matters. The leading historians of this group, of which William E. Leuchtenburg and James McGregor Burns are excellent examples, were not uncritical. The president was accused of timidity and compromise when boldness in both social and economic policy was needed. Nevertheless, Roosevelt was viewed as a compassionate, indeed a visionary figure who had provided more than just a beacon of hope

6. Anthony J. Badger, "The New Deal," in *Encyclopedia of the Great Depression*, ed. Robert S. McElvaine (New York: Thomson Gale, 2002), 2:701-11.

for the downtrodden. The president understood that many fellow citizens were unable to care for themselves, and he had transformed the role of the federal government so that help for the vulnerable was available.⁷

Radical historians writing in the prosperous but troubled 1960s treated the New Deal less charitably. Seeing racial and economic injustice everywhere, they railed against FDR's initiatives which merely propped up capitalism instead of destroying it, provided only the minimum level of social assistance, and tolerated racial discrimination instead of sweeping it aside. These writers castigated New Dealers for failing to grasp the golden opportunity that the depression presented to permanently transform society.⁸ However, the stagflation of the 1970s and the trenchant intellectual attacks on Keynesianism by both monetarists and supply-siders encouraged another significant reappraisal of the New Deal. Policies designed to curb competition that could be defended in the 1930s were hard to justify when inflation rather than deflation was the problem. Moreover, liberalism itself reeled under a sustained attack and public opinion expressed clear support for low taxes, small government, and deregulation. By the 1990s conservatives had seized the opportunity and felt confident enough to accuse Roosevelt of actually prolonging the Great Depression by undermining business confidence, stimulating class hatred, showing contempt for the profit motive, and using his formidable political authority merely as a means to distribute patronage.⁹ Thus within a forty year period the New Deal had been vigorously assailed from opposite ends of the political spectrum.

To expect a transformation in a democratic society in such a short period is unrealistic. A more sensible course of action would be to recognize the unprecedented difficulties facing New Dealers and make appropriate allowances for them. For example, neither the statistical information nor the tools that modern economists would use to promote economic recovery were available during the 1930s. There were no national figures for unem-

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7. Examples of this approach can be found in, Leuchtenburg, *Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal*; James McGregor Burns, *The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956); Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous With Destiny* (New York: Little, Brown, 1990); Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal* (New York: Little, Brown, 1973).

8. Examples of this approach include, Paul K. Conkin, *The New Deal* (New York: Crowell, 1975); Gabriel Kolko, *Main Currents in Modern American History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Howard Zinn, ed., *New Deal Thought* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966). Most modern scholars find these criticisms unrealistic. For a more subtle and balanced critical analysis see, Jerold S. Auerbach, "New Deal, Old Deal, or Raw Deal: Some Thoughts on New Left Historiography," *Journal of Southern History* 35 (February 1969): 18-30; John Braeman, "The New Deal and the 'Broker State': A Review of Recent Scholarly Literature," *Business History Review* 4 (Winter 1972): 409-29; William J. Barber, *Designs Within Disorder: Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Economists, and the Shaping of Modern American Economic Policy, 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Colin Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor and Politics in America, 1920-1935* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

9. Jim Powell, *FDR's Folly: How Roosevelt and His New Deal Prolonged the Great Depression* (New York: Crown Forum, 2003), 89-103, 270-3; Jim Powell, "How FDR Prolonged the Great Depression," *CATO Policy Report* 25 (July / August 2003): 14-17; Robert Higgs, "Regime Uncertainty: Why the Great Depression Lasted So Long and Why Prosperity Resumed After the War," *Independent Review* 1 (Spring 1997): 561-90; Gary Dean Best, *Pride, Prejudice, and Politics: Roosevelt versus Recovery, 1933-38* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 218-33.



The Emergency Relief and Construction Act made \$300 million available as a loan to help states assist their destitute. Democratic Governor Harry Hines Woodring (right, with 1932 presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt and his running mate, Texas Congressman John Nance Garner) immediately established the Kansas Federal Relief Committee to coordinate submissions for aid from each of the state's 105 counties.

ployment and macroeconomic theory was in an embryonic state.¹⁰ New Dealers had to court Congress and cope with the resistance of conservative southern Democrats. They chose to promote high professional standards in the provision of relief, meet political challenges, recognize the lobbying power of numerous pressure groups, and provide assistance for the disadvantaged who could not rely on support from organized labor or organized commercial farmers. In the end, however, much of the New Deal was muddled, inconsistent, and with the benefit of hindsight, can be seen as counter productive in the fight against the depression. On the other hand, the people demanded action, and as both Anthony J. Badger and Robert McElvaine show, the bold experimentation, which FDR inaugurated, had a moral element that was admirable and deeply appreciated by many contemporaries.¹¹

THE NEW DEAL AND RELIEF

One issue that has remained at the core of New Deal debate is whether these FDR inspired initiatives were a genuine break with past practice, or were consistent with a traditional response to hard times. Using Kansas as an example shows that the state's relationship with the federal government first changed in the summer of 1932 when the Emergency Relief and Construction Act made \$300 million available as a loan to help states assist their destitute. This was a pioneering federal intervention, though Washington stressed that the loan, distributed via the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), was a supplement to local effort not a replacement for it. Governor Harry Hines Woodring, a Democrat, immediately established the Kansas Federal Relief Committee (KFRC) to coordinate submissions for aid from each of the state's 105 counties. These submissions, which are a valuable source for historians, show that many county relief budgets were heavily in deficit, tax revenues had fallen, and charitable donations were also in decline. The major urban centers bore the brunt of unemployment, but hard-

10. The best study of unemployment before the New Deal is Udo Sautter, *Three Cheers for the Unemployed: Government and Unemployment Before the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). The Kansas Department of Labor and Industry began collecting information on employment (but not unemployment) and payroll data in 1931. Peter Fearon, "From Self-Help to Federal Aid: Unemployment and Relief in Kansas, 1929-1932," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 13 (Summer 1990): 108-11; see John Joseph Wallis, "Employment in the Great Depression: New Data and Hypothesis," *Explorations in Economic History* 26 (Winter 1989): 45-72, to put Kansas in a national perspective. For a study of unemployment see, Richard J. Jensen, "The Causes and Cures of Unemployment in the Great Depression," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 19 (Spring 1989): 553-83.

11. This approach is seen at its best in Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-40* (London: MacMillan, 1989); Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Times Books, 1984).

ship was particularly evident in Crawford and Cherokee counties where an acute shortage of jobs and the prevalence of short-term, deep-shaft coal mining had led to distressing family poverty even before 1929. Between October 1932 and June 1933, Kansas borrowed \$2.6 million from the RFC, a sum almost as great as the total expenditure on relief from county funds for the whole of 1932.¹²

It is important to note that the KFRC fully supported the philosophy of the RFC, which emphasized work relief rather than dole, had a commitment to relate relief to means-tested need, and firmly adhered to the view that local communities should never shed their welfare responsibilities. The state committee further resolved that federal money would only be used to fund work relief; direct relief costs would be met by local funds and private charitable contributions. A concerted drive to professionalize the state's relief administration was spearheaded by the executive secretary of the KFRC, John Godfrey Stutz, who was responsible for the creation of a first-class welfare service in Kansas. Recruited from the League of Kansas Municipalities where he was executive director, Stutz saw himself as a civil servant whose job it was to provide first-class advice and to rigorously implement rules, rather than occupy the center stage.¹³ Stutz recognized the need for rapid improvement in the state's antiquated welfare provision and, using a combination of intelligence, energy, and high professional standards, he was able to move from aspiration to reality. This is an early example of federal influence on state practice.

In November 1932 Woodring was defeated by his Republican challenger, Alf Landon, in an extraordinarily close contest that featured the third party candidacy of Dr. John R. Brinkley. Landon campaigned on a platform that stressed the need for economy and he acted swiftly to implement cost saving measures in the state, which included cutting his own salary. The new governor displayed a skillful touch by supporting policies that emphasized continuity but also introducing others that were radical and imaginative. For example, he retained the KFRC, which had been appointed by his Democratic predecessor, but he also urged the legislature to adopt a new Emergency Relief Tax and a "cash basis" law that ensured balanced budgets for all of the state's spending units. Both the Republican governor and

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12. Kansas Emergency Relief Committee, *Public Welfare Services in Kansas: A Ten Year Report, 1924-1934*, Bulletin 127 (Topeka: The Kansas Emergency Relief Committee, 1934), 11-12, 481-85, 491-95; Fearon, "From Self-Help to Federal Aid," 120-21. For an interesting account of problems in Finney County, see Pamela Riney-Keherberg, "Hard Times, Hungry Years: The Failure of Poor Relief in Southwestern Kansas," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 15 (Autumn 1992): 154-67; Riney-Keherberg, *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994). A useful biography of Governor Woodring is Keith D. McFarland, *Harry H. Woodring: A Political Biography of FDR's Controversial Secretary of War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1975).

13. Randy Arndt, "NCL Founder, John Stutz, Passes the Century Mark," *Illinois Municipal Review* (February 1993): 20-21. As a result of Stutz's professionalism, KERC bulletins contain an enormous quantity of qualitative and quantitative information on the provision of welfare in Kansas and its counties.

Lawmakers reorganized the administration of the state's relief service in an innovative rather than merely responsive manner.

the new president were strongly in favor of balanced budgets.¹⁴ It was the Kansas "cash basis" law that enabled Landon to balance the state's budget and, as a result, receive nationally favorable publicity. However, it was the flow of federal funding that permitted state budget balancing without unacceptable social costs. Landon's commitment to balanced budgets did not prevent him proposing new taxes, although he stressed that his motive for doing so was his belief that without additional sources of revenue, Kansas would not be entitled to its full share of federal relief funds.¹⁵

Lawmakers reorganized the administration of the state's relief service in an innovative rather than merely responsive manner. Boards of county commissioners had their powers enhanced and minimum qualifications were imposed for poor commissioners and others responsible for the administration of welfare. A powerful stimulus for change was provided by the report of the Public Welfare Temporary Commission, which produced a devastating critique of the system on which distressed Kansans had relied during the worst years of the depression.¹⁶ The state legislature was also influenced by the prospect of further assistance from Washington, which members did not want to jeopardize. In fact, it is clear that a working relationship between Kansas and Washington was in place before the torrent of New Deal legislation began to flow, although Kansas legislators seized the initiative for reform before the New Deal's Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) sought to impose minimum administrative standards on the states. In reforming its welfare administration, then, Kansas must be commended for going further than most states in the adoption of higher professional standards than required by the RFC.

Frenetic legislative activity followed Roosevelt's inaugural address on March 4, 1933. The most significant elements of the first New Deal in relation to Kansas involved relief, farm policy, and bank reform and took the form of three federal initiatives: the FERA, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the Civil Works Administration (CWA), which operated briefly from November 1933 to March 1934. In May 1933 the FERA replaced the RFC as the new administration's principal relief agency. The major difference between the two bodies was that the FERA gave grants rather than loans to the states.¹⁷ However, like the RFC, the FERA supplied means-test-

14. Daniel R. Fusfeld, *The Economic Thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Origins of the New Deal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 229–30. For some insight into Dr. Brinkley, his gubernatorial campaigns, and more, see, among others, Francis W. Schruben, "The Wizard of Milford: Dr. J. R. Brinkley and Brinkleyism," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 14 (Winter 1991–1992): 226–45; R. Alton Lee, *The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002).

15. Peter Fearon, "Taxation, Spending, and Budgets: Public Finance in Kansas During the Great Depression," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 28 (Winter 2005–2006): 235–37; Fearon, "Alfred M. Landon: Budget Balancer," in *John Brown to Bob Dole: Movers and Shakers in Kansas History*, ed. Virgil W. Dean (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 204–216.

16. *Report of the Public Welfare Temporary Commission. State of Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, January 1933).

17. For an account of the background and the development of the FERA and CWA see Doris Carothers, *Chronology of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration May 12, 1933, to December 21, 1935*, WPA Research Monograph 6 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937). The best account of the FERA by a modern historian is William R. Brock, *Welfare, Democracy, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); the most lucid and informed

ed assistance; it supported work relief and opposed dole, it expected states to offer their destitute all possible support, in cash rather than kind, and it required states to improve the quality of their relief administrations. Landon and Stutz were comfortable with this philosophy. While the vast majority of states used FERA funds to assist both direct and work-relief clients, Kansas employed federal funds for work relief only. A special session of the legislature, meeting in October, increased the bond-raising powers of the counties and limited the use of these funds to work relief. The motivation was as it had been in the January session: to satisfy the FERA that Kansas was doing everything that was possible to assist its own destitute.¹⁸

During the summer of 1933 Stutz played the leading role in restructuring the state's welfare administration. By the end of the year, federal field agents reported to Harry Hopkins, director of the FERA, that the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC) was impressively staffed with graduates and exuded efficiency.¹⁹ From an early stage, Kansas policy makers danced to the federal tune. However, that would not by itself have guaranteed the successful implementation of an imaginative welfare structure. Kansas was fortunate that Stutz had the authority and the expertise to bring this about.

New Dealers were quick to recognize that the corrosive effects of unemployment could undermine the work ethic of the nation's youth. The CCC was a program for young men, usually from relief families, who voluntarily moved to camps where they were subject to military discipline. The federal government paid CCC enrollees thirty dollars each month, but of this between twenty-two and twenty-five dollars were sent by the War Department to their families. The



The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a program for young men, usually from relief families, who voluntarily moved to camps where they were subject to military discipline. Poster, ca. 1935, courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

description of its many programs remains, Theodore E. Whiting, *Final Statistical Report of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1942). In June 1934 the requirement that the RFC loans be repaid was waived.

18. M. Riggs McCormick, "Federal Emergency Relief Administration Grants," *Monthly Report of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935): 7-16; Message of the Governor, Special Session, October 1933 (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1933), 2-3. The United States had a greater commitment to work relief during the 1930s than any other country. The best literature on this topic is Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Edwin Amenta, Ellen Benoit, Chris Bonastia, Nancy K. Cauthen, and Drew Halfmann, "Bring Back the WPA: Work, Relief, and the Origins of American Social Policy in Welfare Reform," *Studies in American Political Development* 12 (Spring 1998): 1-56; William W. Bremer, "Along the 'American Way': The New Deal's Work Relief Programs for the Unemployed," *Journal of American History* 62 (December 1975): 636-52; Jonathon R. Kesslerman, "Work Relief Programs in the Great Depression," in *Creating Jobs: Public Employment Programs and Wage Subsidies*, ed. John Palmer (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1978).

19. Peter Fearon, "Kansas Poor Relief: The Influence of the Great Depression," *Mid-America: An Historical Review* 78 (Summer 1996): 169-70.

Programs for young men and women, some of which were residential, provided training for the world of work.

CCC was a universally popular initiative. Both Governor Landon and U.S. Senator Arthur Capper championed its attempts to combat soil erosion, assist water conservation, and raise morale. The counties were delighted that the remittances from enrollees usually resulted in the removal of their families from the relief rolls. By 1935 Kansas had twenty-two camps housing approximately five thousand young men.²⁰ Three of these were reserved for around five hundred African Americans, almost one third of whom came from Wyandotte County. The CCC escaped the reorganization of the welfare system in 1935 when a new agency, the National Youth Administration (NYA), was formed to assist youths who had been excluded from the CCC. Unlike the CCC, the NYA offered help to females. Its student aid program funded part-time employment for needy school, college, and graduate students to enable them to continue their education. Programs for young men and women, some of which were residential, provided training for the world of work. The assistance given to young people was bold and imaginative, even though Congress was miserly in its allocation of funds.²¹

Fortunately the state's welfare administration was robust enough to cope with the additional workload imposed by the CWA, which attempted to create work for all the unemployed not just those in need.²² At its peak in January 1934, the CWA employed 64,500 Kansans on a variety of work projects, mostly involving construction. The expansion of the highway system was the dominant activity, providing work for many unskilled men but very few women. Wage rates reflected those in the private sector and payment was far more generous than remuneration under the FERA, a fact that helps to explain the program's popularity. Indeed, over a five-month period the total CWA wage bill in Kansas was approximately \$11 million, all of which was delivered in cash. The Kansas relief administration managed the civil works program so effectively that Hopkins's office was able to congratulate Stutz and his colleagues for work "unexcelled in any state."²³

It is important to distinguish between two sorts of public assistance. Federal work relief, such as dispensed by the FERA or the WPA, paid a cash wage and was funded largely but not exclusively from Washington. Just taking the FERA as an example, approximately 72 percent of funding came from the central government, 26 percent from the counties, and a mere 2 percent from the state.²⁴ However, unemployed clients who could not se-

20. John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-42: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967) 13-19, 68-69, 103; KERC, Bulletin 127, 31-33; Kansas Emergency Relief Committee, *Public Welfare Service in Kansas, 1934*, Bulletin 289 (Topeka: The Kansas Emergency Relief Committee, 1935), 755-58; Kansas Emergency Relief Committee, *Public Welfare Service in Kansas, 1935*, Bulletin 355 (Topeka: The Kansas Emergency Relief Committee, 1936), 291.

21. Betty and Ernest Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth: The Story of the National Youth Administration* (New York: Viking Press, 1938), 273; "Helping Kansas Youth," *Kansas Social Welfare Journal* 1 (July 1938): 8-9, 16.

22. The most thorough account of the CWA is Bonnie Fox Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration, 1933-34: The Business of Emergency Unemployment in the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Jeff Singleton, *The American Dole: Unemployment, Relief and the Welfare State in the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), 132-33.

23. *Kansas Relief News-Bulletin*, no. 5 (May 21, 1934), 3-4; KERC, Bulletin 289, 11.

24. Whiting, *Final Statistical Report*, 307, table 18.

cure a place on a federal scheme, together with the destitute who were unable to work, had to rely on county relief, which was not only less generous than the sums available on federal programs, it was often provided only in the form of grocery or fuel orders. County relief was available only to applicants who satisfied residence requirements (in other words, they had a settlement) and was funded largely by returns from property taxes. It is understandable that the needy unemployed were distressed and angry if there was no room for them on federal projects and they were forced to rely on local assistance. Virtually all social workers opposed means testing, which was employed by both the FERA and the WPA, and they argued that the CWA should become a permanent fixture in the fight against the effects of unemployment. Landon was also an enthusiastic supporter, but the CWA proved too expensive and in April 1934 it was abandoned.²⁵ With its demise, means-tested relief returned.

A Kansas study shows that not only individuals but also states were means tested in order to ensure that they were making a full contribution to relief expenditure. Every month Washington required the states to collect and provide statistical information on the number receiving relief, the case load, the nature of relief operations, and a wide range of local economic factors. All the information was analyzed by FERA staff that forwarded their comments to Hopkins, who oversaw the monthly grants to each state.²⁶ This imposition forced the states to gather information systematically and it eventually enabled the FERA to produce a comprehensive national picture. The decision to both gather information and to distribute relief each month rather than over a longer period of time shows how committed New Dealers were to means testing and to keeping relief administrations on their toes. Unfortunately, every month in each Kansas county poor commissioners and caseworkers had to make a detailed examination of all relief claims, with disappointing results for many clients. Congress never allocated either the FERA or the WPA sufficient funding to provide work relief to all who were eligible. Indeed, over half the needy unemployed had to be consigned to county assistance and welfare officials had to make that painful decision. Social workers had to be sensitive and professionally expert to handle these problems fairly. They could not, of course, always avoid the anger of men and women who deeply resented their failure to secure prized federal relief.²⁷

The search for trained social workers was extremely competitive as all states strove to improve their welfare administrations. In Kansas this problem was addressed in a highly effective manner. For example, the KERC supplemented the salaries of welfare staff, thus making it easier to attract and retain the best. The state also organized in-house training and publicly

Congress never allocated either the FERA or the WPA sufficient funding to provide work relief to all who were eligible.

25. Jacob Fisher, *The Response of Social Work to the Depression* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing, 1980), 49–55; Alfred M. Landon to Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 16, 1934, FERA State Files, Kansas 1933–35, Kansas File, January–May 1934, RG69, National Archives.

26. M. Riggs McCormick, "Federal Emergency Relief Administration Grants," 7–16.

27. Peter Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression: Work Relief, the Dole and Rehabilitation* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 93–99.

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stated that merit would be the only basis for staff selection. By late 1935, 472 of the 602 welfare officials employed in the state had college degrees and approximately 80 percent of poor commissioners had been promoted through the ranks.²⁸ This Stutz-inspired drive for administrative efficiency attracted praise from federal field officers who provided a vital link between Washington and the states. Their intimate knowledge of the states for which they had responsibility enabled them to deliver a flow of detailed information to senior New Deal officials. Initially concerned about the emphasis that Kansas placed on work relief, these officers soon came to admire Stutz, whom they were quick to defend when Kansas Democrats attacked him. Indeed, federal field officers often drafted responses clearing Stutz of Republican bias in his administration of relief. The relationship of the field officers to both Kansas and Washington officials is an admirable illustration of the system of "parallel government," a thesis skillfully developed by William Brock.²⁹

The Kansas relief administration was praised by field officers for meeting the demands of the FERA, the CWA, and the State Transient Service.³⁰ However, even though the KERC ran like a well-oiled machine, there were some significant administrative problems at the county level, apparently undetected by federal officials. The most dramatic of these resulted in a serious riot of over three thousand of Wichita's unemployed during May 1934. Subsequent investigation revealed that corruption and gross managerial deficiencies in the Sedgwick County relief office had played a significant role in arousing the fury of relief clients. Stutz, who conceded that he had made a big mistake in supporting the poor commissioner, had no choice but to resort to mass firing. A detailed investigation of the Wyandotte County relief office undertaken in early 1936, which was the largest in the state, also uncovered disturbing administrative deficiencies.³¹

It is easy to understand the frustration of the unemployed that frequently boiled over into anger. Many of them formed unions and tried to influence policy through riots, demonstrations, and strikes. Unemployed men and women, who were denied relief by social workers because they were considered ineligible, joined forces with discontents that were eligible for federal work programs but could not secure a place because of funding shortages. The socially distressed needed continuous assistance from a high quality relief office, but it was impossible to guarantee administrative efficiency in all of the state's 105 county relief offices, as the examples quoted

28. KERC, Bulletin 355, 14–16.

29. Brock, *Welfare, Democracy, and the New Deal*, 171–203; Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 122–24.

30. Peter Fearon, "Relief for Wanderers: The Transient Service in Kansas, 1933–35," *Great Plains Quarterly* 26 (Fall 2006): 245–64; Richard B. Sheridan, "The College Student Employment Project at the University of Kansas, 1934–1943," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 8 (Winter 1985–1986): 206–16, covers another FERA special program.

31. Peter Fearon, "Riot in Wichita, 1934," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 15 (Winter 1992–1993): 266–79; Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 101–12; Eleanor D. Myers, Supervisor, Division of Public Assistance, "Report of Wyandotte County Relief Administration February–March 1936," in Papers of John G. Stutz, 327:5:45, Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

above testify. Although understandable, it was particularly unfortunate that the Kansas relief model thrust such great responsibility onto the counties, where departures from the state's high standards were not uncommon. Trained and experienced relief officials were in high demand all over the country and therefore difficult to recruit. By merit based selection procedures, in-house training, and the supplementation of salaries by the KERC, Kansas did more than most states to ensure that good welfare staff could be hired and, just as importantly, their services retained.³² It is more sensible to judge the glass half full and praise what the state accomplished rather than to emphasize periodic deviations from excellence.

The New Deal emphasis on work relief, which did not compete with the private sector, ensured that most projects involved physically demanding, but unskilled, construction work. The outcome was that men had more opportunities than women, and this bias was further emphasized by the WPA practice of targeting heads of household, who were usually male, as the most deserving relief cases. In spite of this deficiency, New Deal programs ensured that for the first time in Kansas history women were offered relief employment. Running parallel to the CWA, the Civil Works Service (CWS) provided a range of relief jobs mostly for females.³³ In early 1934, CWA/CWS projects employed about one-third of the unemployed women in the state. Most of



New Deal programs ensured that for the first time in Kansas history women were offered relief employment. Those few fortunate enough to secure higher paid positions were usually to be found in sewing rooms such as this one in Kansas City, Kansas.

32. KERC, Bulletin 355, 14–16; Kansas State Board of Social Welfare, *Report of Social Welfare in Kansas 3* (Topeka, Kans.: State Board of Social Welfare, 1939), 10–12, 50–55. See also R. Alton Lee, *Farmers vs. Wage Earners: Organized Labor in Kansas, 1860–1960* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 176–211, which deals with New Deal labor policy.

33. Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 224–34; Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917–42* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), 157–61; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 263; Robert Margo, “Interwar Unemployment in the United States: Evidence from the 1940 Census Sample,” in *Interwar Unemployment in Historical Perspective*, ed. Barry Eichengreen and T.J. Hatton (London: Kluwer Press, 1988), 347–48. CWA clients were chosen on the basis of their suitability for the job, but CWS clients had to be both unemployed and in need of relief.

Women were at the back of the line when federal work relief was distributed.

them were CWS clients and, along with those few fortunate enough to secure higher paid CWA positions, they were usually to be found in sewing rooms that employed about two thousand women each week. CWA/CWS work was important economically, socially, and psychologically for over four thousand Kansas women at the beginning of 1934. The really significant gain came when women's projects were continued after the closure of the CWA/CWS program in March 1934. Although the counties provided this continuity, and placement was limited to women who had been certified for relief and lacked the support of an able-bodied wage earner, it was the beginning of a more enlightened approach. At the close of 1934, 6,302 women were employed on state relief projects.³⁴

Women's relief employment included work in state canning plants, library projects, nursing, clerical work, and school assistance but the vast majority, even under the WPA, were placed in sewing rooms.³⁵ The canned beef, clothing, sheets, mattresses, and toys that they produced were distributed free to relief clients and their families as the output from relief work could not be offered for sale. In no state did relief programs offer gender-neutral assistance. Federal initiatives, always the most financially generous, followed the contemporary practice of prioritizing the needs of heads of households, as did the counties. This was a double penalty. Women were at the back of the line when federal work relief was distributed, and they were also deterred from seeking paid employment because their earnings might compromise the relief status of the head of household. The available evidence is not sufficient to show that state level assistance for needy women in Kansas was amongst the best available. However, it is clear that considerable progress was made, although from a very low base.

African Americans formed another disadvantaged group. Three-quarters of the state's sixty-six thousand black Kansans lived in Kansas City, Wichita, or Topeka, and it was soon apparent that their welfare needs were relatively high, as they were in the rest of the country.³⁶ In the fall of 1934, for example, 38.5 percent of the state's African Americans were receiving relief compared to 13.1 percent of the Kansas population as a whole. In 1934 the KERC appointed an experienced black social worker, Louise T. Clarke, and during the following year she was assisted by twenty-two African American case aides who were assigned to the eight counties where the black caseload was heaviest. The state did make some administrative provision for the relief of its black citizens whose numbers, of course, represented

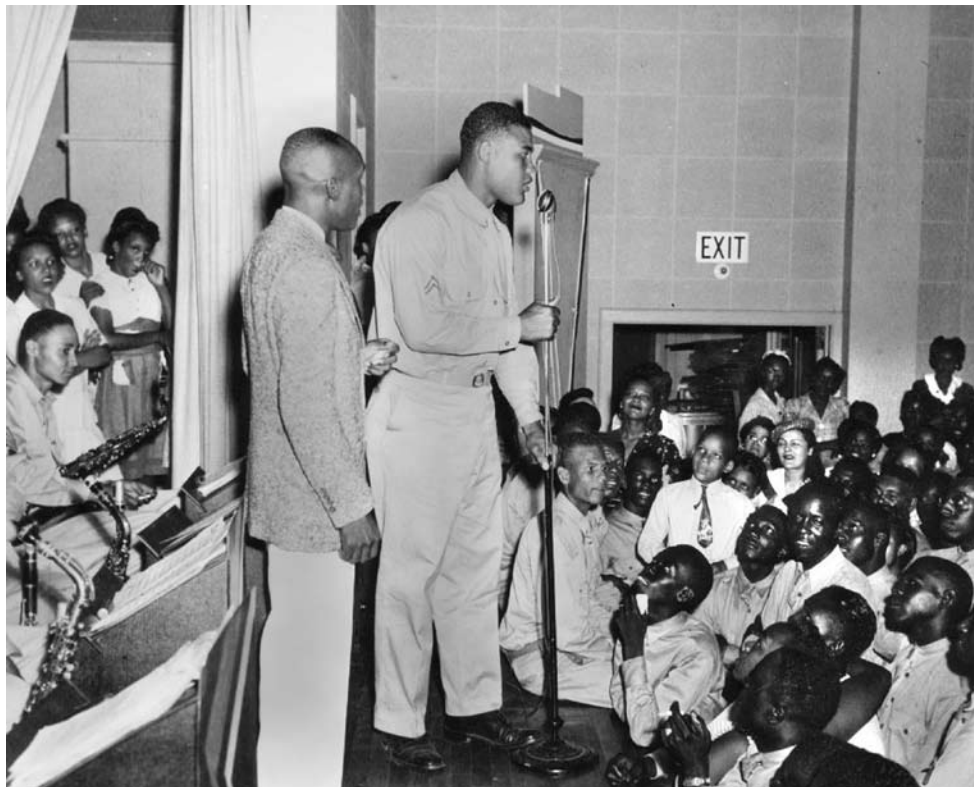
34. KERC, Bulletin 127, 584; KERC, Bulletin 289, 16, 52–59.

35. KERC, Bulletin 355, 14–16, 55–69.

36. For a general account of the African American experience during the depression see, William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); John B. Kirby, *Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era: Liberalism and Race* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*, vol. 1, *The Depression Decade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); Bernard Sternsher, ed., *The Negro in Depression and War: Prelude to Revolution, 1930–45* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1969); Nancy Joan Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Raymond Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression: The Problem of Economic Recovery* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970).

a small proportion of the total population. Young blacks also enrolled in three CCC camps set aside for them, and they were assisted by the segregated NYA. The state relief administration systematically collected statistical information that clearly shows the extent of black deprivation and made a serious attempt to increase the number of black social workers. There is a broad consensus that, nationally, African Americans faced discrimination in the allocation of federal work relief.³⁷ More research is needed to show what black Kansans thought about the provision of relief at both the federal and county levels, what steps their communities took to help each other, how families coped with the additional hardship inflicted by the depression, and how they viewed Roosevelt.

Far more is known about the state's African Americans than the almost twenty-five hundred Native Americans, a quarter of whom lived in Jackson County. Archival evidence relating to the Potawatomi Agency in Mayetta, Jackson County, for example, details poor quality housing, inadequate education, high levels of liquor consumption, ill health, and a high incidence of sexually transmitted disease. The picture painted is of a people in despair, many of whom lacked the incentive to perform the most basic self-help tasks. Welfare officials in Jackson County refused to assist the agency's destitute Indian people, claiming a shortage of funds. White residents expressed their resentment of the meager help available to families from the agency



Though there was need for assistance in many African American communities, there is a broad consensus that they faced discrimination in the allocation of federal work relief. In Junction City, Kansas, the boxing champion Joe Louis gives a talk at an African American recreation center for servicemen and factory personnel that was part of the WPA.

37. Carroll D. Clark and Roy L. Roberts, *People of Kansas: A Demographic and Sociological Study* (Topeka: Kansas State Planning Board, 1936), 153–55; United States and Philip Morris Hauser, *Workers on Relief in the United States in March 1935: A Census of Usual Occupations* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937), 60–61; KERC, Bulletin 355, 55–69, 292–93, 758–61; Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1943), 291–296.



Far more is known about the state's African Americans than the almost 2,500 Native Americans, a quarter of whom lived in Jackson County. Indian women in Mayetta, Kansas, are here depicted working with beads as part of a WPA project.

office.³⁸ The history of Indians in Kansas during this troubled period is a seriously neglected topic. It needs to be addressed from the point of view of Native Americans as well as those trying to minister to them.

The year 1935 saw profound changes to national welfare provision. Taking a bold step, Congress replaced the FERA with the WPA, but in the long run it was the introduction of programs under the umbrella of the Social Security Act that had the most telling impact on Kansas. The WPA, like the CWA, was a federal agency. It was supposed to generate work relief for the entire nation's able-bodied unemployed but only if they were in need. Contributions from sponsors, usually municipalities or county governments, were expected to cover about one quarter of project costs. Kansas Democrats successfully lobbied Washington to prevent Stutz being appointed to the powerful position of state WPA director because of his perceived Republican sympathies.³⁹ Instead, Stutz remained head of the KERC, which was assigned the responsibility of coordinating assistance for needy unemployables who were now solely a county responsibility. KERC staffing was culled so that numbers would be more consistent with its reduced responsibilities.

Conflict between the WPA and the KERC was unavoidable and a tense situation was made worse as Landon emerged as Roosevelt's Republican challenger. Before 1932 Stutz had been an active Republican and many Kansas Democrats believed that his allegiance to that cause, and his loyalty to Landon, was too strong to be ignored. As a thoroughly disenchanted Landon attacked what he saw as the politicization of relief under the WPA, Walter A. Huxman, the Democrat gubernatorial candidate, made it clear that he would expect Stutz's resignation if he entered the governor's mansion.⁴⁰ Huxman was duly elected, and Stutz immediately resigned as ex-

38. H. E. Bruce (Superintendent, Potawatomi Agency) to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 27, 1935, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Classified Files 1907-1939, Potawatomi file 69953, 1935 #720, RG75, National Archives; and Bruce to Commissioner, May 4, 1935, Potawatomi File 21486, 1935, #723, RG75, National Archives.

39. James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 59-77; Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy*, provides an authoritative history of this key agency. See also Arthur W. MacMahon, John D. Millett, and Gladys Ogden, *The Administration of Federal Work Relief* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 272.

40. Alfred M. Landon, *America at the Crossroads* (1936; New York: Kennikat Press, 1971) 36-42; Donald R. McCoy, "The New Deal Through Alf Landon's Eyes," *Midwest Quarterly* 6 (October 1964): 64-65.

ecutive director of the KERC on January 11, 1937.

Landon, too, was swept away in the 1936 electoral landslide that returned Roosevelt to the White House for a second term. The Kansas man had stressed his ability to balance the state's budget and tried to convince the electorate that he would be just as successful with the nation's finances. This was a disingenuous argument. Landon promised that as president he would provide relief to all those who were in need and would also continue the costly programs which gave essential assistance to farmers. Many voters did not believe that it was possible to economize on federal outlays without seriously compromising the New Deal initiatives on which they had come to rely.

The need to comply with the provisions of the Social Security Act forced Kansas to make dramatic administrative and financial changes in the allocation of relief during 1937. A State Department of Social Welfare was created to replace the KERC. It had charge of four categories of public welfare: old age assistance, aid to the blind, aid to dependent children, and general assistance. The first three categories were partially funded by the federal government but only the needy in each category were entitled to assistance. In order to qualify for federal funding all states had to establish programs that met Washington's approval. General assistance, which contained more needy cases than any other category, was entirely a local responsibility. The numbers in the general assistance category were swollen by the able bodied who, though eligible, were unable to secure places on WPA projects because of insufficient funding. In 1937, the legislature agreed to introduce a retail sales tax, a compensating tax, and a cereal malt beverage (beer) tax; a proportion of the considerable sum raised by these new taxes was earmarked for spending on social welfare and for education. By 1938 the contribution that the state of Kansas made to public assistance payments had increased to 27 percent of the total, the counties provided 45 percent, and Washington 29 percent. The increase in tax revenue enabled the state to create a Social Welfare Emergency Fund in 1938 in order to assist counties hardest hit by the Roosevelt recession that had begun during the previous year.⁴¹ The impact of the Social Security Act on the provision of welfare in Kansas was substantial and awaits thorough investigation by historians.



The electoral landslide of 1936, which returned Roosevelt to the White House for a second term, also saw the election of Democrat Walter A. Huxman as governor, pictured at his swearing-in ceremony on January 11, 1937.

41. Fearon, "Taxation, Spending and Budgets," 241-43; Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 235-41.



From its start until June 30, 1942, the WPA injected \$119 million into the Kansas economy, mostly as cash wages. Amongst other benefits, Kansas citizens enjoyed new parks and lakes, 19,747 miles of new and improved roads, and 94 new and 134 reconstructed schools. Here, through the efforts of the WPA, children eat lunch at school in Garland, Kansas.

From its start until June 30, 1942, the WPA injected \$119 million into the Kansas economy, mostly as cash wages. Local sponsors contributed \$39 million, usually for the purchase of materials. Amongst other benefits, Kansas citizens enjoyed new parks and lakes, 19,747 miles of new and improved roads, and 94 new and 134 reconstructed schools. The work was mostly for unskilled men who headed families, and the WPA could employ only one family member per household. As a result, women were obviously disadvantaged. Eligibility for females was confined to those with dependent children, provided they had been certified in need of relief and their family responsibilities did not prevent them from being

available for regular work. In mid-1936, approximately five thousand women were employed in sewing rooms, while others worked in nurseries or as clerical staff. In January 1936 females accounted for approximately 16 percent of the WPA workforce in Kansas.⁴²

Did the WPA improve morale? Not for the majority of those eligible since employment on WPA projects was seriously underestimated and funding was available to take on only about 40 percent of them. And as most of the work was unskilled, no training was provided that would make WPA clients more employable in the private sector. World War II rapidly invigorated the Kansas economy. Wichita was transformed into a boomtown, and airplane producers such as Cessna and Boeing were soon desperately searching for workers. Unfortunately very few WPA workers found employment in the airplane plants. Employers thought them too poorly educated, too unskilled, overweight, or too old for the vigorous work force they wanted to recruit. In addition, many WPA clients were family men

42. Detailed figures can be found in Federal Works Agency, *Report on the Progress of the WPA Program, June 30, 1942* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 26, 62, 71, 73–74, 83.

who lived in southeast Kansas and were not inclined to move to Sedgwick County.⁴³ The WPA certainly did not prepare the unemployed for work in this rapidly expanding sector.

Should Congress have been more generous in funding the WPA? In a well-balanced and astutely argued critique, Jeff Singleton claims that the funding of the WPA was “inadequate.”⁴⁴ Since less than half those declared eligible for the WPA were able to find places on its programs, Singleton’s claim is literally true. But if social spending is put into perspective it is hard to be critical. As Edwin Amenta pointed out, by the late 1930s the United States had committed a higher proportion of its national wealth to social spending than any other country in the world—in other words, relatively more than Germany, France, the United Kingdom, or even Sweden. If we look at public expenditure as a whole instead of just concentrating on relief, it is clear that Congress distributed colossal sums of money by historical standards. It would have been difficult to justify a doubling of the WPA budget in this context. In conclusion to this section, it is worth pointing out that Kansas was amongst the most generous of states for providing general assistance to eligible men and women who failed to secure WPA positions.⁴⁵ Moreover, Kansas counties always supplemented federal relief wages when they were deemed inadequate, as sometimes happened with large families.

REFORM AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF PLANNING

The Great Depression was a crisis of plenty. Far more food, fodder, and fiber was produced than could be consumed by people and livestock, or purchased by manufacturers. There was a surplus of housing and of factory and office space. Industry had the capacity to produce far more than the public wanted or could purchase. The outcome was unemployment, idle factories, dramatic price falls, and a sharp contraction in farm income. Before 1929 slumps had been accepted as a normal, indeed a beneficial part of capitalism. Economic crises swept away weak businesses and the economy, now cleansed and revitalized, arose like a Phoenix on the path to full employment recovery. By 1931 this comforting scenario was difficult to sustain. Little wonder that decision makers and the public lost faith in the power of the free market to balance supply and demand.⁴⁶ Nor is it surpris-

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43. Peter Fearon, “Ploughshares into Airplanes: Manufacturing Industry and Workers in Kansas During World War II,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 22 (Winter 1999–2000): 298–314.

44. Singleton, *The American Dole*, 185.

45. Edwin Amenta, *Bold Relief: Institutional Politics and the Origins of Modern American Social Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 4–5, 166–69; Wallis and Oates, “The Impact of the New Deal,” 163–71.

46. Mark Blythe, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52–53. Some contemporary analyses of the causes and persistence of the depression remain useful; amongst the best are, Maurice Leven, Harold G. Moulton, and Clark Warburton, *America’s Capacity to Consume* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1934); Edwin G. Nourse and associates, *America’s Capacity to Produce* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1934); Gottfried Haber-

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ing that planning became acceptable, not just in the United States but all over the world, as a means of curbing surpluses, reversing deflation, creating more jobs, and restoring confidence. Americans had experienced planning during World War I so the concept was not an entirely alien one, but there were marked differences of opinion as to how much state regulation was necessary to restore the fortunes of the economy.⁴⁷ Should Washington cooperate with business, or was the crisis so intractable that dictation to corporations was the only possible solution? The Administration chose collaboration and Congress created the National Recovery Administration (NRA) that established minimum wages, set maximum hours, promoted the growth of trades unions, and tried to raise business confidence by relaxing anti-trust laws in order to restrict competition. The outcome was a bureaucratic nightmare, which had an adverse effect on recovery before being struck down by the Supreme Court in 1935.⁴⁸

The Kansas Republican administration also embraced planning. Acting on a suggestion by the Public Works Administration (PWA), in January 1934 Landon invited a group of representative citizens to serve as a Kansas State Planning Board. The program established by the board included the collection and analysis of physical, economic, and social facts pertinent to Kansas; the detailed study of factors relating to land use, water conservation, and flood control; and the analysis of ways in which present social-economic liabilities could be turned into assets. This was a bold agenda and within a few years the board had sponsored several high quality publications that informed policy makers who wished to have a better understanding of the problems they faced.⁴⁹ However, a number of legislators remained suspicious of planning and were apprehensive that a permanent commitment to the State Planning Board might prove financially costly. Even amongst the planners there was a lack of cohesion, which prevented the articulation of a unified argument. A division of opinion existed between those who emphasized the benefits of long range planning and those who were prepared to tolerate intervention only during moments of crisis. As University of Kansas political science professor James W. Drury reported, a bill that was designed to give the board permanence was defeated in the Senate by two votes in 1935.⁵⁰

ler, *Prosperity and Depression: A Theoretical Analysis of Cyclical Movements*, 3rd ed. (Lake Success, N.Y.: United Nations, 1946).

47. Patrick D. Reagan, *Designing a New America: The Origins of New Deal Planning, 1890–1943* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); Marion Clawson, *New Deal Planning: The National Resources Planning Board* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1981).

48. Michael M. Weinstein, "Industrial Planning and Economic Policy Making: Lessons from the 1930s," in *International Problems and Supply-Side Economics: Essays in Honour of Lorie Tarshis*, ed. Jon S. Cohen and G. C. Harcourt (London: MacMillan, 1986), 138–45; Ellis W. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study of Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 130–48; Albert U. Romasco, *The Politics of Recovery: Roosevelt's New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 192–214.

49. One of the most impressive is Clark and Roberts, *People of Kansas*.

50. James W. Drury, *The Government of Kansas* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1970), 406–8.

Researchers working for the State Planning Board produced excellent background information on social, economic, and environmental change in the state during the 1930s. These publications are of enormous value to historians, as is the material collated and analyzed by the Kansas Legislative Council, which began to assume the remit of the Planning Board when funding for that body began to dry up in 1935. The conclusion is that planning and its vital attendant, information gathering, were not the preserve of radical New Dealers. Kansas Republicans too saw that policy makers required high quality data if intervention was to be based on a sound practical footing.



Rural Kansans were affected by the persistent drought that had a statewide impact but was most serious in the southwestern counties, which became part of that environmental disaster known as the "Dust Bowl."

An important aspect of economic reform and recovery can be seen in the priority New Dealers attached to restoring the nation's confidence in the banking system. One of Roosevelt's first actions following his inauguration was to declare a national bank holiday, which resulted in a moratorium on all banking operations across the country and an investigation into the solvency of each institution. Between March 3 and 13 every bank in Kansas closed and the phased reopening did not commence until inspectors declared that the banks they had examined were sound. During the 1920s Kansas bankers, farmers, and businesses took every opportunity to express their support for unit banking, as they believed small independent banks were essential to support thriving rural communities. Indeed, so firm was this commitment that Kansas was one of twenty-two states that, in 1929, actually prohibited branch banking. One inevitable result of this policy was the creation of a very large number of small under-capitalized banks, many of which were highly vulnerable even during times of prosperity and were certain to fail in times of crisis.⁵¹ Following the national bank holiday, it was clear that public confidence in the financial system had been restored and Kansas banking was relatively stable for the remainder of the decade. How-

51. United States, *Federal Reserve Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930), 258; Mary Scott Rowland, "Kansas Farming and Banking in the 1920s," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 8 (Autumn 1985): 193-99; David C. Wheelock, "Regulation and Bank Failures: New Evidence from the Agricultural Collapse of the 1920s," *Journal of Economic History* 26 (Winter 1989): 806-22.

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ever, many Kansans believed that the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), a new agency created by Congress in 1933 to protect depositors in the event of bank failure, was a potential threat to unit banking.⁵² Their fear was that the advantages of FDIC membership would only be available to banks large enough to join the Federal Reserve System and therefore Kansas unit banks would be excluded. Many Kansans breathed a sigh of relief when Congress finally removed this threat in 1939.

PLANNING FARM OUTPUT

Nowhere were federal intervention, regulation, and planning more significant than in agriculture, by far the most significant industry in the state. In 1930 nearly 40 percent of all employed males worked in agriculture and 37 percent of the population lived on the state's 166,000 farms. If the volume and value of total agricultural output is used as a guide, Kansas ranked fourth in the nation overall and first in the production of wheat. Furthermore, Kansas farms were amongst the most mechanized in the country, especially in the main wheat cultivation area of the central and western counties. Over 60 percent of the Kansas population was classified as rural, that is they lived in settlements of less than twenty-five hundred inhabitants. It is important to remember that substantial numbers of the rural population were not farmers. However, local bankers, storekeepers, machinery salesmen, painters, decorators, and the like depended upon the purchasing power of farm families for their livelihood. Many farmers also had a direct link with the non-farm world. On the eve of the depression just over 30 percent of all operators spent some time working away from their farms. This kind of work, which was essential for marginal families, became more difficult to secure once the economic climate deteriorated.

Rural and agricultural historians are deeply indebted to historian R. Douglas Hurt, who has produced an excellent article for this series on the development of Kansas agriculture in which he not only covers the main themes of the 1930s but also reviews the existing literature.⁵³ As Hurt and others have demonstrated, from 1929 onwards Kansas farmers were smitten by drastic price falls for crops and livestock that led to a serious fall in income and land values. Deflation was an inevitable consequence of bountiful harvests and as prices fell, the level of real debt increased. Rural Kansans were also affected by the persistent drought that had a statewide impact, but was most serious in the southwestern counties, which became part of that environmental disaster known as the "Dust Bowl." After a short

52. In fact, the president, many New Dealers, and the heads of large banks were not in favor of deposit insurance. Charles W. Calomaris and Eugene Nelson White, "The Origins of Federal Deposit Insurance," in *The Deregulated Economy: A Historical Approach to Political Economy*, ed. Claudia Goldin and Gary D. Liebcap (Chicago: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1994), 145–178.

53. R. Douglas Hurt, "The Agricultural and Rural History of Kansas. Review Essay," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 27 (Autumn 2004): 194–217. This section on farm policy during the New Deal should be read in conjunction with Hurt's essay because he places the 1930s into historical perspective, as well as providing many insightful relevant comments.

period of misery it became impossible for many debtors to continue paying their mortgages, taxes, and what they owed to machinery companies. The owners who were hardest hit faced the trauma of foreclosure; as Pamela Riney-Kehrberg showed, however, the Kansas counties most seriously affected by drought had fewer foreclosures than one might expect because their sun-ravaged farms were impossible for creditors to sell.⁵⁴ Under the circumstances it was logical to allow owners to remain on the farm and descend into tenancy. In general, however, owners fared better than other groups during the depression. It was tenants and laborers who were most likely to migrate from open country to towns and villages in search of work, and who were most likely to be found on the relief rolls. There is no doubt that many farm families and their non-farm neighbors faced ruin by 1932: they demanded and needed help.

In January 1933 the state legislature adopted a six-month mortgage moratorium, which Governor Landon later extended for a further six months. In early 1934, after the Supreme Court had declared the Minnesota moratorium legal, Landon urged a special session of the legislature to pass a similar law, which it did in record time. This legislation gave security to farmers but it was federal intervention that had the most telling impact on the confidence of operators. New Dealers believed that if the farm sector staged a rapid recovery it could pull the rest of the economy out of depression. They wanted to do more than stabilize the farm sector; New Dealers sought a vigorous revival through market intervention.⁵⁵ For their part, the majority of farmers realized that farm surpluses were at the heart of their misery. They were persuaded by the arguments of agricultural economists to overcome their traditional prejudices and accept, as a price worth paying for federal help, planning controls that would regulate how much they could produce.⁵⁶

The aim of the New Deal's farm policy was 100 percent parity. In other words, farm purchasing power would be restored to the relative position that it occupied between 1910 and 1914. The farm bill, passed during the first one hundred days of the new Congress, sought to eliminate destabi-

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54. Riney-Kehrberg, *Rooted in Dust*, 152–53; the *Biennial Reports of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture* (KSBA) are a rich source of detailed statistical information. See also KSBA, *Price Patterns: Prices Received by Kansas Farmers, 1910–1955* (Manhattan, Kans.: State Board of Agriculture, 1957).

55. There is an extensive literature on the most important New Deal farm programs. For a comprehensive contemporary analysis see: Mordecai Ezekiel and Louis H. Bean, *Economic Bases for the Agricultural Adjustment Act* (Washington, D.C.: USDA, 1933). Other excellent monographs include: Gilbert C. Fite, *George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954); Richard S. Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966); V. L. Perkins, *The Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the New Deal, 1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); see also David Hamilton, *Beyond the New Deal: American Farm Policy from Hoover to Roosevelt, 1928–1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Michael W. Schuyler, *The Dread of Plenty: Agricultural Relief Activities of the Federal Government in the Middle West, 1933–1939* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 1989).

56. Barber, *Designs Within Disorder*, 20–21, 26–28, 44; Gilbert C. Fite, "Farmer Opinion and the Agricultural Adjustment Act, 1933," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 48 (March 1962): 656–73; Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold, "State Capacity and Economic Organization in the early New Deal," *Political Science Quarterly* 97 (Summer 1982): 260–61.

YEARS OF DUST



RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION Rescues Victims Restores Land to Proper Use

The purchase of infertile land and the movement, or resettlement, of families to a more suitable location attracted support amongst planners, as this photolithograph from 1937 demonstrates (courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, National Archives and Records Administration, Hyde Park, N.Y.). This was never, however, a significant policy measure in Kansas. It was rehabilitation, which was the attempt to keep families on the land and to help them to become self-sustaining that was of greatest significance in Kansas.

lizing surpluses by persuading farmers who cultivated certain “basic” commodities to produce less.⁵⁷ The key crop in Kansas was winter wheat and cultivators eagerly volunteered to sign contracts that gave them substantial cash payments if they agreed to reduce their planting. However, the wheat allotment payments targeted owners rather than tenants and varied according to the number of acres that could be retired. The outcome was that the largest planters received the biggest allotment payments. This flow of money acted as a form of crop insurance and was crucial to cultivators worst affected by drought, some of who had no crop to sell. As an additional incentive, farmers who participated in acreage allotment schemes were entitled to other benefits, such as seed loans and the nonrecourse loans offered by the Commodity Credit Corporation.⁵⁸

In an interesting contemporary analysis, H. L. Stewart showed that production control payments favored large scale planters over smaller operations, prevented the insolvency of large scale operators, provided a flow of working capital, and made possible a continuing market in land. However, as I revealed in a recent article, while some wheat farmers did reduce their acreage others refused to join the scheme and instead increased planting. Furthermore, in eastern Kansas, farmers whose corn had been destroyed by drought planted wheat as a profitable alternative crop.⁵⁹ During this period, Kansas benefited from a combination of generous allotment payments and increased income from the sale of wheat produced by growers who chose not to join the acreage reduction plan. The wheat allotment initiative did not control planting, but the drought was serious enough to eradicate the surpluses that had exercised such a depressing effect in prices during the early 1930s.

57. Gladys L. Baker, Wayne D. Rasmussen, Vivian Wisner, and Jane M. Porter, *Century of Service: The First Hundred Years of the United States Department of Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.: USDA, 1963), 143–78; Romasco, *The Politics of Recovery*, 157–83.

58. The complexities are admirably explained in R. Douglas Hurt, “Prices, Payments and Production: Kansas Wheat Farmers and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, 1933–39,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 23 (Spring-Summer 2000): 72–87; see also Sherman Johnson, *Wheat Under the Agricultural Adjustment Act: Developments to June 1934*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1934), 57–65; M. L. Robinson, “The Response of Kansas Farmers to the Wheat Adjustment Program,” *Journal of Farm Economics* 19 (Winter 1937): 359–62.

59. Peter Fearon, “Regulation and Response: Kansas Wheat Farmers and the New Deal,” *Rural History* 18, no. 2 (2007): 245–64; H. L. Stewart, “Changes in Wheat Farms in South-Western Kansas, 1931–37,” *USDA Farm Management Report*, no. 7 (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, June 1940), 11, 17, 28, 36–38.

The farm bill also contained the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act that confirmed the powers of the recently created Farm Credit Administration (FCA).⁶⁰ The federal government was now in a position to assist the refinancing of farm mortgages and to support the provision of agricultural credit and marketing loans. Extending a generous helping hand to farmers enabled the Democrats to gain a stunning electoral victory in 1936, even in Republican candidate Landon's home state of Kansas. Washington's role in assisting indebted Kansas farmers, in particular through the ministrations of the FCA and the restoration of stability to the banking system, is a neglected topic and worthy of research attention.

It is not surprising that historians have concentrated on the great drought of the 1930s and the environmental disaster of the Dust Bowl. The possible causes of this phenomenon are not a concern of this essay, which must concentrate on the actions taken by state and federal authorities to moderate the economic and social costs of aridity.⁶¹ In this context, the cattle purchase program was an interesting initiative that greatly benefited Kansas ranchers whose livestock suffered from burned pastures and water shortages. During 1934 and 1935 the federal government, at a cost of \$7.5 million, purchased 521,169 cattle, which was a considerable cash injection at a crucial time. The most distressed cattle were slaughtered and buried, others were moved to greener pastures, but some were processed in state plants employing relief workers and the canned beef they produced was distributed to relief families. A number of farm owners, tenants, and laborers were able to secure places on FERA, CWA, or WPA work programs, which were expanded in the worst affected drought counties. The relief rolls, however, were more likely to contain laborers—whose employment opportunities had been seriously affected by both drought and by the spread of mechanization—and tenants rather than owners.

In general, New Deal farm policies favored commercial landowners rather than tenants.⁶² Families whose sons enrolled for the CCC were grateful when their remittances swelled meager household budgets, as were the counties when CCC payments reduced the numbers who were entitled to local relief. However, for most of the rural deprived, especially those who lived on homesteads, rehabilitation rather than work relief was the chosen New Deal solution to their distress. New Dealers believed that needy rural people should be helped but as their problems differed significantly from

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60. Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790–1950: A Study of Their Origins and Development* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), 264, 280–81, 392–93.

61. Hurt, "The Agricultural and Rural History of Kansas," 206–10, provides a crisp introduction to the Dust Bowl and a good bibliography, to which one can add, Zeynep K. Hansen and Gary D. Liebcap, "Small Farms, Externalities, and the Dust Bowl of the 1930s," *Journal of Political Economy* 112 (June 2004): 665–94; Geoff Cufer, *On the Great Plains: Agriculture and Environment* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005); see also, Karl Brooks, "Environmental History As Kansas History. Review Essay," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 29 (Summer 2006): 116–31.

62. Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1982), 261–62; Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 184–87; on livestock purchases, see Michael W. Schuyler, "The Federal Drought Relief Act in Kansas, 1934," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 42 (Winter 1976): 403–24.



Struggling farm families were advised on the management of their homes, holdings, and finances by the Farm Security Administration (FSA). This Sheridan County, Kansas, farmer confers with his FSA county supervisor regarding his farm plan. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

those of the urban unemployed, a different approach was needed. The purchase of infertile land and the movement, or resettlement, of families to a more suitable location attracted support amongst planners, but this was never a significant policy measure in Kansas. It was rehabilitation, which was the attempt to keep families on the land and to help them to become self-sustaining, that was of greatest significance in Kansas.⁶³

It is easy to see why this policy had appeal. By 1935 many opinion makers had formed the view that mass unemployment had become a permanent feature of economic life. If the incentive for rural to urban migration was reduced then urban relief problems would become more manageable. The solution was to improve the quality of life for the farm families most likely to migrate. The FERA handled early rehabilitation efforts, but in 1935 the Resettlement Administration (RA) was assigned this task; in 1937 the Farm Security Administration (FSA) inherited the remit of the RA. Beginning in 1935 families who had a homestead and also were eligible for public assistance were entitled to borrow to fund improvements, provided their homestead rehabilitation plan had been accepted. These families were advised on the management of their homes, their holdings, and their finances. Families whose rehabilitation plans were unacceptable joined the non-farm, rural destitute in a search for federal work relief or, failing that, county assistance. Historian Michael Grant has produced an interesting study of rural rehabilitation on the Great Plains. He showed that the assistance given to operators, whom he called "Borderline Farmers," was essential to them during a period of particular hardship.⁶⁴

The New Deal inspired and encouraged investigation by skilled researchers into the problems of rural communities, many of which had previously been ignored. The expertise of the staff at the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE) was used to research the implementation of policies and to assess their outcomes. As a result, by the end of the decade far more was known about, for example, the social and economic impact of drought, issues relating to indebtedness, and the problems of providing relief for

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63. R. Douglas Hurt, "Gaining Control of the Environment: The Morton County Land Utilization Project in the Kansas Dust Bowl," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (Summer 1996): 140–53.

64. Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 165–81; Michael Johnson Grant, *Down and Out on the Family Farm: Rural Rehabilitation on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 156–60.

farmers and other rural dwellers.⁶⁵ The most distinguished contemporary studies relating solely to Kansas were written by Earl H. Bell and by A. D. Edwards. These scholars provide two in depth analyses of drought ravaged Haskell County that are of immense value to historians.⁶⁶ Research teams usually targeted problem areas across the country, but a sample of Kansas counties often formed a significant part of nationwide studies. For example, in mid-1934 the Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare, which was part of the BEA, conducted a penetrating survey into three Kansas counties. A year later the bureau conducted another national investigation into the provision of relief and in doing so surveyed thirteen Kansas counties that were experiencing considerable drought and depression induced difficulties.⁶⁷ A better understanding of the economic and social issues enabled a more rationally based series of policy initiatives to directly address the nation's most acute rural problems.

Needy rural people were helped by a variety of programs, many of which were federal but some that were funded locally. These initiatives targeted the effects of drought by, for example, improving both water retention and farming techniques. It is important to realize that the substantial sums awarded to participating farmers under federal schemes such as the wheat allotment or the corn-hog programs were not considered relief by either Congress or the recipients. There can be no doubt, however, that these payments had a welfare function in that they enabled the recipients to stay off the relief rolls and this should be apparent from the following figures. Between 1933 and 1941 Washington contributed \$159 million to fund the FERA, the CWA, and the WPA in Kansas. During the same period Kansas farmers who participated in the wheat allotment and the corn-hog programs received \$226 million, and they were entitled to further help from the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Cattle Purchase Program, seed loans, and debt assistance. Moreover, while participation in the FERA and WPA programs required payment from local contributors, the farm programs did not. Little wonder that they were so popular in the state.

Suitcase or absentee farming became a characteristic of western Kansas wheat cultivation during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It was possible to buy or rent land, plant wheat in the fall, and not return to the holding until the crop was ready to harvest in June. As wheat was the ideal speculative crop, requiring no care as it grows, cultivators could spend most of the year living some distance from their wheat fields.⁶⁸ In a

In spite of its shortcomings, the New Deal delivered substantial benefits to Kansas farmers.

65. Examples of this work include: Berta Asch and A. R. Magnus, *Farmers on Relief and Rehabilitation*, WPA Research Monograph 8 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1937); Carle C. Zimmerman and Nathan L. Whetten, *Rural Families on Relief*, WPA Research Monograph 7 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938).

66. Earl H. Bell, *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: Sublette Kansas*, Rural Life Studies 2 (Washington, D.C.: USDA/Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1942); A. D. Edwards, *Influence of Drought and Depression on a Rural Community: A Case Study in Haskell County, Kansas*, USDA, FSA, and Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Social Research Report No. 7 (Washington, D.C.: USDA/FSA/Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1937).

67. The details can be found in Fearon, *Kansas in the Great Depression*, 173–80, 188–93.

68. Leslie Hewes, *The Suitcase Farming Frontier: A Study in the Historical Geography of the Central Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), is a fascinating study focusing on western Kansas.

*The Federal
Writers Project,
designed to give
employment to
needy writers
and researchers,
produced the
state's first
guidebook in
1939.*

cleverly argued paper, Price V. Fishback, William C. Horrace, and Shawn Cantor have tried to study the effect of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) programs on retail sales using county data. But this analysis is problematic for Kansas. Figures giving the amount of cash flowing to each county under the wheat allotment program are readily available in the *Biennial Reports of the Kansas State Board of Agriculture* but the money was not necessarily spent in the county to which it was sent. As Earl H. Bell shows, in 1935 the owners of 30 percent of the farms in Haskell County lived in another county and presumably spent most AAA funds where they lived.⁶⁹ Absentee ownership was widespread in western Kansas, and as a result, the financial impact of allotment payments cannot be measured with confidence at the micro level.

Farm prices in Kansas and in the country as a whole had made good progress by 1937, but that year's severe recession proved particularly dispiriting. The prices that operators received for grains and livestock tumbled and remained low for several years until war-induced demand brought about a revival. Agriculture finished the decade in a depressed state. In reality, the price inflation that took place between 1933 and 1937 owed more to the impact of the poor harvests brought on by droughts than to the acreage restriction measures introduced under the New Deal. But in spite of its shortcomings, the New Deal delivered substantial benefits to Kansas farmers. These benefits included: cash payments under the wheat allotment and corn-hog initiatives, help with debts, loans to purchase seed, and the purchase of cattle suffering from the effects of drought.

CONCLUSION

Parts of the New Deal had withered away even by 1945. Full employment and a conservative Congress combined to finish off the WPA, the CCC, and the NYA. Nevertheless, Kansans still enjoy the output from these New Deal agencies, which used relief labor for the construction of lakes, roads, parks, bridges, sewers, playgrounds, athletic fields, and public buildings.⁷⁰ Most relief work was construction oriented and provided employment for unskilled males. However, for a fortunate few the typewriter was also called into action. The WPA Federal Writers Project, designed to give employment to needy writers and researchers, produced the state's first guidebook in 1939. Although Kansas policy makers emphasized the benefits of work relief, by the late 1930s the public had become disenchanted. They looked upon many of the WPA projects as a "boondoggle," a waste of taxpayer money and a refuge for the idle who wanted pay for as little effort as pos-

69. Price V. Fishback, William C. Horrace, and Shawn Cantor, "Did New Deal Grant Programs Stimulate Local Economies? A Study of Federal Grants and Retail Sales During the Great Depression," *Journal of Economic History* 65 (March 2005): 36-71; Bell, *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community*, 34.

70. For a full inventory see Federal Works Agency, *Report on the Progress of the WPA Program*, June 30, 1942.

sible.⁷¹ Far from raising morale, it seemed that working for the government had led to the dependency culture it was specifically designed to avoid.

On the other hand, Social Security proved to be one of Roosevelt's most durable memorials. One of the really positive achievements which sprang from the acceptance of the Social Security legislation was the pressure that it placed on states to reform their practices in the care of the needy aged and blind, and in their assistance for dependent children. In order to guarantee federal funding Kansas had not only to reform its relief administration but also to embark upon a major revision of the state's tax laws so that the appropriate matching financing could be raised. The state and counties became less reliant upon property taxes as income, gasoline, sales, and beer taxes added to fiscal revenues during the 1930s. These tax changes would not have taken place without the malignant influence of the depression. It was, however, the need to satisfy the federal government that persuaded the state legislature to radically raise and redistribute the tax burden. This is especially noticeable after the passage in 1937 of the Kansas Social Welfare Act, which established a comprehensive welfare system following the creation of a new partnership with Washington. In 1937 the state spent \$342,000 on welfare; in 1938 the figure had risen to \$4.4 million.⁷² As we have seen in this study of Kansas, an analysis of the evolving relationships between the states and Congress is essential if the impact of the New Deal is to be understood.

Although the administration of welfare provision in Kansas has been closely researched, there are significant gaps in our understanding of a range of related social history issues. For example, little is known about the background and work experiences of the hundreds of social workers employed in Kansas during the depression. What were their views of the problems that they faced and how satisfied were they with their efforts? What also of the many private charities in Kansas that were so important for the amelioration of social suffering until Washington decided to exclusively favor the states? The role of private charities, although diminished, was still significant to the most needy during the New Deal period but knowledge of the individuals who ran them or how effectively they functioned is absent.

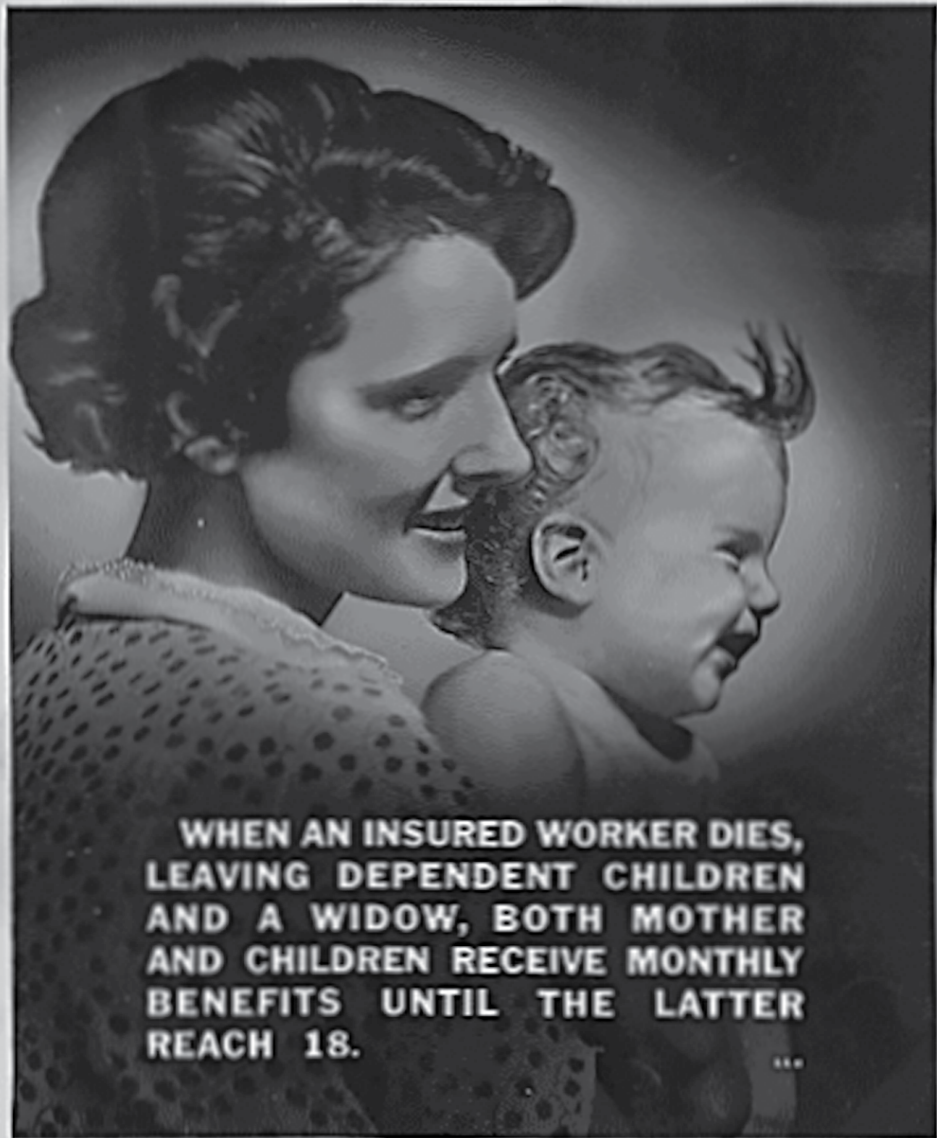
During the depression much misery was concentrated in southeast Kansas, particularly in Crawford and Cherokee counties. A thorough analysis of this region, through the 1920s and 1930s, concentrating on the causes of poverty and the efficacy of local and national efforts to support distressed families and individuals, would be of immense value. Studies of physical and emotional suffering in Kansas during the depression seem

Analysis of the evolving relationships between the States and Congress is essential if the impact of the New Deal is to be understood.

71. Federal Writer's Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Kansas, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Kansas* (1939; Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984), with a new introduction by James R. Shortridge; Hubert Kelley, "Good Men Ploughed Under," *American Magazine* (November 1935), 16-17, 121-21, 135-37. The author traveled through Kansas gathering critical material for this article on the effects of relief policies.

72. Marvin A. Harder and Raymond G. Davis, *The Legislature as an Organization: A Study of the Kansas Legislature* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 141-43.

MORE SECURITY FOR THE AMERICAN FAMILY



**WHEN AN INSURED WORKER DIES,
LEAVING DEPENDENT CHILDREN
AND A WIDOW, BOTH MOTHER
AND CHILDREN RECEIVE MONTHLY
BENEFITS UNTIL THE LATTER
REACH 18.**

**FOR INFORMATION WRITE OR CALL AT THE NEAREST FIELD OFFICE OF THE
SOCIAL SECURITY BOARD**

Social Security proved to be one of Roosevelt's most durable memorials. Poster courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, National Archives and Records Administration, Hyde Park, N.Y.

confined to a number of excellent studies of the Dust Bowl counties. Yet we should understand that hardship was not confined to southwest Kansas; it was widespread and embraced both urban centers and rural areas. Any information on the reactions of applicants for relief to the process they were subjected to, and how as clients they managed on the budget allocated to them would be welcome. Did the men and women employed on work relief projects experience an increase in their morale? Was the experience gained on work relief projects appreciated by private employers?

Kansas agriculture began a great transformation in World War II. Rapidly rising demand for foodstuffs and raw materials gave many operators the chance to cultivate profitably and to erase their debts. The aridity of the Dust Bowl years was transformed by the return of rain, which enabled wheat and livestock producers in the western part of the state to share in national farm prosperity. Many non-farm jobs, some of which were relatively highly paid, were created in the war driven economy and people living on marginal farms that could never be profitable at last had the opportunity to abandon the unrewarding land.

After 1945 investment in farm machinery and fertilizer, combined with more scientific methods of cultivation and animal husbandry, helped fuel a spectacular rise in the productivity of U.S. agriculture. However, most of the price support systems that had been introduced during the New Deal remained in place. It is now apparent that the postwar rise in efficiency had its roots in the mid-1930s, but there is considerable disagreement amongst scholars as to its cause. Perhaps the price supports introduced by the New Dealers provided more than a protective carapace for farmers. It could be that New Deal farm policies played a significant role in both encouraging and enabling this agricultural revolution to take place.⁷³ KH

*Did the men
and women
employed on
work relief
projects
experience an
increase in
their morale?*

73. Bruce L. Gardner, *American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 254–62.