



BUILDING UP WYOMING

Depression-Era Federal Projects in Wyoming, 1929–1943

Michael Cassity

PREPARED FOR THE WYOMING STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
PLANNING AND HISTORIC CONTEXT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
WYOMING STATE PARKS & CULTURAL RESOURCES

**ARTS. PARKS.
HISTORY.**

Wyoming State Parks & Cultural Resources

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Detail, pavilion, Sheridan County Fairground, Sheridan, Wyoming, constructed by
Works Progress Administration.
Photograph: Michael Cassity, 2010.

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For Jessica, Rebecca, and Russ



Acknowledgments

A FUNDAMENTAL PREMISE OF THIS STUDY, and of any serious inquiry into the past, is that history holds a profound relevance to us today. In the process of developing this study, I have been fortunate to count upon the assistance, support, and encouragement of people who shared that premise and who declined to settle for a project that simply accumulated facts without exploring their larger meaning. I am pleased now to acknowledge their assistance and to thank them for it.

Put simply, this study, and its attendant documents, would not exist were it not for the Governor and the State Legislature of Wyoming who saw a need for a focused inquiry into the federal projects of the Depression years in the state so that the historic resources associated with those developments could be better understood and appropriately managed. They provided the funds and vision necessary for this and other historic context studies prepared for the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The SHPO is located within the Wyoming Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources, and the department director, Milward Simpson, has supported and encouraged this project from its inception. Likewise, in the SHPO, Sara Needles and Mary Hopkins have both expressed their continuing interest in the project, made it a priority, and have followed my efforts with close attention and helpful suggestions. I have been fortunate to work with these people and I do not take for granted their commitment to this project. The chief of planning and historic context development in the Wyoming SHPO, Judy Wolf, has been splendid to work with because of her own vision of how a historic context study can meet the needs of the Wyoming public, cultural resource professionals, academics, and others interested in Wyoming history and historic resources. She has been a careful reader, an important source of information, and a patient administrator. She has always been available for assistance and has invariably approached the issues with thoughtfulness and clarity. Without her, this

study likely would not have been produced and certainly not in its present form.

A number of people have taken advantage of the opportunity to read and comment on drafts of this study, and I have benefited from their good counsel, all the more so because some of those people approach the subject with different backgrounds, perspectives, and understandings than my own. The State Historic Preservation Office's Historic Context Advisory Committee, and its member professionals Mike Bies, Kathy Miller Boden, Kierson Crume, John Keck, Dave McKee, Dave Searle, and Lysa Wegman-French provided thoughtful suggestions from their experience in the field as resource managers. In addition, Wyoming SHPO staff members Brian Beadles, Kara Hahn, Mary Hopkins, Laura Nowlin, Nancy Weidel, and Judy Wolf provided important suggestions regarding National Register issues. I also want to thank Nancy Weidel, Mary Hopkins, and Judy Wolf in the SHPO for their efforts in securing and making available to me microfilm of critical government records. Once again Richard Collier, expert photographer in the SHPO, assisted me with providing a number of important images. Dudley Gardner read an early draft and offered helpful comments. David Kathka and Robert Righter spent considerable time and energy reviewing this work, and I have benefited from their suggestions too. Emmy Ezzell has once again brought her talent as a book designer to this project, and I have been pleased to be able to count on her. In addition, I have been fortunate to work with Alice Stanton once again in bringing a manuscript to its finished stages; her guidance helped me sharpen the argument at many points and substantially improved the study. I also want to thank Dawn Santiago, who prepared the index, for her careful and thoughtful contribution.

I have been able to draw upon a number of archival sources and I wish to thank especially the skilled, patient, and helpful staffs of the American

Heritage Center in the University of Wyoming in Laramie, the Wyoming State Archives in Cheyenne, the University of Wyoming Library Special Collections in Laramie, and the Rocky Mountain Region branch of the National Archives and Records Administration in Denver. Each person who assisted me in these repositories proved to be not just cooperative and caring but also resourceful in directing me to troves of material I would not have unearthed otherwise.

To research and write a study such as this is to embark upon a journey, a journey that constitutes in some ways a sustained meditation on the past and its meanings. Unlike other journeys and other meditations, however, this contemplation is not always done in solitude and, even when it is, it is conducted in consultation with the ideas and encouragement of others. After many years, I retain a continuing intellectual debt to three historians in particular who, at the beginning of my career, encouraged in me a habit of disciplined, critical inquiry into large questions. David Thelen, Richard Kirkendall, and Richard Bienvenu, in ways large and small, contributed much that can be found in the following pages, and I am grateful that I have been able to draw upon their examples and approaches in exploring the past. I have also benefited from close contact with people whose ongoing conversation has nurtured, encouraged, and informed me in ways that many people can only envy. Over the years I have found myself frequently turning to David Kathka and Lee Ann Swanekamp for assistance and insight, and they have once again proven to be critical resources for me; I trust they always will be. In addition, the friendship and support of Sherry

Smith, Robert Righter, Anita Puig de Vall, and Robert Young have been important to me in this project and in the larger concerns of life. On one level, these separate people, who do not all know each other, constitute a diverse and thoughtful assortment of friends, colleagues, and associates; on another level, they continually remind me of the promise of the human condition. Their role in this study pales only in comparison to that of my family, a delightful assortment of talented individuals bound by drive and energy, shared values, and abiding love. My brother, R. O. Joe Cassity, may be responsible for my original interest in this topic, for it was while we were still very young that our conversations and reading often focused on the policies, programs, and changes wrought by the New Deal. Every day, in both life and work, I experience and appreciate the interest and support of Connie Cassity, Jessica Cassity, Rebecca Cassity, and Russ Anderson. I should add that they have shown remarkable patience with me and my projects, and I am grateful for that as well. All of these people are important. I can't imagine this journey without them.

The participation of so many individuals and institutions one way or another in this study does not necessarily mean that they share the conclusions and analysis I have developed. Indeed, vigorous discussion and dissent have been and will continue to be an important and healthy part of the understanding of the Wyoming past. And, while I am eager to share any credit for the pages that follow with these people and institutions, I want to be just as quick to distance them from any of the shortcomings of this study. The responsibility for any weaknesses and errors is mine.

Building Up Wyoming

Introduction

Purpose and Scope of the Historic Context Study

WYOMING STILL BEARS the marks of the Great Depression and those marks are virtually everywhere in the state. They exist because the federal government launched a series of programs and projects to fight the Depression by putting people to work. This made sense: Wyoming (and the nation) had a lot of work to be done. And Wyoming (and the nation) had a lot of people who needed work. It is in an effort to understand those work projects that this historic context study was prepared, for such an understanding can, in turn, help us comprehend the significance of the buildings, structures, and other historic resources in Wyoming associated with the Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt administrations. Both of those administrations undertook to improve the public infrastructure, enhance the circumstances of life, and provide jobs. The priorities that they attached to those projects—whether to provide enduring additions to the nation and community or to put people to work—varied between and within each administration and among the different programs, and the projects and programs themselves evolved over time in ways that need to be explored in order for their significance to become clear. As for the overall pattern of change, a society, an economy, and a state were being transformed in a process that moved a nearly pre-industrial set of values, relationships, purposes, and organization to factory models of work and production, and from voluntary assistance (with all its limits) and neighbors helping neighbors in crisis to an industrial, even

military, organization and purpose (with all *its* limits). Wyoming would never be the same.

History and Context

Many of the buildings and other physical remnants of the Hoover administration and of the New Deal in Wyoming are taken for granted in the early twenty-first century, or even dismissed as fading relics of an earlier generation. Sometimes when they are recorded in official surveys, it seems sufficient simply to note that a particular post office or school or dam or conservation feature was built by the New Deal, even if why it was built or how the program responsible for its construction differed from others is only dimly documented or understood. In reality, the Hoover administration and New Deal buildings and projects found all over the state can tell us much about the government and policies that built them; and the converse is also true: so too does an understanding of the federal programs help us document the significance of the buildings in our neighborhoods and town centers, in our forests and ranges, along our rivers and across our deserts. It is precisely to develop the contours of such understanding that this historic context study has been prepared: to enable us to connect the local and the national, the parts with the whole, the multitude of

buildings, objects, structures, and other resources with each other, and to connect them over time.

Those connections in the past form their historical context. Context is a critical tool for historians, one that can provide meaning and significance to the facts of history. As historian E. P. Thompson once observed, “The discipline of history is, above all, the discipline of context; each fact can be given meaning only within an ensemble of other meanings.”¹ As we seek to understand and learn from the past, it is not the isolated facts themselves that are important, for in and of themselves they are devoid of meaning. Instead, we must seek out the patterns that the multitude of facts together comprise. Those patterns may be complex, they may be subtle, and they may also be subject to debate, but identifying the patterns is a continuing responsibility that requires ongoing critical thinking and re-examination to ensure that the context is both accurate and meaningful.

Further, important patterns of history and historical context are not restricted to the halls of power in the nation. Even at the local and state level, large issues, perhaps even universal issues, can be explored meaningfully and insightfully. In fact, by exploring what is happening in Wyoming in the years of the Depression it is possible to further understand not just Wyoming and its communities better but also the nation. Indeed, it is possible with this kind of inquiry to further understand better the connections between the people and communities of Wyoming and also between them and the rest of the world they lived in. Which is

very much different from, and much more important than, either constructing a chronicle of events or erecting compartments of categories into which we can isolate complex historical developments; and it is certainly different from assuming a general framework of change called “progress.” To undertake this inquiry, rather, is to ask, as E. P. Thompson urged, “those questions of satisfaction, of the direction of social change, which the historian ought to ponder if history is to claim a position among the significant humanities.”²

With these thoughts in mind, this study follows two paths of inquiry at the same time. Hopefully they do not diverge too much; ideally, they complement each other. One path is the conventional course of historical analysis in which historians examine a broad range of evidence, study developments small and large, local and national, and determine how even ostensibly unrelated developments make collective sense. Historians do this all the time, seeking out patterns that indicate the direction of the course of society over time. The second path of investigation involves examining the physical resources of history that figure into the framework used by the National Register of Historic Places. These buildings and structures, even works of art, are often important historic resources, and the National Register seeks to understand their historical significance in evaluating them as eligible for listing. The concept of historical significance is where these two paths of inquiry connect, for that is the ultimate question being explored. In identifying that historical significance, it is important to be sensitive to both the physical resources and the larger history of which they are a part. The National Register system and the history of an area, after all, are not separate, are not isolated from each other, and are not either one to be ignored by the person who wants to understand and hold onto the past. Thus a major goal of this study is to identify points at which the historical narrative can be connected to the remnants of the past that still can be found on the ground, and to provide them meaning—significance. When historic resources of any kind have significance, we can learn from them. And what we learn from the past depends entirely on the questions we ask of it. This study seeks to ask important questions.

Which leads to the title. The notion of “building up Wyoming” has more meanings than may be apparent, and those meanings need to be acknowledged at the outset. There is the obvious meaning, quite literal, in which these years witnessed a “building up” of the state, much like one

1. E. P. Thompson, “Anthropology and the Discipline of Historical Context,” *Midland History* 1 (1972): 45.

2. I have developed the notion of historical context more conceptually in two essays: Michael Cassity, “E. P. Thompson and the Local Historian,” in Carol Kammen and Norma Prendergast, eds., *Local History Encyclopedia* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: American Association for State and Local History and Alta Mira Press, 2000), 435–37; and Michael Cassity, “After Two Decades: The English Model and the American Context,” paper presented at Southern Labor Studies Conference, Atlanta, September 1982. This paper is available at <http://www.michaelcassity.com/the-problem-of-historical-context.html>.

might build a house, a factory, or a city, only on a much larger scale. And certainly the federal government helped build countless buildings around Wyoming, and built roads and sewers and sidewalks and trails and picnic areas and dams and corrals and just about every other kind of feature. But there was more to that building up than the physical structures themselves. In fact, often that building up represented the development of an entire transportation, communications, and public utility infrastructure. Moreover, that infrastructure is as much organizational and conceptual as it is physical, which is to say that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. When we seek the historical significance of the physical buildings and structures, it is essential that we understand the larger system of which they are a part, for it was a *system* being built up, not just separate buildings. By the same token, that system changed over time, becoming increasingly industrialized and centralized. In other words, the “building up” of Wyoming was also a transformation of Wyoming in its fundamentals—in economic infrastructure, in the system of production, in the social structure, and in the political institutions and their relationships with the economy. The result was, in some sense, the development of a “modernized” Wyoming on the one hand, and, on the other, a dismantling or replacing of traditional systems and relationships. A central objective of this study is to understand how that modernization took place, and also to understand the costs it exacted.³

An additional word: The intention of this study is not to praise or criticize either the Hoover or the Roosevelt administration or any individual program but to understand them better and to understand how they evolved over time, what the assumptions and objectives were behind them, how their priorities and organization shifted according to differing perceptions of need and purpose, why they took the shape they did, and what kind of impact they had on the state. Any reasonable person will doubtless find aspects of each administration, and perhaps even each program, to use as models for action and also as cautionary lessons for today. Only the person with blinders will dismiss or applaud entire programs or administrations. Life is too complicated and too important for that kind of approach, and this study seeks more to raise questions than to settle on final answers.

Building Up Wyoming is not the final word on these projects or on these resources. In fact, an explicit objective of this study is to encourage

more research in this important and rich area of inquiry. While it seeks to provide an overview and present the general contours and dynamics of the federal projects operating in the state in these years, it is not a history of each building constructed or each project developed by the federal government. Hopefully, however, the historic context that it presents can be used by future investigators and scholars to explore the multitude of individual projects and structures remaining from the Depression years. When researchers bring a thoughtful focus to those resources and when they contemplate their significance in light of broader developments, the historic context can become increasingly sophisticated and sensitive to the varieties of evidence and the concepts by which history in Wyoming can make sense and be of enduring value itself.

Methodology

This study used conventional methods of historical inquiry and analysis and began with a survey of published and unpublished literature addressing both Wyoming history and also the literature dealing with the larger historical issues pertinent to the study. Thus it was essential to read broadly. Despite considerable attention to the Depression years by scholars in the 1960s and slightly beyond, much of the operation of the federal gov-

3. Modernization can mean something as simple as having indoor plumbing, but the concept more meaningfully describes a coherent process of social change involving centralization of authority (public and private) into fewer and more distant hands, the fragmentation of society into discrete producer groups, the decline of personal local bonds and relationship networks and their replacement with impersonal, national connections and loyalties, and the specialization and synchronization of economic activities. Despite its appearance sometimes as a neutral or value-free process, obviously modernization generates as many problems as it solves, perhaps even more problems. While the literature on modernization is vast, a starting point conceptually relevant to the present study's concern with issues surrounding modernization can be found in Michael Cassity, “Modernization and Social Crisis: The Knights of Labor and a Midwest Community 1885–1886,” *Journal of American History* 66 (June 1979): 41–61.

ernment, and its work projects in particular, in Wyoming have been wanting for attention, for close scholarly analysis. At the same time, in the last four decades, historical reassessments of both the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations have created a fertile field of examination by asking fresh, new questions and using different kinds of sources. This means that there is no reason why studies of the New Deal or of the Hoover administration need to be mired in the discussions and debates of a half century ago, and there is every reason why they should not.

This means, further, that the literature and sources available to draw upon have been impressive, exciting, and also exhausting. Studies undertaken by T. A. Larson and others in Wyoming history have been important, and there actually is a substantial body of relevant work in scholarly journals published in the state and beyond. Yet there is always the need for more examination as new answers raise new questions and as old answers are reviewed in light of new information and perspectives. Study of the Roosevelt and Hoover administrations in Wyoming surely will be able to keep scholars actively engaged for many years to come. It is not a dead field, but one very much alive and filled with potential for understanding more about Wyoming and also about the nation. The literature exploring issues of social, political, and economic change in the Depression years in the nation is extensive and constantly growing, and the body of conceptual literature—addressing issues of authority, purpose, organization, and identity—is likewise expanding as new questions arise that beg to be asked of even familiar sources. Thus both the sources and how we use them represent growing challenges and opportunities for the historian. That constantly evolving and expanding inquiry is a measure of health in the historical profession, not a measure of weakness.

Among the special sets of sources that have been explored here are those that pertain to local developments. Too often dismissed as unimportant—because they are local and not national—those materials, such as newspapers, personal accounts, family histories, and others, are vital records. They are important not because they offer disciplined, professional accounts, although sometimes they do; they are important because they reveal the circumstances of real life and real people involved in the patterns of history; in discussing very local or even private events and developments, those sources also reveal something larger, more than they intended. They also, when put together into a coherent pattern, suggest

that what happens in the lives of people at the local level, when connected with what was going on at the local level at other places, may have been of greater historical importance than some of the activities of a powerful, but isolated, elite operating at the state or national level. In other words, local history is as rich, vibrant, and complex as state or national history if the right questions are asked. In addition, using these sources reminds us that we are not dealing with nameless, faceless people; we are studying the lives and hopes and dreams and troubles of actual, sometimes identifiable, men, women, and children, and the remnants of the past that we encounter today were often left there by those same people, or by people like them.

There is nothing particularly novel or new about these local historical sources—nor about the conventional historical books, unpublished monographs, and articles; what may be new here is the way they are used—which is to say, the questions asked of those materials, and those questions have to do with patterns over time. One source that may itself be new, however, or at least has been insufficiently drawn upon in the past, is the records of the various work projects. These records, ultimately a vast collection of documents generated by the federal agencies charged with the specific projects, often provide important information otherwise unavailable about individual work projects. In particular, the records of the Civil Works Administration (CWA) and the Works Progress Administration/Work Projects Administration (WPA) enable the researcher to see the programs in action that brought about specific activities, both construction and nonconstruction. By examining these records, it is much easier to see an individual activity or project as part of a larger set of activities instead of, say, viewing an isolated building emerging at one place, and another isolated structure at another place.

The CWA and WPA microfilm files are an important source of immense value. And they have been supplemented with other agency records in the National Archives and Records Administration regional branch in Denver, including especially the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) records of the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bureau of Land Management (including its predecessors the Division of Grazing and the Grazing Service), and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). In addition, other records and reports have been invaluable, and they represent a variety of agencies and departments; and many of them have even been published. Of course the records in the Wyoming State Archives are an essential part of any inquiry like this, and

once again the records of the WPA Federal Writers' Project in the State Archives have been invaluable. Likewise, the collections of the American Heritage Center in Laramie and the University of Wyoming Libraries have proven of tremendous assistance. Again, it is important to note that the documents available for research are extensive, rich, and accessible. The real challenge for the researcher is to formulate important, meaningful questions to ask of those materials.

I also want to mention that my own previous work on Wyoming homesteading, ranching, and farming was of assistance to me in this effort. Because these projects pursue similar questions and objectives and sometimes even examine the same processes and patterns, in the same state, it is no surprise that the two studies overlap considerably at those points involving agriculture-related policy and developments. In places where I have referenced the previous study, I continue to use the same analysis and framework I developed there. I sometimes summarize my conclusions from that study and on occasion, when discussing the same developments and circumstances, I even use some of the language I employed in that study and I encourage the reader to turn to that work for more information and a more extensive examination of those issues.⁴

Finally, it has been a consistent effort on my part in conducting this study to visit and examine as many of the federal project sites as pos-

sible. There is more to this than visiting them to take a picture or check them off a list. It is difficult, for example, to appreciate fully the Beartooth Highway without driving it and occasionally looking over the side and contemplating the work required to build it; it is difficult to contemplate what was involved in riprapping Bitter Creek without climbing down into the streambed and looking up at the walls of hand-placed rock put there seven decades ago; it is difficult to regard the Newcastle armory's stable as something more than a building, albeit a beautiful building, until one looks closely at the stonecutters' marks on individual stones and does some quick math; it is difficult to appreciate the bandshells in the George Washington memorial parks around the state until one has savored (and *felt*) the music emanating from one of them. To visit the sites, to study the buildings, the structures, and their surroundings, is important. To touch the past, to touch it exactly where the makers of history also touched it, is an experience essential to coming to grips with what was produced, and how it, in turn, touches our own lives. At that point one remembers that this is not just the story of buildings but the story of the people who built them and who used them and who shared them, even with future generations. When we remember this, we are in a deeper sense touching what was built when people built up Wyoming.

4. Michael Cassity, *Wyoming Will Be Your New Home . . . : Ranching, Farming, and Homesteading in Wyoming, 1860–1960* (Cheyenne: Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, 2011). That study and related materials can be found online at <http://wyoshpo.state.wy.us/homestead/index.html>.

The Fragile Fabric of the 1920s

HISTORIANS FOR MANY YEARS have moved beyond the facile characterizations of the 1920s as “roaring” or the “jazz age,” or similar popular clichés that are reductive, static, or otherwise distorting. Instead, a more complex picture has emerged of the decade, a picture that helps illuminate the social and economic forces at work reshaping the nation in the decade following World War I and that contributes to an understanding of the contours of the Great Depression and public responses to it. While certainly some of the same currents of change at work in the rest of the nation were also transforming Wyoming in the 1920s—the rise of the city, the modernization of the economy and society, and even some measure of economic growth—those changes concealed serious undercurrents of tension and stress that weakened the economy, put many people at risk in their own lives and occupations, and exposed further issues that raised questions about what the future might hold. The social fabric connecting people together in Wyoming, it turned out, was fragile.

The “New Era” of the 1920s in Wyoming

Sometimes called the “New Era” because of the dramatic rise in the stock market, the rapid proliferation of automobiles in society, and the rising dominance of cities, the 1920s actually did represent significant changes away from the decentralized, rural, horse-powered economy and social structure of just a few decades before. In the first place, the 1920 census marked a concrete watershed in American history as for the first time a majority of Americans now lived in cities, not in villages and on farms. The United States was, at least officially, an urban nation. The definition of city, of course, was somewhat generous—any place with a population of 2,500 or more—but this was not just a static development. Just as im-

portant as the crossing of this numerical threshold was the fact that this was actually a trend; more and more people were moving from farms and ranches and villages to the towns and cities of the nation, and that number kept growing. The United States was not only an urban nation but was becoming more so every day with this major demographic shift.

Wyoming’s population to some extent reflected that shift. Its towns and cities were growing, but the state, still just three decades removed from territorial status, remained predominantly rural and agricultural in its population and economy. In 1920, 29.5 percent of the people in Wyoming lived in cities. This was even a slightly *smaller* percentage than had lived in cities in Wyoming ten years earlier (29.6), although urban and rural areas were both growing at a rate of around 33 percent (33.4 for rural areas and 32.7 for urban).¹ As for the Wyoming “metropolises” with more than 2,500 people, there were only eight of them. Two of them had more than 10,000 residents: Cheyenne with 13,829 and Casper with 11,447. Even so, while Cheyenne’s population was slightly higher than it had been in 1910, it was lower than it had been in 1900; on the other hand, the population of Casper had jumped during the 1910s from 2,639, reflecting the rise of the petroleum industry in that community. Three communities (Laramie, Rock Springs, and Sheridan) each had a population between 5,000 and 10,000. Evanston, Greybull, and Rawlins were each between 2,500 and 5,000 residents. Thirteen of Wyoming’s counties did not have any communities with 2,500 people in them. Wyoming was, by any measure, still a rural state at the beginning of the 1920s.

1. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States [1920], State Compendium, Wyoming* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), 8.

The people of Wyoming, in their varied occupations, reflected that rural life. With an adult male workforce of 72,134 in 1920, the single largest category of occupation, employing more than a third (25,221) of these men, was agricultural work—mostly working on farms and ranches, with a few hundred in forestry and about five hundred in “all other occupations” related to agriculture. Given the role of entire families, including women and children, in the productive efforts on Wyoming’s farms and ranches, of course, that tabulation seriously undercounts the number of people who were “occupied” or working in the backbone of the Wyoming economy.

Even so, the numbers still reveal a substantial population, not quite two-thirds, employed otherwise than in agriculture. Those were the people working in the towns and cities of the state. What were they doing there? What were all those jobs? Census categories are hampered by arbitrary conceptualization and shifting boundaries, but they do reveal, like rock strata in a core sample or an archaeological dig, something of what was going on. After the agricultural occupations, the next largest category was that of “manufacturing and mechanical industries.” That label is deceptive. With conspicuous exceptions, factories in Wyoming were few and small. Dominated in actual numbers by dairy plants, flour and grist mills, automobile repair shops, printing and publishing plants, bakeries, lumber mills, and similar operations, the average “manufacturing” entity was quite small. The largest group within this category included people identified as carpenters, then building and general laborers, followed by machinists. In addition there were blacksmiths, boilermakers, masons, stationary engineers and firemen, painters, mechanics, and other skilled and semi-skilled laborers.

The transportation industry, employing 9,516 men, ranked next in the census enumeration. In a state where the Union Pacific Railroad dominated the southern tier of counties, this was not surprising; and the Union Pacific was joined by a growing number of railroads in other parts of the state. While laborers on the steam railroads included the single largest group of men employed in the transportation industry, the next largest was “draymen, teamsters, and expressmen.” The horse and buggy transportation system was very much alive and well in Wyoming. The extraction of minerals was a separate category, and it included coal mine operatives as well as oil and gas well workers, with coal miners greatly outnumbering their oil and gas counterparts (6,674 to 1,238). Of those coal mine opera-

tives, the vast majority (4,805) were foreign born. Not only was the state young, and its industries also young, but the connection of its workers to the “old country” of their origin remained palpable for these workers; the state was in the early stages of industrialization. The other categories—trade, public service, professional service, domestic and personal service, and clerical occupations—made up the remainder of Wyoming’s gainfully employed male population in 1920.

Women in the workforce were tabulated separately from men, and this set of data is also revealing. Wyoming may have been the first place to allow women to vote and serve on juries, and in 1925 Nellie Tayloe Ross may have been the first female governor in the nation, but Wyoming’s women in the twenties were still not a major part of the official outside-the-home workforce, and when they were their occupations tended to be defined by their gender. In 1920 only 9,402 women were listed as part of the population engaged in occupations, and of these, the largest group fell into the categories of domestic and personal service (3,305) and professional service (teachers, musicians and teachers of music, trained nurses, and others) with 2,107 employed women. Some women were employed on farms and dairy farms, at other places as dressmakers and seamstresses (not in factories), and as retail clerks and “saleswomen” in stores. Nearly 1,500 women worked in clerical occupations.²

Clearly, not all was equal in the Equality State, although in important respects the structure of the economy and society was one that encouraged the independent entrepreneur, the merchant on Main Street, the skilled craftsperson, the farmers and ranchers with their own land and self-sufficient (or nearly so) operations. There were, of course, the large coal mines and the growing oil refineries, but generally the economy was decentralized in fact as well as in theory. This was but the early stages of an industrial organization of labor in the state. As the 1920 census report itself expressed it, “Less than 1 per cent of the total number [of establishments] employed more than 250 wage earners each, while 84.9 per cent employed less than 6 wage earners.”³ As for the one percent—the employers of large

2. *Ibid.*, 31–33.

3. *Ibid.*, 81.

numbers of people—some industries, like petroleum refining and sugar beet processing, did not publish information since to do so would disclose the internal operations of individual establishments; they were identifiable because there were so few of them, and that hinted at another process at work—the consolidation of small operations into fewer, larger entities.

There was perhaps no better indicator of the state of the Wyoming economy than the banks. The banks too were small businesses, situated all across the state in villages as well as cities. Wherever an irrigation project opened up, so too did new banks emerge to serve the farmers. Wherever a ranching community sprang up, there was a bank. When a coal camp appeared reasonably permanent, there was a bank somewhere nearby, maybe two. Milton Woods describes the venture of Emerson Pugh, son of an Evanston banker, to start a new bank in the nearby community of Mountain View: “Mountain View was very primitive, with no electric lights, running water, or sewers.” In truth, in its lack of physical infrastructure, Mountain View was like most small towns, and even like some of the larger communities also. But now Mountain View had a bank, even if the bank’s temporary building, quickly thrown together, had to last it a few months into the winter before the permanent building was ready. Pugh’s initial task was to list the people in the community he felt could be trusted for unsecured loans and then calculate the collateral requirements for the others.⁴

Likewise, in the opposite corner of the state, a new bank opened in Moorcroft in 1919. Charles Floyd Spencer, fresh out of the army following his World War I service, returned to his parents’ homestead, not far from Moorcroft, where the family raised sheep. Spencer recalled, “A new bank, a branch of a Cheyenne bank, had just opened in Moorcroft. In an effort to get business, it was advancing loans to those interested in expanding their livestock holdings.”⁵ So it went across Wyoming. During the decade of the 1910s, eighty-four state banks and twelve national banks were chartered in Wyoming—in addition to those already chartered.⁶ The brick edifices of many of those buildings remain as symbols, not just of the proliferation of banks, but as symbols of the surging optimism and decentralized nature of Wyoming society in the years following World War I.

Some banks came and some banks went during the 1910s, but by 1920 their number reached a high point. At that time probably every community of any size, and some of not much size at all, including a good num-

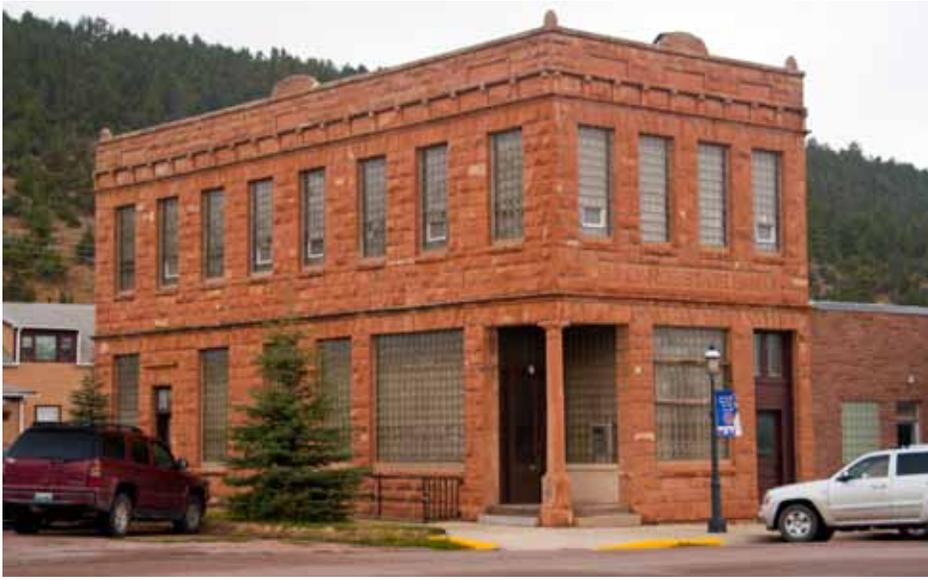


Serving as both symbols and active agents in the shaping of Wyoming’s economy in the 1920s, the state’s banks were small, decentralized, and at the heart of commerce in small towns and cities alike. Above, First National Bank of Rock River. One of three banks in Rock River operating in 1920, it failed in 1923 or 1924.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

4. L. Milton Woods, *Sometimes the Books Froze: Wyoming’s Economy and Its Banks* (Boulder, Colo.: Colorado Associated University Press, 1985), 97–98.

5. Charles Floyd Spencer, *Wyoming Homestead Heritage* (Hicksville, N.Y.: Exposition Press, 1975), 105.



Rock solid, the banks seemed to represent not just a firm connection to the past but also a foundation for the future. Sometimes the history of a bank can be seen in the building itself. Above: Sundance State Bank. Note 1885 date (top of left elevation) of original charter of the bank's predecessor and 1914 date (top of front elevation), marking when this building was constructed. Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

6. Woods, *Sometimes the Books Froze*, 89.

7. Wyoming banking statistics are elusive in these years and there remains a small margin for imprecision, although all available accounts do not vary greatly. These figures are from Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *All-Bank Statistics: United States, 1896–1955* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Reserve System, 1958), 1137, 1141. L. Milton Woods calculates the number of banks in 1920 slightly differently, in fact arriving at two different conclusions himself, noting at one point that Wyoming in 1920 had 145 banks in 83 locations, and at another that Wyoming in 1920 had 153 banks; but all the numbers remain close and suggest the widespread, decentralized nature of the banking system in Wyoming in that year. Woods, *Sometimes the Books Froze*, 96, 106n5.

8. Woods, *Sometimes the Books Froze*, 113.

ber that did not reach the Census Bureau threshold of 2,500, had a bank, even more than one. In 1920 there were a total of 113 state banks and 47 national banks in Wyoming.⁷ Communities across the state from Garland to Dixon, from Manville to Marbleton, from Lingle to Big Piney, from Manderson to Superior (and also South Superior), just about everywhere in the state, local farmers, ranchers, miners, merchants, and other workers could find a bank nearby to loan them money when they wanted to buy a house, some livestock, a car, or simply expand their current business or farm operation. The local bank also gave them a place to deposit their hard-earned savings. And there was a good chance, in that decentralized economy, that they would know the people who worked at and operated the bank—for better or worse.

Some of the banks were branches of bigger banks in Cheyenne, Casper, or elsewhere, and a few were owned by out-of-state interests, but many were independent operations that flourished and suffered alike with their neighbors in the community. The First State Bank of Greybull showed the extent to which banks could be a neighborhood, and neighborly, enterprise. That bank, capitalized at \$30,000, had 237 shareholders, many of them, according to Woods, owning only one-fourth of a share and only two with more than ten shares (one with ten and one with seventeen and a half).⁸ The banks were not only decentralized and distributed throughout Wyoming, but the ownership of some of them was equally decentralized and distributed throughout the communities in which they operated.

Undercurrents of Change and Stress

This picture of Wyoming's economy and society is not to suggest that the early 1920s represented a halcyon period, a fit subject of nostalgia and wistful romanticizing. The problems in the economy were profound, pervasive, and rooted in the larger structure of change in the nation. And, deep as they were, they steadily, and sometimes dramatically, undermined the optimism and hopes of Wyoming's citizens and also eroded the material foundations of that optimism in the rest of the decade. And this was before the stock market crash of 1929 brought the rest of the nation to the depths of despair. Powerful forces were at work reconfiguring the economy, the countryside, the urban centers, and the lives of the people of Wyo-

ming. In agriculture, in mining, in the oil and gas industry, in the cities, in retail sales, and more, Wyomingites watched their world shift in the 1920s, and it seldom shifted to their advantage.

THE AGRICULTURAL DEPRESSION OF THE 1920S

The world of the rancher, farmer, and homesteader often appears to be an unchanging world, one in which the people and the portion of the earth they claim as their own remain fixed and solid. There is some truth to that perspective, at least to the extent that their cycles of work and production remain entwined with nature's own cycles and rhythms, certainly much more so than for people whose lives are lived within an industrial order. But increasingly the lives of Wyoming's farmers and ranches were changing too, shaped ever more by technology, by markets, and by the new, modern structure of relationships and priorities. The rural population had already been shifting to the city, and during the 1920s the migration from the farm to the city continued apace. The number of farms and ranches (the census lumped farms and ranches together into a single category called farms, no matter the ratio of crop and livestock production on that farm) increased in the 1920s, from 15,748 in 1920 to 16,011 in 1930, a small increase, but an increase nonetheless. The small increase in the number of farms and ranches, however, masks other indicators that reflected powerful, but opaque, undercurrents of social change and an increasingly vulnerable rural population. In the first place, the increase was not evenly distributed in the state. The growth could be seen in Albany, Campbell, Carbon, Hot Springs, Natrona, Platte, Sweetwater, Uinta, Washakie, and the two newly created counties of Sublette and Teton that had not existed in 1920; but just as revealing, the other counties showed a *decline* in the number of farms. While the creation of the two new counties contributed to the loss in others, there was something else going on in Wyoming agriculture.

The challenges to farmers and ranchers and homesteaders in Wyoming in the 1920s proceeded along several levels. The first was the increasing pressure to think of themselves as operators of businesses instead of as people living a distinctive way of life, perpetuators of a culture, inheritors of the Jeffersonian and American dream of independent, relatively self-suf-

ficient farmers and ranchers beholden to no one and envied by many. This observation may, from the perspective of the twenty-first century, appear to be trivial, for the common assumption is that everyone is involved in the nation's economic machine, producing on a commercial basis for the national and international markets. This view, however, is itself distinctly modern and does not accurately characterize the aspirations and practices of many of Wyoming's farmers and ranchers in the state's early years and beyond. Much of Wyoming was settled under the terms of a series of federal laws granting increasingly large parcels of land to those who would live on the land and actively develop it. This was not an easy path and it seldom led to opulence, but it did provide for a modest level of well-being, or at least survival. And that is what the homesteading experience was all about. It was a political and social—both in the broadest sense of relationships—experience as much as it was economic. Rooted in the Jeffersonian notion of freehold democracy, a nation of small landowners would ensure the independence of families on the land, who would not be economically bound to anyone, whether to a feudal lord or simply a landlord, and it would also ensure the perpetuation of democracy in the nation. The nugget at the core of homesteading was that of having resources on which an individual and family could get by—that was the birthright of freedom itself. Without the land and its potential for producing what the family would need in its essentials, people would be dependent on markets not only for their financial success but for their very survival; they would be forced to sell their labor or other talents on a market.⁹ Life, from the homesteading perspective, was more than an economic proposition and the purpose of life was more than manipulating markets.

Actually, this concept of political and economic self-sufficiency, which may seem like it belongs to another time or place, was widespread in Wyo-

9. See the discussion of this framework and its application in Wyoming in Cassidy, *Wyoming Will Be Your New Home*. Possibly the two most pertinent theoretical and conceptual studies bearing on this are C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962) and Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

ming in the early twentieth century, and at the beginning of the 1920s it still resonated broadly across the plains and mountains of the state. Homesteaders continued to take up land with the same hopes and aspirations that we associate with their nineteenth-century predecessors in homesteading. Even as the cities of the state and nation grew, at the expense of the countryside, homesteads in Wyoming also increased.

On the other hand, the reality of independence was eroding during the 1920s through several developments. One was simply the phalanx of agricultural experts advising farmers and ranchers that they needed to be more business-like in their endeavors, that they needed to think of themselves as businesspeople instead of as farmers and ranchers. Money lenders and extension agents alike encouraged Wyoming's agriculturists to think in commercial terms and were shocked that they abidingly declined to do so. From these "modern" perspectives, farmers were stuck in their old ways of doing things and needed to change dramatically, and the first thing they needed to change was their minds. When Ted Olson and his family sold their ranch near Laramie in 1918, Olson lamented what he called the "arid bookkeeper calculus" of the bankers and purchasers: "A ranch is not merely a capital investment; it is a way of life."¹⁰ That perspective summed up much of what the conflict was about. There was the money, "that arid bookkeeper calculus," yes. But there was more at stake. There was also the life on the ranch, the way of life, the life that could not be reduced to dollars and cents. What was happening was that the goal, structure, and methods of operating a farm or ranch as a way of life were being challenged and often subjugated by the business assessment of farming and ranching as only a capital investment, with farming and ranching as worthwhile endeavors only insofar as they delivered a competitive return on committed capital.

Another development had to do with the hard times experienced by people who actually followed that advice and operated their farms and ranches as commercial businesses, producing for the market. Some of that distress went back to World War I. The war had brought with it higher

prices for the commodities that Wyoming ranchers and farmers were producing, and the prices brought for wheat, oats, corn, sugar beets, beef cattle, and wool were not only comfortable but even lush. But when the war came to an end, the countries in Europe that had been forced to cut their own agricultural production and import materials from the United States were not only back into production for their own consumption but were even competing with U.S. goods, a factor which further pushed agricultural commodity prices down. Plus, during the war the U.S. government had provided a variety of incentives and supports to encourage greater production. The combination of higher prices and government support meant that many farmers focused their efforts on the best-paying crop and switched from oats to wheat to the exclusion of all else, or expanded (or started) their sugar beet operations, and that ranchers increased the size of their herds and invested in more land. This worked out so long as the high prices and the supports were there. But after the war the prices were not there, and the mortgages still had to be paid—a combination that spelled disaster for many. There was some fluctuation in prices in the early years of the 1920s, but after 1923 or 1924, prices remained low, far below what they had been.

If a farmer or rancher was already invested in this system of commercialization and mechanization of production, the possible responses to the lower prices were generally limited to increasing the commitment and the production—and the debt. One way to produce more was to mechanize. Since the days before the turn of the century when steam-powered threshing machines moved people away from hand-held threshing flails, a variety of technological innovations beckoned to the agricultural producers of the state. World War I had offered up machines that promised easier work on the farm and ranch, encouraging their adoption in the name of both patriotism and profits. But the logic of mechanization was part of a complex stream and the implications of adopting the larger machinery were huge. It was not just a matter of purchasing a tractor alone. For example, the investment in a tractor then required working more acres to justify it, and that meant producing more of whatever it was that the family was growing. And that meant, further, borrowing more and more money for land and machinery. All of this meant that the tractor, or other machinery, was at the top of an unseen pyramid of debt that included not only the tractor but the implements that the tractor would pull, the land that it

10. Ted Olson, *Ranch on the Laramie* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 224.

would work, the seed that would be planted, the barns, sheds, and storage buildings, the additional irrigation, and the transportation expenses, and the goods that would be purchased that had previously been produced on the farm or ranch. And all of that meant, further, a mortgage to cover it all, which meant that it was that much more necessary to produce even more to pay off that debt. And so the spiral of debt continued to climb upward.

The combination of mortgages and machines was especially fateful. Tractors had been around for a couple of decades, although they had been as big as railroad locomotives and powered by steam, and not terribly inviting; but by the 1920s tractors were lighter in weight and gasoline powered. Although they were still only used by a minority of farms and ranches in Wyoming, they were increasing. In 1920, 969 (6.2 percent) of Wyoming's farms had a tractor, but during the decade, despite market setbacks (and sometimes because of them) the number of tractors virtually quadrupled so that by 1930, 3,749 (23.4 percent) farms reported owning tractors. Most operations—more than three-fourths—continued to use only their horses and mules, but the tractor was spreading and reflected an emerging, fundamental transformation of the countryside.

There are two other indications of this transformation. One was the increase in the size of farm and ranch operations, from an average of 749.9 acres in 1920 to almost twice that in 1930: 1,469 acres. The other was the increase in farm and ranch mortgages. The percentage of farms and ranches that owed money, that had taken out mortgages, at one time had been a small fraction of the total. During the 1910s the number of farms and ranches that did not owe a penny, did not have a mortgage, had dropped from around 80 percent of the owner-operated farms to just over 50 percent. By 1930, not only had the number of owner-operated farms dropped from what it had been in 1920 (despite the total increase in farms), but now only 30 percent of those owner-operated farms and ranches were free of mortgages.¹¹ Once they were mortgaged, there was no escaping the market imperatives for what kind of operation their owners would run. They would need to maximize sales, maximize production, and maximize profits.

Farms and ranches became more specialized—sugar beet farming and dairy operations jumped in their reported numbers in the 1920s, and specialization of both crops and livestock also became common, usually in

the name of scientific agriculture. The trend was away from independent, diversified, relatively self-sufficient operations. Any time an operation became more specialized, its labor or equipment also became specialized. In the case of sugar beet agriculture, the labor force had already become heavily migratory, and in the 1920s it became even more so. Which created a situation where the beet producers were dependent on migratory labor, building colonies even for their Mexican American workers, and devising ways to keep them there even in the off season. Of course, the laborers were also dependent on the market. If farmers and ranchers were vulnerable, these people were especially vulnerable. As it turned out, the 1920s were a difficult time in which to become dependent on the market.

Wyoming farmers and ranchers experienced the Depression years before the rest of the nation. This was the agricultural depression of the 1920s. The farmers and ranchers who experienced the agricultural depression the hardest were the ones who were the most connected to and dependent upon the national markets. That meant, however, not just a connection in the commodities they were producing, but on the other side of the ledger too—in the way they financed their operations. Those without fixed debts to pay, those without mortgages, were free of a major burden even if their standard of living may not have been as sumptuous as that of their mortgaged neighbor. Of course, it was not a black-and-white situation in most instances—mortgaged or not—and the burdens fell along a wide spectrum reflecting the degree of dependence on declining markets and the amount owed. But if they owed money to a bank, there was a particularly powerful force that pressed on them that could not be rationalized away or denied.

The farmers and ranchers experienced hard times, but so did their bankers, and the two shared those hard times, and not happily. Banks across the nation were in crisis during the 1920s, but especially troubled were the small banks in the rural states and in the small towns of the rural states. The premier history of banking and monetary policy in these years

11. Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: Agriculture, Volume II, Part 3—The Western States*, 220; Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States [1920], State Compendium, Wyoming*, 54.

is explicit in its assessment of the situation: “A large fraction of all banks that suspended during the period had capital of \$25,000 or less and were located in towns of 2,500 or less, largely situated in seven western grain states.”¹² Economically and socially this was a banking catastrophe as about 20 percent of all banks in the nation failed. And that included a large share of banks in Wyoming. Sixty-seven communities in Wyoming lost at least one bank during the decade and, while the figures are not always precise or in agreement, it appears that 101 banks out of a total of 153 in Wyoming closed their doors. On the other hand, only thirty-two banks opened for business in those years—not exactly equilibrium. And some years were especially bad. In just the one year of 1924 banks shut down in these communities: Basin, Buffalo, Carpenter, Casper, Cheyenne (2), Clearmont, Cowley, Douglas, Fort Laramie, Glenrock, Guernsey, Hillsdale, Kaycee, Keeline, Lavoye, Lingle, Lusk, Manderson, Newcastle, Osage, Powell, Rawlins, Riverton, Rock River, Sheridan, Shoshoni, Torrington (2), Upton, Van Tassell, and Worland. The next year more banks failed in six communities, including in some of the same towns that had suffered a bank shutdown in 1924.¹³ In addition, of course, there were the banks that had failed already in the contraction that followed World War I, and there were others that failed in the remaining years of the decade. The banks of Wyoming were in serious trouble throughout the 1920s.

The reasons for the difficulty are not hard to discern, although they are complex. On one side of the picture, the banks had made bad loans, loans that were not, as it turned out, worth the uses to which they were put. Valuations of land and equipment during World War I turned out to be inflated and could not be sustained during the tighter years of the 1920s.

12. Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 249.

13. T. A. Larson, *History of Wyoming*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 413; Peter W. Huntoon, “The National Bank Failures in Wyoming, 1924,” *Annals of Wyoming* 54 (Fall 1982): 35, 37, 42–43.

14. Spencer, *Wyoming Homestead Heritage*, 106.

And the risk of the loans was greater than anticipated, simply because of the extreme volatility of the market—so that the ability of borrowers to pay back money was seriously hampered. Yet it was the banks that had encouraged those loans, encouraged the expansion of the farms and ranches. And they, and the agricultural extension agents who urged farmers and ranchers to become more businesslike, had been more than satisfied to see Wyoming ranchers and farmers borrow money, expand their operations, become more market-oriented in their production, and more mechanized in their systems. In other words, those farmers and ranchers were dependent on the bankers, but the bankers, in perhaps a fitting irony, were now dependent on the farmers and ranchers to whom they had made the loans.

Another factor in the weakness of the banks had to do with their own structure and operation. At the time it was legal for commercial banks to invest their money, or more accurately, the money of their depositors, in speculative ventures; if those speculations were to fall short of expectations, the banks would themselves be in trouble and would need further assets to cover their losses. Their customers would then be injured both when they lost their savings and when the banks foreclosed on their mortgages. In addition, branch banking created a row of dominoes among the banks so that the collapse of one bank would spread to others. Charles Floyd Spencer had borrowed money from the People’s Bank of Moorcroft, but since that bank was owned by a bank in Cheyenne, when the Cheyenne bank experienced problems, so did the Moorcroft bank: “The Cheyenne bank was forced to call in the notes of its member branches and the People’s Bank of Moorcroft closed its doors permanently after being in business only a short time.” When the Moorcroft bank called in its own notes and closed its doors, Spencer’s family lost not only the sheep they had purchased with a recent loan, but the entire homestead that had been used as collateral for the loan. In this case, it needs to be noted that the bank had sold them the sheep and required a six-month mortgage to be renewed and extended over a long term in the fall: “Dad’s homestead, that he had labored on for ten years, and all the sheep in the newly-purchased band, together with their lambs, were turned back to the bank for the cancellation of the notes due them.”¹⁴ As in this instance, it was entirely possible for the large to pull down the small. These people were losing everything not because they didn’t work hard enough or had character

flaws that doomed them; they were losing their homes and livelihoods and futures because the economic system pulled them down.

Sometimes the banks would decline to foreclose on their largest customers, but this too had serious implications. Thurman Arnold was practicing law in Laramie in the 1920s (in the 1930s he would become assistant attorney general of the United States) and he observed that when agricultural prices fell, mortgages were foreclosed, but the banks could not get rid of the land they had acquired, so the banks themselves went under, especially in the agricultural communities. “The only thing they could do was decline to foreclose, keep advancing money to the ranchmen, and hope for the best.”¹⁵ When they did so, however, and they would only do so with their biggest customers to whom they had loaned the most, they turned with even more vigor to the smaller customers to get what they could. This might result in a foreclosure of the farm or ranch, or it might mean a forced sale at low prices, or it might mean any number of other distress transfers, none of which were especially good for the bank, but all of which were even worse for the borrower. Historian Van L. Perkins puts this process into perspective: “While it is difficult to measure the seriousness of the impact of particular aspects of the depression with any degree of sureness and precision, there can be no doubt that foreclosure was one of the most dreaded. It meant the relegation of landowners to the status of tenants or farm laborers, or in the depth of the depression, to relief rolls or breadlines.”¹⁶ Except, of course, during the 1920s there were no relief rolls or breadlines to turn to.

That still left farms and ranches that had not been transferred, but those operations were now even deeper in debt and the outlook was not getting brighter. By 1929 farm foreclosures, crisis sales, and other emergency solutions had become commonplace in Wyoming. Soon, however, the situation would get even worse. Again, there was an irony in that those who placed their faith in the market because of its anticipated blessings, its promise of prosperity, maybe even of wealth, those were the people most vulnerable when the commodities fell in value and the mortgage payment came due, no matter how hard they worked, no matter their own personal virtue. On the other hand, those who practiced a greater degree of self-reliance by producing for their own needs on their homestead, even in modest subsistence ways, who did not use their farm or ranch as collateral to get a bigger



People's Bank of Moorcroft.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

15. Thurman Arnold, *Fair Fights and Foul: A Dissenting Lawyer's Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1951), 34.

16. Van L. Perkins, *Crisis in Agriculture: The Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the New Deal, 1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

farm or ranch, who really did not buy into the idea that they were businesses like the merchant on Main Street striving for a return on investment, those people were less dramatically affected by the agricultural depression of the 1920s. Even those people, however, would be vulnerable to nature's volatile turns, as when the rain (or the Wyoming variant, snow) that was crucial for them, their crops, their livestock, did not come.

Thus the urbanization of the nation, and the urbanization of Wyoming, in the 1920s was fueled by a steady movement of farmers, ranchers, and farm-laborers off the land and into the city. That movement was not necessarily powered by the lure of the bright lights. In the late 1920s in Sublette County, Adeline Brosman and her husband, Tom, contemplated an offer to sell their ranch and move to Casper. Tom dutifully went to Casper to explore the situation there, spending several days in the city: "When he came home he said, 'I have seen a lot of people. That town is full of promoters and agents, and the get-rich-quickers. People rush in the hotels and cafes to get something to eat. Then they rush off in a whirlwind of "get what I can, quick as I can" race. I don't believe you or I would like that kind of a life, after our quiet peaceful life here on our ranch.'"¹⁷ The couple discussed the possible sale of their ranch and moving to town, but finally declined the offer. They seemed to agree on Adeline Brosman's summary judgment: "I'm so glad we're not going to move to Casper. I would rather live on cornbread and potatoes and be able to stay on our own ranch." That judgment was not so much on the city of Casper as it was on the course and direction of change in society generally.

17. Adeline H. Brosman, "Wyoming Homesteaders: An Autobiography Covering My Life in the Green River Valley (1905–1954)," 64–65. Typescript in American Heritage Center collections, University of Wyoming, Laramie.

18. A. Dudley Gardner and Verla Flores, *Forgotten Frontier: A History of Wyoming Coal Mining* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989), 133.

19. Gardner and Flores, *Forgotten Frontier*, 127.

COAL MINING AND MODERNIZATION/MECHANIZATION IN THE 1920S

The countryside was not alone in its stresses and strains; if it was any solace, the cities and towns to which the farmers and ranchers were moving also were troubled. If the farmers and ranchers were vulnerable in the national market, so too were others, and, by definition, that included almost everyone else who did not own land or other resources on which they depended for a living. Consider the coal miners of the state. As A. Dudley Gardner and Verla Flores observe in their history of Wyoming coal mining, "The years between the wars were not ones of prosperity."¹⁸ Coal mining had been a powerful and key element of Wyoming's economy going back to the Union Pacific land grants when the railroad was able to take advantage of vast deposits of bituminous coal to operate its engines, creating its own coal mining company, the Union Pacific Coal Company, to unearth the valuable fuel that stretched intermittently from the Hanna Coal Field to the Green River Coal Region. It was not long before coal was prospected in almost every part of Wyoming, but the concentration of mines became especially heavy in (1) an arc that went from Hanna to Rock Springs to Kemmerer and (2) the Powder River Basin, broadly defined from Douglas and Glenrock to Cambria and Sheridan—by the 1920s. In some instances company towns emerged at the mines, and they were company towns in every sense—towns that were lived in by company workers who purchased their provisions at company stores, towns that were owned by the company and governed by the company. The railroads aggressively recruited immigrants to work the coal mines; so the mines, and the miners with their industrial organization of work, underground workplaces, and polyglot tongues, represented a distinct cultural, economic, and social aspect of Wyoming in the early years of the twentieth century. Almost invariably underground operations, except for the small wagon mines that cropped up all around the state, the work in these mines was hard, long, and dangerous. And the wagon mines were not delights to work either.

In the 1910s Wyoming's coal mines had grown dramatically in physical extent, in output, and in people employed. New coal camps emerged, new technologies replaced old, and records were set. As Gardner and Flores report, "from 1915 to 1920, coal production climbed steadily to a point where 9,580,274 tons were extracted in 1920."¹⁹ In 1910, production

had been two million tons less, at 7,583,088 tons, and in 1900 it had only been 3,774,487 tons.²⁰ But it was not an unalloyed record of increased production and increased benefits for all. In the 1920s, the coal mines and the miners faced an unstable market, encountered dramatic swings in demand, and experienced the reality of the introduction of new technologies.

Several aspects of the coal industry particularly loomed over the miners during the 1920s. One was the increased mechanization of the mines. Coal mining had traditionally been hard work, all the more so because of the hand tools used to perform the work. Traveling into the bowels of the earth, following the drift of the seams of coal as they would expand and shrink in their heights, the miners would work the various “rooms” carved out of the coal seam. Confronting a face of coal, or the wall of coal, in the room, they would lie on their sides, not uncommonly in water, and use picks at the floor of the coal seam to undercut the remaining chunks. Undercutting was essential because then, when the miners set their explosives at strategic points, the blast would loosen lumps of coal the right size—not too big, not too small, so that it would keep together and keep its value but not be so big as to be unmovable—and the chunks were then loaded by hand-held shovel into mule-powered wagons and taken to the surface.

During the 1920s this system changed with the addition of larger and more powerful machinery. That mechanization took two forms. One involved undercutting the coal. Essentially, this involved using a machine that Henry Kovach, a miner at Reliance, described as “like a big chain saw”; this machine, however, was much larger than a chain saw and, for that matter, was sometimes as large as an automobile and was generally mounted on a chassis with four wheels or on tracks. The cutter would penetrate the face laterally, as close as possible to the rock, and cut the bottom so that the coal, when it separated from the face, would drop down in a controlled fashion. Then it would be loaded, and that was the next form of mechanization. Several kinds of devices emerged in the 1920s to take the place of hand loading, and generally they lifted the coal from the mine floor and transported it, often on a conveyor, to the mine car where it was then taken to the surface and cleaned. These machines themselves were powered by ten or twenty-five horsepower motors and some completely eliminated shoveling by hand.²¹

The immediate consequence of the introduction of the machinery, however, was profound. An Ohio study of the introduction of that machinery in 1929 observed, “The tendency toward mechanization and coal cleaning is having a very noticeable effect upon the coal industry. It is reducing the number of men underground per ton of coal mined. It is resulting in the employment of a greater percentage of skilled labor, and finally it is producing a great need for more technically trained men to superintend the operation of the mechanical equipment.”²² Written in 1940, one history of the Union Pacific coal mines praised the contributions of Eugene McAuliffe, who became president of the Union Pacific Coal Company in 1923: “Under his administration the mines have been enlarged for greater production, and have been completely mechanized. Prior to 1923, only a small tonnage at Hanna was loaded mechanically, the entire system [of] production now being loaded by this method.”²³

The Union Pacific Coal Company, in fact, pioneered some of this technology, purchasing a German shaking conveyor and installing it in Superior C Mine; George Pryde, a vice president for operations, declared, “the results were so much better than that obtained under the hand loading method that other machines of this type, some of them of American manufacture, were installed in all of the Company’s mines from time to time.” The machinery had a defect, however, in that it was still “necessary to shovel most of the coal onto the conveyor.” The UP Coal Company mines at Superior and Rock Springs then developed the duckbill machine, attached to the shaking conveyor; the duckbill “advanced into the coal pile and loaded most of the coal automatically, the immediate results being

20. *Ibid.*, 100.

21. See especially the discussion of the mechanical loaders in L. C. Ilsley, E. J. Gleim, and H. B. Brunot, “Coal-Mine Mechanization and Equipment,” in U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Mines, Bulletin 343, *Permissible Coal-Handling Equipment*, 1.

22. F. E. Steele, “Mechanization in Coal Mining,” *The Ohio State Engineer*, May 1929, 8.

23. *History of the Union Pacific Coal Mines, 1868 to 1940* (Omaha: The Colonial Press, 1940), 191.

a visible increase in the production obtained from each machine.”²⁴ The introduction of this machinery took place most intensively in the last years of the 1920s. In 1926, 22.6 percent of the coal produced in Wyoming was mechanically loaded; three years later, in 1929, 48.56 percent of the coal was mechanically loaded.²⁵

In addition, the introduction of electric locomotives, ultimately replacing the ubiquitous mules, also transformed the mines in the 1920s, although mules remained common in the 1930s. This was a key development since more and more of the equipment used underground required electricity, and the locomotives operated by a trolley line in the roof of the mine, the trolley line also carrying electricity into the depths of the mines.

Translating the impact of mechanization in the coal mines, historian Dudley Gardner explains: “More machines meant fewer miners were needed. All aspects of coal mining became more sophisticated. Even setting explosives was done scientifically. But wages were slow in reflecting the new skills needed in mining. Worse yet was the fact that miners were losing jobs to new equipment.”²⁶ In addition, mechanization of mines especially increased when strip mining was introduced. In 1925, for the first time, a strip mine was reported in the State Mine Inspector’s Report: the Wyodak Coal and Manufacturing Company near Gillette. Where the seam of coal was ninety feet thick and covered with perhaps two dozen feet of soft overburden that could be removed with relative ease and safety

(compared to the underground endeavor), strip mining proved to be even more machine-intensive, producing dramatically more tons of coal per person employed.

Productivity of the mines increased, at least in terms of tons of coal per worker, but total output of the mines declined in the 1920s from a peak at the beginning of the decade. Assessing in 1938 not just the workers at the UP mines, but all coal mines in the state, George Pryde reported, “While the high peak in production occurred in 1920, the high peak in men employed came in 1922, this probably due to the fact that all coal companies were heavily manned in anticipation of a further increase in business. However, production began to fall off, and after 1922 the general decrease in men ran along at the same rate as the decrease in production.”²⁷ In 1922 a total of 9,192 men worked in the coal industry in Wyoming.

While mechanization meant that fewer workers would be needed even if output remained high, the reduced production meant that even fewer workers would be needed and that even more workers would be laid off. In addition, those who remained at work did not always have full-time work. The demand for coal was actually seasonal, with winter’s increased demand creating more work and the summer reductions becoming manifest as work and production slowdowns. Again, Gardner explains: “slowdowns were nearly as bad as layoffs because a miner might work only one day a week. These slowdowns were the result of few orders for coal.”²⁸ Gardner then notes, though, that one salvation was that the company, which owned not only the mines but the miners’ houses, would allow the workers to remain in their houses during the slowdowns, something not possible if the miners were let go. The downside of that, of course, was that the worker and family, while being able to charge goods at the company store, remained in debt to the company, deeper and deeper in debt even. Work in the mines provided a part-time income; rent and groceries constituted a full time expense.

By 1930, Wyoming coal miners numbered about half as many as only eight years previously: 4,693. Mines cut back, mines closed, and sometimes entire communities that served those mines vanished too. In 1928 the mine at Sublet No. 6, north of Kemmerer, shut down; the mines were then quiet and the miners’ houses were soon vacant. In 1930, when Cumberland Mines No. 1 and No. 2 shut down, the Union Pacific abandoned

24. George B. Pryde, “The Union Pacific Coal Company,” *Annals of Wyoming* 25 (July 1953): 194.

25. These numbers, taken from the State Mine Inspector’s reports, were cited by George B. Pryde, vice president for operations for the Union Pacific Coal Company, in his “Report of Coal Mining Operations in Mining for Use of the Governor’s Resources Committee, October, 1938,” page 18, manuscript located in Box 23, Union Pacific Coal Company Records, Western Wyoming Community College, Rock Springs, Wyoming.

26. Gardner and Flores, *Forgotten Frontier*, 145.

27. George B. Pryde, “Report of Coal Mining Operations in Mining for Use of the Governor’s Resources Committee, October, 1938.”

the towns too. Others were in similar shape, and those that survived often did so as mere shadows of what they had once been. The 1920s were not years of prosperity for that part of Wyoming society—and the other parts that depended on it.

THE PROMISE OF PETROLEUM

If coal mining, as an integral part of the industrial sector of Wyoming, indicated some of the limitations of economic and social development and vitality in the state, so did its rising competitor, the oil industry. While the production and refining of the state's considerable oil resources held out the promise of broad economic growth, the reality remained much more limited—in several ways.

The increased demand for oil in the 1920s (and the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 that allowed oil companies to lease mineral rights instead of claiming and owning parcels of federal land) paved the way for dramatic and dynamic growth. In fact, that growth was so promising that the coal industry often attributed at least part of the decline in coal consumption to the petroleum industry, which supplied fuel for the increasingly available automobiles and trucks. As cars and trucks became more common and more accessible in the early twentieth century, and roads sometimes more drivable, the demand for fuel increased. This increased demand itself was part of a larger context of social and economic change, for this growth in consumption came at a point in the 1910s at which John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil trust lost its strangle-hold on the production, refining, and distribution of petroleum in the years following the Taft administration's prosecution of Standard Oil for violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. In 1911 the Supreme Court upheld that prosecution, and the company was broken into multiple parts, although the holding company structure continued, enabling a single parent company to own and control the ostensibly separate and competing companies. This partly opened the door for more companies to emerge and also encouraged independent development in Wyoming of other resources outside the traditional area dominated by Standard Oil.

The demise of the Standard Oil trust was not complete, however, and the various Standard Oil companies continued to operate and even

expand. In the 1910s one of those individual companies that had separated from Standard Oil, Standard of Ohio, also known as the Ohio Oil Company, began operating in Wyoming, taking over other independent companies and emerging as a dominant player. Primarily a crude oil producer and the largest producer of the pre-1911 Standard Trust, the Ohio Oil Company moved aggressively under the leadership of the hard-driving Jack McFadyen to develop or acquire oil fields around the state. The list of Ohio Oil Company fields in Wyoming was extensive: Big Muddy (1915), Salt Creek, Lance Creek, Maverick Springs, Rock River (1916), Mule Creek (1919), Oregon Basin (1921), Rex Lake (1923), Byron (1924), Medicine Bow (1933). Furthermore, the company was active in other fields that it did not completely control and had commercial gas wells operating in some of these fields and also at Hidden Dome, Elk Basin, and Buffalo Basin.²⁹ In addition, another Standard Oil Company, Standard of Indiana, began building a refinery in Casper as early as 1913 immediately east of the Midwest Refining Company operation, and both Standard and Midwest tapped the growing supply of crude oil from the productive Salt Creek Field.

To some in the oil business, it seemed that the future was bright and promising, perhaps endless, because of the rise of the automobile. The demand for oil as generated by the automobile actually had two parts to it. One was the volume of that demand as more and more cars meant more and more consumption of gasoline. But the other part was a change in the refining industry itself. The petroleum refineries were not originally set up to produce gasoline. They had initially focused on the production of other products. Heating oil, kerosene, and other products constituted the main production for the first half-century of the commercial refining processes. Gasoline had, in fact, been a waste byproduct of the refining process, too explosive for most domestic uses and not really marketable for anything

28. Gardner and Flores, *Forgotten Frontier*, 145.

29. Hartzell Spence, *Portrait in Oil: How the Ohio Oil Company Grew to Become Marathon* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1962), 78, 86.

else. The widespread production and adoption of the internal combustion engine, however, created new demand, and in 1910, for the first time, sales of gasoline exceeded sales of kerosene.

This shifted the focus and engineering of the refining process as the effort switched from finding ways to reduce the waste (gasoline) to finding ways to maximize the production of gasoline. In 1911, immediately prior to the dissolution of Standard Oil, William H. Burton, who would become president of Standard Oil of Indiana, developed a new process of refining. This process, called thermal cracking, involved the heating of crude oil to separate its different components, just as the earlier processes had. What was different, though, was that now the crude was being heated under pressure; the combination of forces—heat and compression—caused the carbon molecules to divide, or “crack,” into smaller molecules, creating a usable automobile fuel. Standard of Indiana, which owned the patent, developed some of the new stills, and in 1914 it started to license the technology to other refineries. In the same year, the Indiana Standard’s new refinery in Casper used the technology of the “Burton pressure stills.”

As additional “pressure stills” began to emerge around the state, the older refineries were left behind and Standard used this technology to rise to dominance. The independent refineries became obsolete technologically and redundant economically and, with a small number of exceptions,

were either closed or taken over by others, especially by the two largest refiners in the state, Midwest Oil Company and Standard Oil of Indiana. Some independent refineries remained in Wyoming, generally small operations with limited output, and they were usually characterized as unintegrated—focusing on only one aspect of the oil business, in this case refining.

But the giants were the integrated companies, and they were becoming more integrated all the time, both vertically (from crude production to refining to distribution) and horizontally (controlling more of the same kind of operation). And of these giants, the two Standard companies (Ohio and Indiana) and Midwest stood out in Wyoming.³⁰ Midwest aggressively expanded its operations and opened new plants and took over old refineries. In 1917 Midwest Refining Company acquired Greybull Refining Company, and in August 1920, Midwest opened a plant in Laramie. The explicit goal of the company was domination of the refining business in the state. Verner Z. Reed, founder of the Midwest and still a large stockholder in the company in 1917, made no bones about the need to block any possible competition when he discussed the company’s policy and effort: “It has become very important, if it can do so legally, to prevent the building of other refining plants within its [Midwest’s] territory, and [the company] is doing all that it legally can do to prevent such competition.”³¹ Of course, this was a likely violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act, but then that law was not being enforced anyway. Although Midwest appeared to be in a position to challenge the dominance of Standard Oil in Wyoming, in 1921 Standard of Indiana gained controlling interest in the Midwest Refining Company, exercising that control while leaving it as a separate entity. Standard’s control, including its control of Midwest, as the Federal Trade Commission observed in 1921, “will in all probability discourage the development of independent refineries in Wyoming.”³²

The extent of Standard Oil dominance was clear in the 1920s and it was also clear that the two separate companies—Indiana and Ohio—held close bonds. As Daniel Yergin explains in his acclaimed history of the petroleum business, “A kind of shadow Standard Oil Trust had persisted for a decade after the 1911 dissolution. The various successor companies to the Trust had remained tied together by contracts, habits, personal relationships, old loyalties, and common interests, as well as by shared dominant stockholders.”³³ Nor did the “shadow” trust dissipate suddenly in Wyo-

30. By 1921, these smaller refineries included an independent at Riverton, one at Glenrock owned by the Mutual Refining & Producing Company, and one at Thermopolis. The Producers and Refiners Company (Parco) took over a refinery in Lander, also with a small output.

31. Federal Trade Commission, *Report of the Federal Trade Commission on the Petroleum Industry of Wyoming* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 54. This important document sets forth the structure of the Standard Oil companies’ near monopoly of the petroleum business in Wyoming at the time.

32. Federal Trade Commission, *Report of the Federal Trade Commission on the Petroleum Industry of Wyoming*, 52.

33. Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1992), 226.

ming in the 1920s. While the two Standard Oil companies pursued their separate courses of vertical integration to gain more power in the nation, at least in Wyoming they were not exactly competing with each other as adversaries. When eminent sociologist Robert S. Lynd studied the oil and gas camp at Elk Basin, which was dominated by the Ohio Oil Company and the Midwest Company, he took the results of his study—finding that the workers had to work six-and-a-half or seven-day weeks with twelve hours a shift, lacking shower facilities, and worse—to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., himself. Rockefeller directed the inquiry to R. W. Stewart, president of the Standard Oil of Indiana, who protested, “None of the Standard Oil Companies has any such interest in the Elk Basin Consolidated Petroleum Company [an independent] as would warrant their interference in the situation.” Ultimately, after being presented the facts of Standard ownership, Stewart acknowledged, as Lynd reported, “that his statement to Mr. Rockefeller was in error,” and Rockefeller issued a public statement promising to improve conditions at Elk Basin.³⁴

Or, on a different, but perhaps more comprehensible, level, the workers in the camps knew the intimate connection between the separate Standard Oil companies. In the Salt Creek field, the notorious Jack McFadyen (after whom the camp and then town of McFadden was named, with a twist in the spelling), a vice president and director of the Ohio Oil Company, fired a crew of workers and ordered them to collect their pay. The workers, however, were employed not by Ohio but by Midwest, an Indiana company. As related in his famously friendly and uncritical study of The Ohio Company (and of McFadyen), Hartzell Spence tells what happened: “They reported to their timekeeper, who asked who had dismissed them. ‘Jack McFadyen,’ they replied. ‘Well,’ said the timekeeper, ‘Jack McFadyen is not running the Midwest Oil Company, but if he fired you, you stay fired.’”³⁵ The Standard interests, far from separate competitors, remained close and they remained powerful.

The dampening effect of Standard Oil control was powerful and pervasive, although some independent refineries did emerge in the 1920s; often, however, their independence was short-lived and they were controlled by one of the two large companies. The construction of small refineries by new independents usually took place with the operator hoping to benefit from physical proximity to the producing field to gain an advantage in both crude capture and gasoline distribution, and doubtless that some-

times worked, such as occurred for a plant close to the Osage field near Upton. There the United States Oil Refining Company aspired to an operation (the first in the area) that would treat a thousand barrels daily, capturing the output of the thirty producing wells in that field.³⁶ So too in 1920 did the small Armstrong gasoline plant in the community of Rock River hold on for a little while thanks to production in the nearby fields. Others cropped up elsewhere in the state, each small, each locating near an existing or new field that was far from the major refiners, and each struggling in its own way against the majors.

But Standard remained the leading and largest major oil producer and refiner in the state and it continued to grow in power. The independent oil producers organized to fight Standard Oil, and one of the independents, Leslie Miller, in 1923 explained the means by which Standard dominated the oil industry not only in Wyoming but in other states through its vertical integration and massive size. Miller described how Standard both stifled competition from other producers (controlling the pipelines) and overcharged consumers (setting prices artificially high using the “Tulsa plus” system, factoring in extra charges to make the price equivalent to oil shipped from Tulsa regardless of actual origin, thus eliminating any advantage to being near Wyoming’s wells and refineries).³⁷

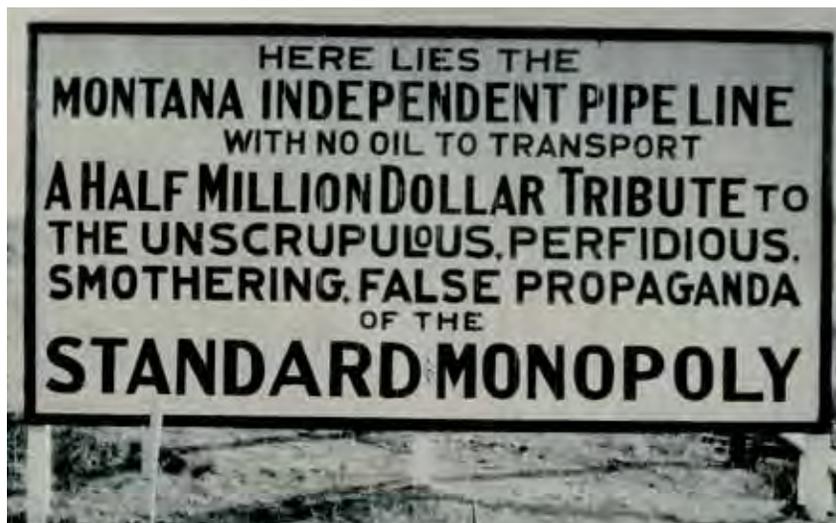
Although Standard Oil dominated the petroleum industry of Wyoming, there were several other large companies that moved into Wyoming in the 1920s to expand their own operations. The key feature that set them apart from the independents was their vertical and horizontal integration,

34. Robert S. Lynd, “Done in Oil,” *The Survey* 49 (November 1, 1922): 138–39; John D. Rockefeller, Jr.’s response, “A Promise of Better Days,” is in the same issue at 147–48.

35. Spence, *Portrait in Oil*, 66–67. McFadyen was not always admired by his workers. He hated to see them have any time for themselves. As Spence, a gushing admirer of McFadyen, notes, “Deliberately he planned his work to keep anyone from taking time off. When the division headquarters was transferred from Thermopolis to Casper in 1917, McFadyen made the move on Christmas Eve.” *Ibid.*, 79.

36. *Sheridan Daily Enterprise*, January 20, 1920.

37. Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 435.



Despite the apparent break-up of the Standard Oil trust in 1911, the hold of the Standard companies on Wyoming's petroleum industry remained powerful in the 1920s, as evidenced by this 1922 sign.

Photograph from the Herman C. Bretschneider Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

a consolidation and organization that gave them increasing control over their production and markets. The Texas Oil Company (later to become Texaco) constructed its own refinery east of Casper in 1922 and the White Eagle Oil Company also built a refinery east of town (later Mobil and then Little America).³⁸ Mutual's refinery at Glenrock, with a capacity of 1,500 barrels daily in 1920, was itself taken over in 1924 by the Continental Oil Company (the future Conoco, and one of the Standard Oil companies separated out in 1911), as the company needed a refining capacity in its chain of production. Taken together with the power of Standard Oil, the trend in Wyoming conformed to that in the rest of the nation. The structure was increasingly centralized and national in scope, and the independent producers and the independent refiners were being left out. The standard history of the industry notes the trend: "While there may have been still some 14,000–16,000 separate crude oil producing companies, the drive to vertical integration that reached an intense pitch during the late 1920's lessened the competitive importance of the small-scale producer."³⁹

By 1929, Wyoming had a total of seventeen refineries, although these were not equally distributed or evenly participating in the refining of oil. Nor were they equal in size. No matter how they were built, they could not compare or compete with Standard. The Standard Oil refinery in Casper was huge. In 1920, the state land commissioner, A. Baker, observed, "One refinery in the state is about sixth largest size in the United States and when enlargements which are planned or underway are completed, will be the largest refinery in the United States."⁴⁰ The Casper Standard Oil refinery did indeed expand and, by virtually every account, it became the largest refinery in the nation and some sources say in the world.

The result of all this was that Wyoming's economy was well on its way to becoming not just oriented to the petroleum industry, but, some argued, dominated by the oil industry. The oil fields provided employment to many, some of them people from out of state, people who followed the oil industry wherever the next boom might be, some of them local farmers looking to supplement their income. Others moved permanently to town, and Casper became even more an oil town in the 1920s. The *Laramie Republican* suggested that the process was well underway in 1920 when it said of Casper: "From a typical cattle and sheep town it has developed along substantial and permanent lines because of new prosperity coming from the big Midwest Refinery plant."⁴¹ And during the 1920s that

38. Ed Bille, *Early Days at Salt Creek and Teapot Dome* (Casper: Mountain States Lithographing Company, 1978), 63.

39. Harold F. Williamson, Ralph L. Andreano, Arnold R. Daum, and Gilbert C. Klose, *The American Petroleum Industry: The Age of Energy, 1899–1959* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 329–30.

40. "State Lands Commissioner Baker on Wyoming Oil Outlook," *Kemmerer Camera*, January 28, 1920.

41. *Laramie Republican* semi-weekly edition, November 17, 1920,

growth continued with the addition of more refineries and the expansion of existing facilities. During the 1920s Casper's population increased by nearly 50 percent, from 11,447 to 16,619. In addition, the outlying areas near the refineries also grew, reflecting the new petroleum age of the area. The Town of Mills, incorporated in 1923 near the Midwest refinery, provided homes for many of the burgeoning workforce for the refinery. Mildred Steinle moved to Mills in 1923, and she recalled, "When I first came here Mills residents were just about all refinery employees or families of employees."⁴²

The structure and growth of the petroleum industry helped shape the social and political contours of the state, and Standard was at the center of the state and of its development—and lack thereof. One analysis in 1924 noted the ways in which Standard "was able to throttle competition to an unusual degree" in the oilfields with its control of pipelines and also explained how Wyoming consumers were victimized by the company: "Wyoming gasoline has sold cheaper at Missouri River points than within the State. At the present time the gasoline that is selling in towns neighboring the oil fields at 21 cents per gallon is selling in Colorado at 16 cents." But that analysis went further by indicating that Wyoming was at the crossroads in its development. It could, Walter Hawes argued, develop on its own, and become "at last a unified commonwealth, a State among States." The key to that development, he suggested, was an important byproduct of the rising oil industry—the rising city of Casper as an oil town to refine the crude from the Salt Creek field. With the growth of Casper, "the first industrial city of any consequence in the State," Wyoming might no longer be a "meaningless geographical rectangle" on the map; "previously it had been a State without cities, a ragged fringe of settlements around a central desert. Economically the State had been as thoroughly partitioned into spheres of influence as ever was Poland or darkest Africa."⁴³ Wyoming, the suggestion ran, was but a colony for outside business interests, but there was hope that "real social and political development" may yet come.

As it happened, that development was itself thwarted by Standard's control; in addition the boom that had propelled the growth of the petroleum industry slowed and then collapsed. The decline was evident by the middle of the decade. By 1923 the price of crude was less than a dollar and half a barrel, having dropped to that point from three dollars in 1920. Despite a

gesture in the direction of recovery in 1925 and 1926, the spiral downward between 1927 and 1929 gutted the petroleum business.⁴⁴ Part of the problem was the increased production from the expanding oil fields; part of the problem was the ability to extract higher-quality fuels from crude, making the increased production of crude that much more redundant; part of the problem was the change in petroleum consumption, making gasoline of greater demand than fuel oil; and part of the problem was the decline of competition in the petroleum business as the giants took advantage of their power to squeeze all they could from their workers and from their consumers and also made it that much more difficult for the independent producers and refiners. All these parts can be seen in Wyoming with the ascendancy of the automobile, the sophistication of the refineries, and the consolidation of Standard Oil power in the state. The promise of Wyoming's social and economic development, insofar as it rested on petroleum, fell short of realization in the 1920s.

42. Steve Kurtz, ed., *Separate and Distinct: A History of the Town of Mills, Wyoming* (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1986), 20.

43. Walter C. Hawes, "Wyoming: A Maverick Citizenry," *The Nation* 118 (January 16, 1924): 58. This critique of Wyoming in the 1920s as a state in name only, without meaningful, independent economic and political development, was widespread; J. M. Scanland reported that "within the last few years Wyoming has shown very little increase in the number of its inhabitants, and a large number of these are not really citizens," and that the 1920 census reported a smaller population than would merit a Congressional representative. In addition, he wrote, "it is reported that its few industrial resources are declining, and the people have held meetings, from time to time, and will petition Congress to 'dissolve' the State Government," the objective being to return Wyoming to territorial status under federal control. J. M. Scanland, "Reducing States to Territories," *North American Review* 225 (March 1928): 318–20.

44. Williamson et al., *The American Petroleum Industry*, 462–66.

INTO THE WOODS

The timber industry of Wyoming constituted a small but essential part of the state's economy, and it also reflected some of the changes and stresses of the 1920s. As an organized business, Wyoming's timber industry was for much of its history inseparable from the railroad tie industry and, accordingly, had its origins with the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad across the state in the 1860s as the railroad required huge quantities of railroad ties; the timber for those ties was close at hand, especially in the lodgepole pine forests of the Medicine Bow Range. Battalions of hard-working and hard-living tie hacks penetrated Wyoming's forests, using their big broadaxes with a skill often acquired in Norway or Sweden to carve individual ties as smooth as if they had been planed. They worked for timber companies in year-round camps, and soon those workers, and their camps, would be found in other mountain ranges and forests of the territory and state as railroads stretched their rails into more and more sections of Wyoming. Like the oil camps and coal camps, these logging and tie camps were permanent or semi-permanent communities with built structures and varying degrees of facilities (commissaries, mess halls, bunkhouses, and cabins), though certainly still primitive and not "modern." Frequently there would be a main headquarters camp (where management lived and worked) and then outlying satellite camps or even scattered individual cabins housing the tie hacks; these could be as much as twenty miles distant. Even after the construction of the railroads in Wyoming in the early twentieth century, the continuing demand for replacement ties kept the tie hacks plying their craft. While railroad ties were the mainstay of the camps, the industry also supplied timbers for mine sup-

45. The most detailed treatment of the work and culture of the Wyoming tie hacks is that of Joan Trego Pinkerton, *Knights of the Broadax: The Story of the Wyoming Tie Hacks* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1981).

46. Robert G. Rosenberg, "Handhewn Ties of the Medicine Bows," *Annals of Wyoming* 56 (Spring 1984): 50, 51; see also Scott Thybony, Robert G. Rosenberg, and Elizabeth Mullett Rosenberg, *The Medicine Bows: Wyoming's Mountain Country* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1985), 68, 74.

ports as well as a growing amount of lumber for the construction of the new state's communities.

The romance of the "Knights of the Broadax" endures with ubiquitous museum photographs of isolated, pre-industrial Paul Bunyans in the backwoods cutting and hewing the timbers in winter, often digging down into the snow to leave a short stump from the felled tree. Working independently on assigned strips of forest, the tie hacks would saw the trees into eight-foot lengths and then, using their broadax, cut into the sides of the logs to make the excess easier to remove and trim the two sides smooth for railroad ties. The ties or logs would be removed by horses skidding them or be loaded onto sleds, and those early sled and skid roads were cleared in the forests by the hacks as well. The ties would ultimately be taken either to streams to be piled at landings where they would be pushed into the fast running waters of the snowmelt in spring or to flumes where they would rush down mountainsides to be dumped into rivers. Hundreds of thousands of them, all over the state, year after year filled Wyoming's riverways from May to September, as they were driven downstream to the sawmills and creosote treatment plants in places like Laramie, Dubois, Riverton, Pinedale, Green River, and Sheridan.⁴⁵

The social and economic contours of the Wyoming timber industry have yet to be studied closely and there remains a multitude of questions—social, economic, cultural, environmental, technological, and political—about the evolution of this part of the Wyoming economy over the decades. Even at that, however, some patterns are evident, and it is clear that the timber industry was transforming in the 1920s. Robert Rosenberg calls the period after 1915 "The End of an Era," and that era reached its conclusion in southern Wyoming in 1940 when the railroads, especially the Union Pacific, "entirely discontinued the use of hand-hewn, river-driven ties."⁴⁶ The end would come later in other forests, depending on how measured and how narrow the definition of the timber industry. By virtually all accounts, however, the tie hacking endeavor came to an end sometime around World War II—a victim of changing technology, aging tie hacks, and railroad preference for milled ties that had not been soaked in Wyoming river water.

A transformation of some kind, however, was underway in the 1920s and a key dimension of that transformation was the introduction or increase of machinery in the woods. The work of the tie hacks was the

work of craftspeople, and these people who lived and labored in the woods honored and perpetuated ancient skills, even if those skills were put to use in creating ties for modern railroads. Joan Trego Pinkerton writes of the tie hacks in the DuNoir area on the northeast flanks of the Wind River Mountains, “No assembly-line process this; they not only carved the ties themselves, but each summer they herded the winter’s cut down the swift waters of the Wind River in a spectacular 100-mile river drive to the tie yards in Riverton.” And she compares them to cowboys; only instead of herding cattle, they were herding ties. “Just as cowboys had to contend with sudden stampedes, the Hacks fought sudden cloudbursts which could send the waters of the Wind River over its banks, scattering ties from here to Sunday. Each stray had to be located and lugged back to the river on a strong shoulder.”⁴⁷ Their living conditions were hardly sumptuous, and were often isolated in the extreme, and their pay, such as it was, compared to that of share-croppers. Or instead of being paid, in some camps the company would simply apply the hacks’ earnings to their debts at the company store. Joan Trego Pinkerton’s father was the accountant and secretary for the Wyoming Tie and Timber Company and she speaks with some authority on this point: “They weren’t paid in cash, and there was no payday. When they needed money they would come to Trego and make a draw against their account. The company was their bank. Cash wasn’t even needed to buy groceries, since Wyoming T&T issued coupon books for use in the store to purchase food and clothing. The coupon books were also charged against their accounts, so the men had little use for cash other than for their gambling needs or drinking binges.”⁴⁸

At the same time, however, it is clear that the circumstances of tie hacking, even though not a path to comforts and riches, allowed people to live a life where pre-industrial skills were honored and valued and where individuals had some control over their own lives. “The Hacks were free to work their own hours, to come and go as they pleased as long as they cut all the ties in their assigned stand of timber. Each tie was notched with the Hack’s own mark, and a record of how many he had cut was kept by the tie inspector.”⁴⁹ These were also the circumstances that gave rise to the powerful romance of the state’s tie hacks, a counterpoise in its own way to the romance of the cowboy, both of them achieving a mythical status in Wyoming lore.

The tie hacks had gone into the woods and pursued their calling where

the main sounds were those of nature and the whack of their ax. But in the 1920s machines followed them into the woods. Portable sawmills that could be operated by a few workers would make ties faster than the hacks could. The trees would still be cut by the hacks, and they would be skidded to the sawmill, but the mill would transform the logs into ties and also produce rough lumber, and then the mill would be taken down and moved to another location to repeat the process. As early as 1923, some of these implications were becoming clear. Rosenberg notes:

The early 1920s saw a gradual change in the lumber industry with the development of gasoline and diesel powered portable sawmills and a better road system in the Medicine Bow Forest. With better roads, portable units could be hauled by tractor to timber areas, and ties could be economically sawed instead of handhewn. This development signaled the end of the tie hack era. One forest official prophetically queried, “Is the time approaching when the picturesque tie hack with his broadax will be replaced by a sawmill on wheels?”⁵⁰

The answer to that question, of course, was yes. The sawmills were moving into the forests. Some were portable and movable on wheels, but others were more substantial with huge boilers, steam engines, and peripheral equipment. In 1921 and 1922 the Homestake Mining Company’s logging camp of Moskee, Wyoming, in the Black Hills set up a large sawmill and by the autumn of 1922 was sawing planks.⁵¹ By 1925 or 1926 the camp

47. Pinkerton, *Knights of the Broadax*, 21, 108.

48. *Ibid.*, 61.

49. *Ibid.*, 61.

50. Rosenberg, “Handhewn Ties of the Medicine Bows,” 50.

51. Clair Roadifer, “The Story of Moskee, Wyoming,” *Bits & Pieces* 7 (1971): 12. This copy of *Bits & Pieces* from the Hebard Collection in the Emmet D. Chisum Special Collections in the University of Wyoming Libraries was kindly provided by Tamsen Emerson Hert. At Moskee, semitruck trailers, on newly built roads, replaced horses in transportation while small caterpillar or crawler tractors skidded the logs by 1938.

had electricity from a steam-boiler generator that provided illumination for work. And it was not just a matter of taking sawmills into the forests. Those sawmills had to be transported, and that meant improving—or building—the roads. By 1924 motorized vehicles were partially replacing the horse-drawn sleds and eight-wheeled wagons that transported the logs, and they were taking them to the rivers or flumes for floating downstream; in a few instances they were even taking the logs to the sawmills. The first step in that transportation shift was often the use of a Linn, a half-tracked, very slow-moving, but rugged, vehicle that could carry a full load of logs behind its cab and sometimes a tracked trailer (or two of them) with additional logs, all this on primitive roadways. The Linn and other tracked vehicles hauled many loads, but as the roads in the forests improved, those vehicles were in turn replaced with fat tired trucks. Of course, horses and mules were still used for skidding logs prior to loading, but the technology was changing. Industry was also moving into the woods and it was moving in on a web of roads that had not been there before.

The process of technological transformation was uneven and depended on the forests, the companies operating the tie or lumber camps, proximity of rivers, and probably other, more subtle factors. And the Medicine Bow National Forest might have been slightly ahead of other parts of the state. Historian Ann Chambers Noble records that in Sublette County,

52. Ann Chambers Noble, “Sublette County, Wyoming,” <http://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/sublette-county-wyoming?page=5>.

53. Pinkerton, *Knights of the Broadax*, 176–78.

54. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910, Volume IX: Manufactures, 1909* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), 1371; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: Manufactures: 1929, Volume II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1933), 444.

55. Rosenberg, “Handhewn Ties of the Medicine Bows,” 50–51; Paul L. Armstrong, “History of the Medicine Bow National Forest Service,” undated [probably 1936] typed manuscript in WPA Collections, subject file 155.

56. Pinkerton, *Knights of the Broadax*, 112–16.

while the tie industry flourished on the Cottonwood Creeks there in the 1920s and 1930s, near Daniel, “portable sawmills were in use by the late 1930s.” She continues, “Gradually, portable sawmills, chainsaws, tractors, road, and haul trucks replaced the broadax and tie drives.”⁵² Joan Trego Pinkerton writes similarly of the DuNoir area: “Portable sawmills came into popular use in the early 1930s, and by 1936 many of the ties delivered to the yards each year had come from the mills.”⁵³

The timber industry clearly was transforming in the 1920s, but the numbers of workers in the forests are difficult to determine—and likewise the trend in their employment. The census data include in “lumber and timber products” the employment of people in the camps and also the workers at the lumber mills in town, and even in those isolated instances when an effort was made to separate them, a blurry overlap in enumeration remains. Taken as a whole, however, the number of workers in the mills likely rose and fell with the numbers in the forest—although not necessarily at precisely the same time, given the time between cutting and processing. And the dominant conclusion presented by the statistics is one of dramatic fluctuations in numbers from one year to the next. In 1909 the Wyoming timber industry employed 766 workers, more than twice the number of just five years before (370), but in 1919 the number dropped to 322. In 1927 the census reported 469 workers and then in 1929, 793.⁵⁴ As if to underscore the wide swings in employment, obviously the result of fluctuating numbers and sizes of timber sales after the advent of regulation on the national forests in the first decade of the century, one contemporary estimate calculated that in 1925, in just one national forest—Medicine Bow—about five hundred men were at work there, with nearly another hundred at work in the Laramie tie treatment plant. That year was exceptional; one source in the mid-1930s referred to 1925 as the peak year of the timber industry in the Medicine Bow Forest “so far.”⁵⁵ Meanwhile, in the Wind River Mountains, Wyoming Tie and Timber Company reached its peak in 1927; that year the company’s workers cut and sent down the river to Riverton some seven hundred thousand ties.⁵⁶ If these reports are accurate, and if they reflect in a general way activity in other forests, the peak in employment in the timber industry occurred about the same time that transformation in work processes and technologies was setting in, and that probably was not a matter of coincidence. A generally unexamined question has to do with what became of those former tie hacks

displaced by technology and by changes in the industry. Where did they go as the work declined? Without a definitive answer, the probable place to look would be down the rivers, where the logs went. Like the farmers and cowboys moving to town as the agricultural part of Wyoming's society and economy transformed, the tie hacks and other loggers similarly had to look elsewhere for work. And the place to look for work was in town.

It is a separate, but related, question as to how many and how big were the businesses that employed these timber workers. Again, the statistics provide a less than precise view of the structure of the industry. Moreover, as with the tabulation of the numbers of workers, in which there was presumably some change of individuals from one count to the next, so too with the firms that employed them—presumably they changed too so that at least some of the firms themselves were different from one census to the next. But no matter how figured, the 1920s were years of change in the structure of the timber industry. In 1899 52 establishments operated in the timber and lumber industry in the state; in 1909 the number was a little higher, at 63; and in 1919 it had dropped slightly to 58.⁵⁷ But during the 1920s, with the great swings in employment and cutting, something else was going on too. In 1927 there were only 15 of these firms operating; two years later there were still only 24. Considering that some of these operations were relatively stable—such as the Homestake Mine that operated the camp at Moskee and Wyoming Tie and Timber at DuNoir—the changes elsewhere were all the more dramatic. It wasn't only the forests that were being thinned; it was also the firms employing the loggers, and the trend toward consolidation and centralization was powerful in this part of the economy.

Clearly, more work needs to be done in the local newspapers and in the archives of the national forests to learn more about the crews at work in the Wyoming timber industry, but several conclusions seem warranted: (1) a technological transformation was overtaking the timber industry that was also transforming the lives and work of the people employed on the crews; (2) the number of firms working in the timber and tie industry was declining, especially in the 1920s, with the remaining firms employing larger crews, almost like factories in the forests; (3) by the late 1920s, if not earlier, the cutting and treating of railroad ties, and possibly other parts of the timber industry, in Wyoming was declining; and (4) even at its best, this was not steady work for a great many of those who practiced the

trade of cutting ties and timbers, and for those who were working at any given time, whether or not work would be there the next year or the following was always an open question. As with virtually every other part of the Wyoming economy in the 1920s, the tie hacking and timber industry did not portend a promising future.

THE RISE OF THE CITY IN WYOMING—AND ITS STRAINS

The growth of Casper was undeniable in the 1920s, but other communities around the state were also growing—at least some of them. Instead of appearing as a component and sign of economic and social vitality, however, the increasing urban population actually raised new questions and presented new problems for the people of Wyoming. At the same time that people were moving to the state's towns and cities, those population centers themselves suffered the strains of growth, needing to provide water systems to replace the wells and hauled water that worked well enough for small populations but proved more challenging as the population outgrew that system. And they needed to provide modern sewage systems, often for the original townsites and also now for the expanding areas housing the new populations. For that matter, streets were generally unpaved, not just in the new towns and new parts of town, but in the original townsite areas too; the desire to have them paved was common, but even just to have them graveled and graded was a genuine improvement in most places. Photographs of many Wyoming communities in the 1920s show not just residential areas but often business districts that look as though the picture could have been taken two decades earlier—except for the automobiles parked on the streets; the streets themselves are often unpaved, ungraveled, ungraded. As for the sanitary sewer systems, that too was expensive. Almost universally communities were able to provide some kind

57. In addition to the census data noted above, see also the figures in the 1900 census: *Census Reports, Volume VIII: Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900: Manufactures, Part II* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1902), 978–79.



Paved roads and streets, even when the Lincoln Highway constituted Main Street, were a rarity in 1920s Wyoming. Above: Cedar Street in Rawlins. Photograph from the Frank J. Meyers papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

of “modern” utilities to parts of town but not until well after people had been living there for a while, needing those utilities. And without a strong economy, how could the cities finance that infrastructure?

Sometimes a local business helped. In Rock Springs, the Union Pacific proved a willing participant in the floating of a bond issue by the city, and in 1928 the project was completed, for the time being, providing paving, curbs, and gutters as well as a sanitary sewer system. Rock Springs city officials, according to Robert Rhode, even “were threatening to send employees around to padlock outdoor toilets still in use if owners did not hook up to the sanitary sewer.”⁵⁸

Then there was the matter of education, as schools were necessary for families of the new residents of the cities, and a whole range of social services begged for attention. In Casper during the early 1920s, this was a crying problem, and Superintendent of Education A. A. Slade lamented in 1924, “It is doubtful whether any other city or school district in the United States is confronted with a problem similar to that which faces this Board

of Education each year.” The schools simply could not accommodate the pressures of new students placed on them every year. That situation was especially true in North Casper, an area that grew probably faster than other parts of town because of low property values, available short-term housing, and the limited incomes of those who followed the labor market in the petroleum industry. Vivian Dwyer, the principal at North Casper School, described the neighborhood in plain terms: “The conditions in this district are so different from those of the other districts, that it should be treated as a community in itself.”⁵⁹ Growth seems to have been generally

58. Robert Rhode, *Booms and Busts on Bitter Creek: A History of Rock Springs, Wyoming* (Boulder, Colo.: Pruett Publishing Company, 1987), 148.

59. National Register nomination for Roosevelt School in North Casper, 1996.

welcomed, but there remained a lag time between drawing the additional population and then providing the services necessary for their well-being. Sometimes that lag time lasted for years; in the meantime the problems and needs grew and grew.

It was not just public services that were in trouble. Main Street businesses had their own tribulations. Put another way, when the rural people were in trouble, so too were the merchants in town who depended on their business. And if their customers were the people who worked in the coal mines or in the refineries, they knew as intimately as the workers themselves the cycle of layoffs and cutbacks. If their customers could not pay their bills, it would not be long before the businesses could not either. A lack of consumer demand could spell hard times for everyone.

Moreover, if there was a trend toward consolidation in agriculture, in mining, in banking, in refining, in timber, there was a similar process of weeding out other small businesses, even the retail merchants in the towns. The 1920s marked the ascendancy on a national scale of mail-order retail giants like Sears, Roebuck and Company. But possibly more important were the chain stores that moved in to the small towns. Retail chains, such as the department store of J. C. Penney, appeared increasingly on Main Street. Penney's store, first started in Kemmerer in 1903 to provide competition to the company stores of the local mining camps, had grown to a substantial national chain with 674 stores and sales of ninety-one million dollars in 1925.⁶⁰ Other chains of drugstores, supermarkets, gasoline filling stations (themselves increasingly operated by the major oil companies), and so forth used their purchasing power and size to compete with local independent merchants. Thurman Arnold, former mayor of Laramie, described the system as "an economic blight known as absentee ownership." During the 1920s, Arnold

recalled, nationwide industrial combinations "would use their control over a product local enterprises had to have to force the latter to sell out at a distress price. The motion-picture industry is as good an example as any. The major distributors controlled the vast majority of feature films. They would supply them only on such terms as would bankrupt a local theater, after which the major company would buy the theater at its own price." "It was," Arnold said, "murder of small business."⁶¹ For Arnold the results in Laramie were clear: "A practicing small-town lawyer could easily sense what was happening. The local motion-picture theater was about to be taken over by Fox. The local plaster mill was being purchased by Celotex. The local oil refinery was being absorbed by Standard Oil of Indiana. There went three of the big local clients. Divorce cases and collections grew to be the major source of revenue for the local lawyer."⁶²

What was to be the future of the Laramies and the Sheridans and the Green Rivers and the Landers and the Powells of the state? Stressed and strained by growing populations that needed municipal services and schools and streets, the cities had big issues and the solutions were not clear. The question of how they could sustain their business communities was no less murky since Main Street itself was in a precarious position, faced on the one hand with declining consumption by consumers who may have been workers or farmers or ranchers and who were themselves in dire straits, and on the other hand with the pressures of national chains. And these people also watched their banks close down in the 1920s, a turn of events filled with premonitions of wider economic carnage. There may have been the rollicking notes of jazz and the gaiety of the bright lights somewhere, and these may even have been in particular corners of Wyoming at the right hour and right day, but they were not the rule. And, if they did exist, they existed as escapes from the uncertain circumstances of life that prevailed.

MICAWBER ON THE RESERVATION

If Wyoming's communities were stressed and strained, if farmers and ranchers were suffering an agricultural depression, if the coal mines were cutting back, and if the petroleum industry was proving less than it promised, if the job of the tie hacks was being undermined by industrialization,

60. J. C. Penney Company, Inc., company history, www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/JC-Penney-Company-Inc-Company-History.html.

61. Arnold, *Fair Fights and Foul*, 33.

62. *Ibid.*, 34.

there was still another group even more hard pressed. The people who lived at the Shoshone Agency—as the Wind River Reservation was known until 1937—had been left out of even the most rudimentary benefits of social and economic development in Wyoming. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the Shoshones on the reservation had watched as their lands shrank in size, and when they were joined by the Northern Arapahoes in 1878, the two nations, apprehensive and often resentful of each other, shared a common fate of trying to survive in an increasingly circumscribed world where pressures mounted on them to alter customs and livelihoods. Where white settlers saw the provisions of the various homestead laws, and their promise of individually owned farms and homes, as a refuge from the pressures that beset landless peoples, American Indian perspectives were a little different. The prospect of dividing up tribal lands and distributing them to individual members—under the Dawes Act, or General Allotment Act, of 1887—came as a challenge to the inhabitants of the reservation, for it threatened to, and was designed to, undermine the collective tribal structure and its communally owned lands. Moreover, the larger effort was to transform Indian peoples throughout the nation into individual farmers integrated into the larger Anglo-American culture, economy, and political system.

The frustrations on the reservation ran deep and were complicated by government policies that seemed to work at cross purposes. For example, the U.S. government wanted the Indians to become individually independent farmers, and sought to diminish the role of the tribe, but also refused to distribute tribal income—moneys received by the government in behalf of the Indians for the leasing of Indian lands—on an individual, per capita basis. Those funds instead went to pay for collective projects and salaries at the agency. The situation was stark in the 1920s, as revealed by anthropologist Loretta Fowler in describing the plight of Arapahoes on the reservation:

Only a minority of Arapahoes were able to farm, and Indians could obtain wage work only intermittently. In the view of Superintendent E. A. Hutchinson (1917–22), many Indians, having leased their allotments to whites “for a mere bagatelle,” were “aimlessly drifting, Micawber like, waiting for something to turn up.” . . . By 1920 he had reduced the number of persons receiving rations to 100. Water charges of \$1 an acre were being

levied against individual Indians. Most Indians lived in canvas tents and brush shelters. Despite the widespread suffering, the Indian Office allowed only minimal and occasional per capita payments to the Arapahoes: for example, \$12 in 1920, \$20 in 1921. To the tribe’s further dismay, the Arapahoe cattle herd was sold at a loss.⁶³

The process that Fowler aptly terms *detrribalization* proceeded with agonizing force, and she reports that by 1926 half of the Arapahoes operated individual family farms “on which they grew hay, some wheat, oats, potatoes, and garden vegetables.”⁶⁴ Comparable data for the Shoshones are not readily available, but the pattern was likely similar. One difference, however, is that the Shoshones experienced greater outmigration than did the Arapahoes, so that even though the Shoshones had more enrolled tribal members, they were outnumbered on the reservation 995 to 879 as of 1933.⁶⁵ In any case, it is clear that the Shoshones and the Arapahoes were not prospering on the reservation. Income was low. Facilities were primitive. Pressures were great. And the future was bleak.

Fragile Society, Vulnerable People

The outward signs of prosperity in Wyoming—increased tourist travel, new oil fields, peak production of railroad ties and timber, new buildings rising in the town centers—were real enough, but those symbols rested on a fragile reality, on a material foundation that was quickly eroding in the 1920s. The trends in that erosion could be seen everywhere and they were profound, for a transformation of Wyoming was underway.

One element of that transformation could be seen in the decline of agricultural autonomy and independence as ranchers and farmers became increasingly dependent upon markets. A great many resisted the temptations of expansion, mechanization, debt, specialization of production, all

63. Loretta Fowler, *Arapahoe Politics, 1851–1978: Symbols in Crises of Authority* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 134.

64. *Ibid.*, 167.

in anticipation of future markets, and for those people the homestead ideal of relative self-sufficiency continued to work. At the same time, however, the power of the markets, and the vulnerability those markets also created, increased in the Wyoming countryside of the 1920s. The pressures of those markets on farmers and ranchers who valued their distinctive way of life too often proved unbearable. The agricultural depression of the 1920s was but the second stage of the transformation in which people lost the homes and operations that had become vulnerable in the first stage. The agricultural depression, and the losses sustained in it, also showed that Wyoming businesses and Wyoming workers and Wyoming farmers were connected to national, even international, markets over which they had no control and upon which they were enormously dependent. For some, the market rendered them landless—or otherwise without resources on which they could make a living—and thus pushed them into the local, national, and international market of labor, hoping for someone to buy their time as wage laborers.

Another aspect of social transformation was in the nature of the work process itself. The habits and systems of the new industrial order, of course, reached into Wyoming and reshaped the circumstances of work to conform to the industrial model with each passing year and with each new industrial endeavor. But the traditional ways held on. The mechanization of agriculture with the assembly-line-like organization of work at the thresher, replacing the old individualistic hand flail of grain, had not completely taken over in Wyoming, and the smaller operators in particular continued to work in the traditional ways. For that matter, even in organized industry, the habits of the past endured. In the logging industry, despite the fact that technology was changing and factory processes were lurking just down the road, on their way to the logging camps, that

change was not yet dominant. Joan Trego Pinkerton's description of the work in the timber industry drives that point home with the precision of a well-swung broadax: "No assembly-line process this."⁶⁶ And even in the oil camps, Robert Lynd found welcome respite from the new industrial order that dominated elsewhere in the nation. The work in the oil fields was hard, very hard, he said. "Slogging away with pick and shovel at hardpan soil that hasn't been molested since the Flood is punishing business at best, as is also rod-wrenching in the slimy oil ooze about the mouth of a well." But, he continued, these people expected hard work and that was not a problem in and of itself. In fact, there was a redeeming quality in the work: "After all, a job's a job, and one worked at pretty much one's own gait, without the constant speeding up to keep pace with a machine that wears out the machine operative."⁶⁷ The industrial order and its assembly lines, division of labor into fractional parts, and mechanical pace was taking hold and transforming work everywhere in the nation, but the process was not complete in Wyoming. The workers there were not yet machine operatives.

Wyoming was also being reshaped in the 1920s as economic institutions and activities became increasingly centralized, their control resting in distant hands, as firms consolidated, buying out or forcing out small competitors and creating larger entities, and as producers integrated vertically to control their own supplies and markets. Again, however, that trend was hardly complete, and the small businesses on village, town, or city Main Streets and the family farms and ranches retained an important and pervasive presence in the state. But they were increasingly threatened each year by changes underway in the national economy. The shift toward business consolidation and its attendant displacement of small entrepreneurs was evident in the petroleum industry and in the chain stores and in the coal mines and evidently in the timber companies too, and that shift was felt by Wyoming's workers and consumers and merchants and small producers as a loss of control. When Lynd wrote, "the temporary cut in production ordered in a distant office where Elk Basin was only a spot on the map reached into the Basin one morning and the lay-off began," he could just as easily have been writing about any other part of the economy, and decisions reached elsewhere in offices where the entire state of Wyoming "was only a spot on the map."⁶⁸ This centralization in the economy left out small businesses as well as workers and consumers.

65. *Ibid.*, 143.

66. Pinkerton, *Knights of the Broadax*, 21.

67. Lynd, "Done in Oil," 139.

68. *Ibid.*, 146.

Yet one more element of fundamental change in the Wyoming economy had to do with the technological transformation underway, a trend in which mechanization of work processes made workers redundant and dispensable. In the coal industry and in the timber industry workers pushed, drove, hauled, and carried into the ground and into the woods the machines that would take their places in the productive economy, sending them, like their counterparts on the farms and ranches, into towns, or just on the road, destination unknown, looking for jobs that often as not were there either, all in the manner, as Lynd reported, “on to the next job in the haphazard career of the casual laborer.” In the 1920s, Wyoming was in trouble, wherever a person lived, however a person made a living. The pressures were pervasive. The uncertainties were huge.

A transformation was taking place in what some then and since have cheerfully called “the New Era,” but that transformation did not always bestow blessings on the people whose lives it touched. At the same time, however, the people of Wyoming drew upon impressive resources in coping with those issues, and in approaching the future. Although becoming more urban and industrial in the 1920s, Wyoming was still not far from the rural farming and ranching society of the nineteenth century, and statistically most people in Wyoming were, even in the 1920s, rural in residence and lifestyle. Or, put slightly differently, Wyoming’s people carried an element of individualism in their cultures, and that individualism has become firmly embedded in the state’s lore and collective self-image. But the individualism in which people took pride in their autonomy and self-reliance was not an acquisitive individualism in which they saw their neighbors as fodder for their own ambitions and material dreams or as competitors to be pushed aside or pushed down in a struggle for riches. A different spirit pervaded Wyoming’s cultures, one that would shape their response to adversity, not only in the 1920s, but in the ensuing decade.

Wherever one turns, except perhaps in the corporate offices of the national-based coal and oil companies that saw Wyoming’s workers, consumers, and natural resources all through the same lens of profits to be harvested, a spirit of neighborly assistance and cooperation prevailed, with neighbors helping neighbors in a system of mutual assistance. Even the ranchers and farmers, at one time viewed (with considerable exaggeration except in the cases of the huge ranchers who waged war against the small farmers and ranchers alike) as adversaries and life-enemies on the range,

had made their peace with each other. And mutual assistance of neighbors on the range, even when the neighbors were some miles distant, was an accepted responsibility in times of need. When a rural school needed to be built, when a barn burned, when branding had to be done, when a crop needed harvesting, when an irrigation ditch needed to be dug, it was not every man (or woman) for himself, but a community endeavor, the strong helping the weak, the fortunate helping the disadvantaged, the individual drawing upon the resources of the community and the community helping out the needy, knowing that those resources—and those neighbors—would be there in future times of need too.

The “get rich-quickers” (as referred to by Tom Brosman) and their values and institutions were doubtless on the ascendancy in the 1920s, but they did not yet prevail. And it was not only on the farms and ranches where a different ethos obtained. In the coal mining communities neighbors helped one another just as the ranchers and homesteaders did. Especially when from the same “old country,” in the words of Henry Kovach at Reliance, “they worked together and did things together. Like, for instance, killing a hog. There would be a group of them come and help butcher the hog, and they would share.” The next time a different person would have the hog but would share in turn.⁶⁹ In the oil camps the same cooperative spirit was evident. When Robert Lynd chronicled the hardships and abuses inflicted by Standard Oil at Elk Basin, information gained from his own employment there with a pick and shovel, he made special mention of the effort of workers to help one another out in times of emergency or just for everyday needs. Even the foremen—tough, profane, and demanding men—proved sensitive to the needs of the people they supervised. One of them, “Old John,” who roused the men out of their bunks and worked them hard, proved just as unflinching in his generosity: “Yet John is typical of the West, for I found him in the wash-house ten minutes later lending ten dollars to a still sleepy roustabout whom he had only the minute before been threatening with death and dire destruction. Later on, when one of the boys in the Ohio camp was rushed to the hospital twenty miles away with appendicitis and a hundred dollars was needed for an opera-

69. Gardner and Flores, *Forgotten Frontier*, 135–36.

tion, it was ‘Old John’ who put up the needed money.”⁷⁰ Notably, it was not the company that came to the aid of its workers; rather it was the workers, and their foremen, helping one another. In fact, when the people in the camp sought to improve their lives with a modest community facility and asked the company to participate—not to do it all but just to contribute—the company turned a deaf ear.

The most obvious social need of the Basin had long been recognized to be . . . a community house where the women could sit and sew with each other during the day and there could be informal dancing and games at night; a rough basket ball floor would go far toward solving the recreation problem of the men in winter. The companies had been repeatedly petitioned to build some simple community house such as the Midwest Company has erected in other fields. At length we subscribed six hundred dollars among ourselves toward the cost of the building, but even this con-

crete suggestion met with the profound silence of Don Marquis’ “rose petal dropped into the Grand Canyon.”⁷¹

In such circumstances it was clear that the benefits of the New Era were not trickling down to the people at the bottom or even in the middle of society. It was also clear that the main feeling of community responsibility was that of workers and neighbors toward each other. And this, it should be noted, was in relatively prosperous times. What would happen when the economy turned sour? By the end of the decade, that downturn was not only a likelihood; it was a fact of life in large parts of the Wyoming economy. The social fabric was being stressed, stretched, and frayed, and the people and institutions that made up Wyoming society were vulnerable to any shift in the economy, and their very lives hung in the balance. And then the Depression hit.

70. In the crucial matter of layoffs and cuts in production, Lynd went even further in his appreciation of the foremen: “Nothing but praise is due these men for the way they handled such matters in the Basin—they found stray piecework for a time, and then when the cut became inevitable generally sent the newer, unmarried men first, and when some of the married men had to go, allowed their wives and furniture to remain behind rent free until they could make the change.” Lynd, “Done in Oil,” 140, 145–46.

71. *Ibid.*, 145. Don Marquis was a poet who famously wrote, “Writing a book of poetry is like dropping a rose petal down the Grand Canyon and waiting for the echo.”

Herbert Hoover, the Depression, and Wyoming

IN MARCH OF 1929, Herbert Hoover took his oath of office as president of the United States, entering office near the end of a decade that had witnessed significant weaknesses in the economy and fissures in the social order. But it was also, as many business and government leaders were quick to point out, a time when the stock market had reached record highs, a time when the nation's cities—the wave of the future—were growing, and when the Gross National Product (GNP)¹ had also grown to an unparalleled high. In his inaugural address, Hoover likewise saw economic abundance in the nation and he called upon the American people to join him in a cooperative effort to see that the prosperity continued and also broadened to include more people. In so doing he gave important clues to his view of the role of government in society, the role of business, and the role of people in their everyday lives.²

Hoover acknowledged the economic achievements of not just the previous decade but the longer reach of history: “We have reached a higher degree of comfort and security than ever existed before in the history of the world. Through liberation from widespread poverty we have reached a higher degree of individual freedom than ever before.” In this, however, it is important to note that he spoke not just of material affluence in terms of the GNP or prosperity for its own sake, but of the necessity of eliminating poverty to provide greater freedom for the American people. He was committed to ending poverty as a fundamental, achievable goal and he returned to that theme in his inaugural address, observing that through establishing “stability and security of business and employment,” it was possible to “remove poverty still further from our borders.” Achieving that, however, depended on the American people’s “new-found capacity for cooperation among themselves to effect high purposes in public welfare. It is an advance toward the highest conception of self-government.” Cooperation—*voluntary cooperation*—at every level was the key to

Hoover’s outlook for America, both the solution to all problems and the objective toward which the nation needed to move in order to preserve the birthright of freedom.

As for the role of business in society, Hoover is sometimes alleged to have simply turned over the reins of government to the business community. But his inaugural address articulated quite a different perspective. “Business,” Hoover said, “has by cooperation made great progress in the advancement of service, in stability, in regularity of employment and in the correction of its own abuses.” Strikingly, he did not count the financial objectives of business—the increase in profits—among the beneficial achievements. Moreover, he said, “Such progress . . . can continue only so long as business manifests its respect for law.” The laws governing business were of two kinds he noted, both of them essential. In the realm of ordinary businesses that produce and distribute commodities, he declared the necessity of free, open competition, for competition protected the public against abuse by business. “Our laws,” he said, affirming the critical role of the antitrust laws, “insist upon effective competition.” Competition would

1. Up until 1991 the United States used the Gross National Product—the total value of all goods produced and services rendered by residents (or, the income of U.S. residents)—as the measure of the nation’s economy, but in 1991 it switched to the more common, and more easily quantified, international standard of Gross Domestic Product, which measures instead productivity of (or total income generated within) the United States.

2. Hoover’s inaugural address is widely available. One source is online at <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres48.html>. The following quotations are from that address unless otherwise noted.

not protect the public from those businesses, like the public utilities, however, which were by their nature uncompetitive. In the case of those businesses where “we substantially confer a monopoly by limiting competition,” Hoover said, “we must regulate their services and rates.” Although sometimes viewed as a spokesperson for laissez-faire economics, where the government simply allows business to proceed on whatever course it wishes regardless of public needs, Hoover consistently in his inaugural address, and beyond as well, invoked the public interest in its broadest sense: “The rigid enforcement of the laws applicable to [utilities and trade] is the very base of equal opportunity and freedom from domination for all our people, and it is just as essential for the stability and prosperity of business itself as for the protection of the public at large.”

Compared to other presidential speeches, Hoover’s inaugural address is hardly one of the moving calls to political action on an agenda of change. He was not a great orator. He did not see himself (and rightly so) as a skilled politician capable of moving the masses in a particular direction. He was an engineer and he possessed the temperament of an engineer. By the same token, however, it is important to remember that Herbert Hoover meant these words not just as slogans or bumpersticker sayings. He meant them as part of a philosophy. And that philosophy would guide him as president in good times and bad, for better or worse.

It was not long before times got worse.

Onset of the Depression

The stock market did boom in the 1920s and prices of all kinds of shares of stock increased in what seemed to some an endless course. The greater the faith that prices would continue to rise on the market, the more investors joined in the happy quest, and the higher the prices went. Back in Wyoming, Thurman Arnold, about to leave Laramie in 1927, watched the consequences of that growth in the stock market, one that he identified as a colonial relationship between the East and the West, between the city and the small town. “Practically no one in the year 1927—when I left Laramie—had any notion of the financial catastrophe that lay so close ahead. Illegal merger followed merger. Giant corporations continued to absorb local industry, draining off to the big cities the purchasing power of the West and the South. But the money taken out by absentee ownership of local enterprise was being put back into the small towns through their local stockbrokers. This iridescent bubble constituted the sole balance of payments between the city and the small town.”³

Thurman Arnold was concerned, but so too was Herbert Hoover. One of his severest critics, John Kenneth Galbraith, conceded that Hoover in the 1920s grew increasingly apprehensive about the stock market’s growing frenzy, and “as Secretary of Commerce he had sought nothing so much as to get the market under control.” He failed. Galbraith explains why: his efforts were “uniformly frustrated by Coolidge and the Federal Reserve Board.”⁴ One of the chief aspects of this uncontrolled market that Hoover sought to control was the trading on margins—that is, the loaning of money for the purpose of speculation, with usually a ten-percent down payment being made on the securities purchased, thus enabling the investor to purchase ten times as much as otherwise possible. As Galbraith summarizes, “Banks supply funds to brokers, brokers to customers, and the collateral goes back to banks in a smooth and all but automatic flow.”⁵ Galbraith concludes: “People were swarming to buy stocks on margin—in other words, to have the increase in price without the costs of ownership.”⁶

But the boom could not continue forever, and it did not. The market became nervous in late March 1929 over fears that the Federal Reserve Board might indeed restrain the speculative fervor, but the Fed, with only minor exceptions, declined to act in a decisive manner, or even in

3. Arnold, *Fair Fights and Foul*, 33–34.

4. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Great Crash, 1929*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), 21.

5. *Ibid.*, 25.

6. *Ibid.*, 26

a way that hinted at the need for restraint in the market. And the boom resumed—for a little while. Some economic indicators in the summer months raised doubts, but the market generally continued its rise; by September, though, more indicators suggested problems, and declines were increasingly evident. Those declines, like the increases previously, begat more of the same; where optimism had generated more optimism and higher prices, doubts now spread and spawned more doubts, and with the doubts came lower prices—which propagated even more doubt about the future. If the stock market rested on faith, which it did, the valuation of faith was itself in decline in September and October. The stock market—the New York Stock Exchange—exhibited increasing signs of nervousness, apprehensiveness, fear, and, increasingly, turmoil.

Thursday, October 24, 1929, is usually designated Black Thursday, and for good reason, but that Thursday actually capped a week of increased stress, and the market engaged in some roller-coaster rides each day, with trading at high volumes, the tickers lagging far behind, and usually a rally late in the day. On Thursday morning fear turned into panic, and the stock exchange tumbled dramatically, although that too came to a halt early in the afternoon when prominent bankers, demonstrating both their influence and their confidence, went onto the floor of the exchange and started buying—when everyone else had been selling. And so the exchange stabilized. But the following Monday, October 28, it got worse, and this time there was no recovery, no stabilizing force. And the next day was, as Galbraith describes, “the most devastating day in the history of the New York stock market, and it may have been the most devastating day in the history of markets.”⁷ The crash of the stock market was deepening and widening. And, Galbraith further observes, “The singular feature of the great crash of 1929 was that the worst continued to worsen. What looked one day like the end proved on the next day to have been only the beginning. Nothing could have been more ingeniously designed to maximize the suffering, and also to insure that as few as possible escaped the common misfortune.”⁸

The suffering indeed spread, and it spread to, among other places, far-away Wyoming. It needs to be noted first that if the American economy had been sound, the stock market crash would not have pulled it down. But the problems in the economy were fundamental and those problems meant that even places remote from Wall Street were affected. A litany of weaknesses can be ticked off, each item with varying importance accord-

ing to the perspective and theoretical framework of the observer, but it is clear that some of the weaknesses of the Wyoming economy were reflected in the nation as a whole: these included an imbalance in purchasing power, with serious limits on the ability of many people to purchase the products of the economy, and the concentrations of economic power both limiting the opportunities for independent business and skewing the price structure upward in the absence of competition. The concentrations in the economy, John Kenneth Galbraith notes, had a particularly devastating consequence: “In particular, dividends from the operating companies paid the interest on the bonds of upstream holding companies. The interruption of the dividends meant default on the bonds, bankruptcy, and the collapse of the structure. . . . It would be hard to imagine a corporate system better designed to continue and accentuate a deflationary spiral.”⁹

Another factor was the nation’s fragile banking system with banks linked together like a string of dominoes in which the weakness of one could spread to the others. And then there were other fissures in the economy—home construction had been declining since about 1926, and this at a time when the nation’s cities were growing and the population was increasing; industrial production had declined, meaning that a greater portion of the nation’s industrial plant was now idle, a fact that boded ill for the companies that operated the factories and for the workers they employed. Some have suggested that the economy was like a house of cards, susceptible to the slightest tremor or breeze, and when the market crashed it all came tumbling down. That metaphor, like all metaphors, should not be confused with real life; there were actual structural issues and powerful forces at work, but as a metaphor, it was apt.

By most accounts, the engine of despair in this train of affliction was the nation’s banking system. It was the vehicle by which the downward spiral of the economy reached into the homes and businesses of Americans far removed from stock market activity. The nation’s banking system

7. *Ibid.*, 116.

8. *Ibid.*, 113.

9. *Ibid.*, 183–84.

was already in serious trouble and even more so after the stock market crash. In Wyoming the troubled banks had been pulling down Wyoming's farmers and urban homeowners and businesses and investors on and off since World War I, and even more so in 1924 and after. Now the troubles intensified.

The banking crisis, already wreaking a path of destruction through Wyoming, got even worse between 1929 and 1933 as the entire money supply of the nation, already painfully tightened, shrank by more than a third, thus placing additional pressure on everybody who borrowed money from the banks, who saved money in banks, who depended on the banks in any way, directly or indirectly—which was a great number of people. What economists call “the Great Contraction” was the most severe banking crisis the nation had suffered. Between the stock market crash of 1929, which witnessed the loss in value of investments, and the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt in March 1933, “more than one-fifth of the commercial banks in the United States holding nearly one-tenth of the volume of deposits at the beginning of the contraction suspended operations because of financial difficulties.”¹⁰ On top of this were voluntary liquidations, mergers, and consolidations, which resulted in even more banks disappearing. All in all, the number of banks operating in the United States fell by over a third in those several years.

In Wyoming, exactly how many banks collapsed during the most severe part of the national banking crisis is not clear—partly because of the absence of reliable data in the first place (the Federal Reserve tracked the activities of nonmember banks only in retrospect, years later) and partly

because of the failure of historians to indicate whether they are considering state banks, national banks, or both. Geologist Peter Huntoon indicates that in 1927 there were 57 active banks in Wyoming. He also says, “by 1936 there were only thirty-two banks doing business in Wyoming.” T. A. Larson, however, counted 83 banks in the state in 1930, although he notes that the Depression “trimmed out twenty-seven more, seven of them in 1932 and seven more in 1933.”¹¹ The Federal Reserve Board data offer yet a third number of suspensions, but the reporting dates (whole years during which the number may have fluctuated) may account for some differences. The Federal Reserve statistics indicate that the number of state banks declined from 62 to 48 between 1929 and 1933 and that the national banks even added one, going from 25 in 1929 to 26 in 1933.¹² What is clear, disparities in numbers of banks aside, is that more and more banks in Wyoming were closing their doors and that Wyoming's people who depended on banks were suffering as a result of lost savings and checking accounts, and from loans that could not be made, renewed, or extended. They also suffered additionally and indirectly when their neighbors were hit by the bank closings, which sent shock waves rippling through local economies and then the whole state. As the banking system collapsed, it took Wyoming's people into the depths of despair.

The obvious question in this critical episode is why did the Federal Reserve System allow all these banks to fail? Since its creation in 1913, following a series of banking panics that roiled the nation's economy, the primary mission of the central banking system was to prevent exactly such a crisis from developing. But it did not prevent it. Just as it had during the 1920s, the Federal Reserve watched while the banking system came further unraveled following the stock market crash. Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz have accurately answered the questions about this curious development. A broad group including “most of the governors of the [Federal Reserve] Banks, members of the Board, and other administrators” they write, “tended to regard bank failures as regrettable consequences of bad management and bad banking practices, or as inevitable reactions to prior speculative excesses, or as a consequence but hardly a cause of the financial and economic collapse in process.” They continue:

Four additional circumstances may help to explain the System's failure both to develop concern over bank closing at an earlier date and to under-

10. Friedman and Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States*, 299.

11. Peter W. Huntoon, “The National Bank Failures in Wyoming, 1924,” *Annals of Wyoming* 54 (Fall 1982): 44; Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 413.

12. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *All-Bank Statistics: United States, 1896–1955* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Reserve System, 1958), 1137, 1141. L. Milton Woods, in his study of Wyoming banking, inexplicably does not address this crisis, restricting his focus in these years to the panic that took place immediately prior to the bank holiday of 1933. Woods, *Sometimes the Books Froze*, 125.

take more positive measures when concern did develop. (1) Federal Reserve officials had no feeling of responsibility for nonmember banks. In 1921–29 and the first ten months of 1930, most failed banks were nonmembers, and nonmembers held a high percentage of the deposits involved. (2) The failures for that period were concentrated among smaller banks and, since the most influential figures in the System were big-city bankers who deplored the existence of small banks, their disappearance may have been viewed with complacency. (3) Even in November and December 1930, when the number of failures increased sharply, over 80 percent were nonmembers. (4) The relatively few large member banks that failed at the end of 1930 were regarded by many Reserve officials as unfortunate cases of bad management and therefore not subject to correction by central bank action.¹³

In fact, it was not just a case of the Federal Reserve not helping the banks. At a time when the banking system needed more funds to meet the demands made upon them, the Federal Reserve System embarked, with lack of clear focus and with some fluctuation, on a generally tight money policy that actually increased the pressures on the banks.¹⁴ This seems to have emerged from a fear that the crisis of the weak banks would pull down the strong. So, instead of the big banks saving the small, the small banks were being sacrificed to save the big. The banks in Wyoming tended to be in the small category.

Exactly what was going on here, numbers aside, is clear. In the collapse of the stock market and of Wall Street, the assets of others—businesses, consumers, governments—were lost either (1) through the closure of banks and their inability to pay or (2) through the loss of value when the markets became glutted with securities. The spiral was downward directed and along the way businesses closed, employees were laid off, spending was slashed, and the economy ground down to a slower and slower pace. By 1933 around a fourth of the labor force was out of work and unable to find a job. When workers in the cities could no longer afford to buy groceries, it was a serious hardship for them; it also represented a serious blow to the producers of those groceries—and that included the farmers and ranchers in Wyoming. There can be no doubt that the problem was insufficient demand to keep the economy operating at the level that was needed. In February 1933, the Wyoming Extension Service estimated that demand in the economy—as measured by industrial activity and by

factory payrolls—had fallen to 60 percent and 40 percent, respectively, of what they had been between 1923 and 1925.¹⁵ Economists at the Extension Service hoped that the situation was improving, that the nadir had been reached in the summer of 1932, but even so, there were dark days ahead: “in view of the fact, however, that a large portion of the reserve purchasing power of the consumers has been exhausted, their savings depleted, and an accumulation of indebtedness built up during the last three years of the depression, improvement is not likely to reflect higher prices of agricultural products before the latter half of 1933, and then only in moderate proportions.”¹⁶ The lack of consumer purchasing was killing Wyoming farmers and ranchers. And what was true of agriculture was just as true of other products from Wyoming, like coal and gasoline. When people in the cities were unable to purchase the Wyoming grain, wool, and meat, and the Wyoming coal and gasoline that they needed for their families, Wyoming’s workers in the refineries, oil fields, coal mines, and farms and ranches were also unable to provide for their own families.

Contours of Crisis

Wyoming citizens were hit by a double whammy in this downturn. First of all, they lost their jobs, they lost their own savings, their mortgages were called in, and they faced the question of how to make a living and how to pay their bills. That was the direct impact. This also had a self-perpetuating aspect too, since the banks, when pressured to meet their demands, would liquidate their own assets, dumping their investments on an already glutted market where prices were moving downward, thereby assuring that they would continue to decline, further reducing both the value of the

13. Friedman and Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States*, 358–59.

14. *Ibid.*, 375.

15. A. W. Willis, “Wyoming Agricultural Situation for 1933,” Wyoming Agricultural Extension Service Circular no. 45 (February 1933): 5.

16. *Ibid.*, 6.

assets and the banks' own value. Second, the increasing unemployment everywhere else, the closing of factories, the reductions and retrenchments all across the economy, meant a decline in demand for Wyoming goods. In a continuing downward spiral, the worse the Depression became, the more powerfully the forces of decline fed on themselves, draining the economy of the demand that had sustained it; and declining demand led to even less demand, pushing the economy even further down with no end in sight.

Employment had probably reached a high in Wyoming around 1926 (as it did in the rest of the nation). In the months following the stock market crash, employment dropped steadily. The coal mines were hard hit because the trains were suffering. Most of the coal produced in Wyoming's mines went directly to operate the steam railroads, and when the railroads cut back their service, the mines reduced their production. Already starting to feel the competition of trucks on the nation's growing network of roads, and with reductions in production in the nation's factories, freight trains reduced their schedules; and passenger trains also were fewer in number. So employment in the coal mines dropped. The mines had employed 9,192 people in 1922. In 1929, 5,081 men were employed. As A. Dudley Gardner and Verla Flores report, by 1934 that number had declined to 3,778.¹⁷

Statistics for unemployment are notoriously difficult to use with precision. As with many other numerical indexes, those numbers attempt to convey a picture, and they do so, but with some compromises and ambiguity. Each number in the tallies of such a census report represents a group of individual lives, and each of those lives is certainly more complex than the numbers can convey. And the boundaries of the category into which the numbers are placed are often arbitrary, or, at a minimum, obscure. Unemployment is not a black-and-white, permanent, and objective category. There is the problem of underemployment which is not

17. Gardner and Flores, *Forgotten Frontier*, 162.

18. There were other categories as well, including people who were on vacation or those who were employed but idle because of sickness or injury. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: Unemployment, Volume I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931), 1105.

always reflected in the statistics. How much does a person have to be employed to be considered employed? Half-time? More? Less? What about those people who give up looking for work and manage to get by with the help of family or others? And what about the people who are employed on and off over time, working full time for short periods? (Think of the coal miners who might be working one or two days a week.) Often the data are carefully structured to accommodate these variables, but even then, they sometimes change in their definitions and boundaries from one census count to another, so that comparison becomes difficult. In other words, the numbers should never be taken as a final, precise count. On the other hand, obviously, they can give a general idea of the trends. And the trends in holding a job during this period were clearly heading downward.

The 1920 census did not even ask about unemployment (even though that question had been included in 1900 and 1910), but the 1930 census asked about employment status, albeit with considerable caution. In April 1930, about five-and-a-half months after the stock market crash, the census reported that Wyoming had a total population of 225,565, of whom 92,451 were termed "gainful workers," which is to say they were part of the labor force, whether or not they had a job. The census showed 3,719 "persons out of a job, able to work, and looking for a job"; 1,181 "persons having jobs but on lay-off without pay, excluding those sick or voluntarily idle"; 302 "persons out of a job and unable to work"; 365 "persons out of a job and not looking for work"; 223 "persons having jobs but voluntarily idle, without pay."¹⁸ All of these groups added up to 5,790 people out of work in those conditions, or 6.3 percent of the workforce. Even with the necessary imprecision of counting unemployment, this was a significant number. And this was just five-and-a-half months after the stock market crash. This was at the *beginning* of the Depression.

During the next several years the situation worsened dramatically. Historian T. A. Larson reports that unemployment in Wyoming had reached twenty thousand at the end of 1933. But that was not the whole picture. Larson accurately summarizes the bleak economic picture in these terms:

The state's taxable valuation, which had changed little in the twenties, shrank from \$448,000,000 in 1929 to \$300,000,000 in 1935. Assessed oil production dwindled to ten million barrels valued at only six million dollars in 1934. Motor-vehicle registration dropped 15 per cent between 1931

and 1933. The Bureau of the Census reported the state's retail business down 46 per cent between 1929 and 1933, motors and apparel showing the sharpest declines. Fewer tourists entered the state, and those who came spent less money than in former times.¹⁹

Production was down, jobs were down, tax revenue was down, the whole economy was down and it continued downward as one reduction led to another reduction and private sector cutbacks generated cuts in public services that in turn impacted people and businesses who depended on public expenditures. So then schools cut back, road construction cut back, municipal services and state operations cut back. Schools in Wyoming responded mainly by cutting teaching positions and also the salaries of remaining teachers. Rawlins, Thermopolis, and Cody reduced salaries by 10 percent in the one year of 1932 and Newcastle decreased teacher salaries by up to 20 percent the same year—and all of these also eliminated teacher positions. Some districts kept their staff, like Lovell in 1933, but reduced salaries (Lovell's reduction that year being fifteen percent).²⁰ Overall in Wyoming, from the school year 1930–1931 to the school year 1933–1934, the number of teachers declined from 2,944 to 2,716. Moreover, as Paul Andrew Hassler reports, “Schools in rural areas were threatened by closure because of lack of funds. As late as December of 1934, a lack of funds threatened to curtail school terms.”²¹ At the same time that school funding declined, teacher pay was reduced, and school terms were shortened, high school students tended to remain in school longer. With fewer employment opportunities, education took on a new attraction both because of the time available and because of the hopes of improved chances at finding jobs with further education. Hassler quotes the *Wyoming State Tribune* in 1931: “The night school at Cheyenne finds in its membership at this time numerous students engaged not only in completing the eighth grade and abandoned high school education but in making a hurry-up job of neglected education through a return to day school, as well.”²²

The University of Wyoming was not spared the budget reductions although there seems to have been a greater time lag for cuts to reach the university than for the school districts, in part because of funding on a biennium basis and some dedicated funds from oil revenues. In fact, due to the growing enrollment in the university, in 1930 it listed building needs that included “an enlarged College of Education, a women's build-

ing, a place for the preservation of state historical records and mementoes, and a College of Liberal Arts, this last ‘the largest building projected, with auditorium and student union quarters.’”²³ But the Depression hit the university too. In 1931 one sign of that was concealed in the enrollment statistics; although total enrollment peaked at 1,400 that fall, the freshmen portion of the enrollment had declined, and that would translate into future declines as well. That same year state appropriations to the university were cut, some departments (such as mining engineering, music, extension work, and possibly even law) were considered for elimination, but an emergency appropriation avoided immediate reductions.²⁴ Wilson Clough, who prepared a semi-centennial history of the university in 1937, and who, as a professor in the English Department, both witnessed and participated in the reductions he chronicled, wrote, “In March, 1932, the University's budget was slashed nearly \$100,000, faculty were assessed, along with other state employees, for state relief, married women were excluded from employment, faculty travel was restricted, and staff vacancies were not met by replacements.” Among the married women whose positions were included in this prohibition was Helen Bishop, the Dean of Women and wife of a faculty member in the Agronomy Department; in 1931 she resigned “following depression rulings against married women on the staff.”²⁵ Merica Hall, then a dormitory, was closed. President Arthur Crane and O. C. Schwiering, in the College of Education, urged alumni to

19. Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 444, 443.

20. Paul Andrew Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934” (master's thesis, University of Wyoming, 1957), 2.

21. *Ibid.*, 4.

22. *Ibid.*, 7.

23. Wilson O. Clough, *A History of the University of Wyoming, 1887–1937* (Laramie: Laramie Printing Co., 1937), 156.

24. *Ibid.*, 161–62.

25. *Ibid.*, 161–62, 152.

pledge contributions to a Student Welfare fund from which students would be able to borrow money in these hard times, a time also when student employment, an important source of funding, was being cut.²⁶ Salaries of all university employees were also reduced. The president's salary was cut from \$11,000 to \$8,000, and other salaries were reduced on a sliding scale averaging 15 percent in 1933.²⁷

All across the state Wyomingites cut back their spending, both public and private, and many people found that even more was needed. They could not get by with the dwindling resources they had. Incomes were reduced almost everywhere. People could trim their discretionary spending (if there was any), or completely eliminate it, but there remained expenses that had to be paid. The rent or the mortgage was a priority, as was food. Clothing could sometimes be made to last longer than in better times, but even so, some articles were necessities in Wyoming winters, and there came a point at which shoes could no longer be cobbled together adequately or other items repaired and patched. People did without, as much as they could, but they still needed help. It was also abundantly clear that the growing numbers of unemployed people were not out of work and

26. Those pledges, however, were themselves impacted by the Depression. The largest pledge, \$25,000 from the Gilchrist estate in Cheyenne, shrank to \$8,000 when the Gilchrist moneys were reduced by other demands. Clough, *A History of the University of Wyoming, 1887–1937*, 164.

27. Hassler, "Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934," 8–9.

28. See the story of the poor farm near Farson, which appears to have been more developed than others, in Fran Young, "Farson's County Poor Farm," in Sweetwater County Historical Museum, *Eden Valley Voices: A Centennial Celebration of Stories* (Cheyenne: Pioneer Printing & Stationery, 2008), 64–67.

29. Eri Hulbert, *Report of the Study of the Public Welfare Services of the State of Wyoming* (Cheyenne: State Board of Charities and Reform, 1934), 62–74. Copies of this report, submitted in December 1934, are available at the Wyoming State Archives and the University of Wyoming Libraries.

living in penury because of their personal shortcomings or because they were lazy or spendthrifts. Indeed, in some cases, such as the farmers and ranchers who received low prices on their marketable goods because the markets were glutted, their very talent and discipline in producing more and more was partly responsible for their low incomes. Telling them to work harder was not the solution.

Patching Together a "System" of Relief

In the wake of this economic calamity the state began to patch together a system of relief, using whatever resources were available. The official system of assisting the needy in Wyoming had been much like it was in other states, generally limited to minimal assistance to paupers. Otherwise, it was mainly a voluntary, private, informal system of neighbor helping neighbor. The state had authorized a poor farm near Lander in 1907 for those who, "by reason of age and misfortune, are unable to labor," but the site chosen was not suitable and it appears that on a state basis, the poor farm never actually emerged. Counties, however, did have poor farms—for example one in Carbon County near Dixon, one near Farson for Sweetwater County, the remains of both of which survive, and one in Natrona County near Bessemer Bend, which, like so many others, has disappeared. Others were scattered around the state, but they were usually neither substantial nor attractive, nor were they intended to be. They were, in every sense, a destination of last resort.²⁸

Some assistance seems to have been provided at the county level for "mothers' pensions," and in 1929 counties were enabled by state law to issue a one-half mill levy for old age pensions. A key study of relief in the state reported that by 1933 twenty counties paid a total of 655 such pensions averaging \$12.02.²⁹ The relief that went to help individuals and families in distress generally came from the cities and counties and from private sources, although in autumn 1931 a state committee was created to help coordinate the sundry relief efforts.

Cheyenne, the largest city, also seems to have been the most ambitious in its relief efforts. In that city the mayor formed a relief committee and sponsored a fund drive encouraging people who earned over a hundred dollars a month to pledge 1 percent of their earnings to help out the less

fortunate, and the committee (made up of representatives from the various civic organizations in the city) also distributed donated clothes, fuel, and food. By November the relief committee was helping 50 families; in April 1932 it had grown to 180 families.³⁰ The funding of the relief effort in Cheyenne seems to have been provided by a piecemeal, ever-shifting combination of groups, with the local Red Cross sometimes coordinating and financing part of the endeavor and at various times the county and the city contributing some funds. By April 1933 the situation had evolved so that, according to Paul Hassler, “the city of Cheyenne was out of the relief picture with the county supporting 80 percent of the relief and the Red Cross the remainder.” And, without an unemployment office anywhere in the state, in Cheyenne the Red Cross helped with job placement.³¹ The Salvation Army provided assistance in Cheyenne for the growing number of transients crossing the state who needed help. Red Cross, Salvation Army, Knights of Columbus, Kiwanis, American Legion, Boy Scouts (clothing drives), the “Help-One-Another Club,” and others worked to help those who needed it. The Union Pacific League for a while was able to help some two hundred families associated with the railroad, but soon it could no longer continue the support. When that organization exhausted its resources, families in need turned to the coalition of local public and private organizations for help.

Across the state this was generally the pattern: a coalition, informal or organized, of charities, professional and civic organizations, churches, and city and county governments attempted to help the growing numbers of unemployed. Laramie voters in 1931 (on the second try) passed a bond issue to remove city debts and also help the unemployed by putting over two hundred men to work; and Albany County increased its expenditures for relief of the poor and paupers. Hassler notes that Albany County, in April 1933, “had approximately 28 percent either unemployed or dependent upon charitable organizations.” The unemployed and their dependents added up to 3,920.³² Rawlins religious and fraternal organizations coalesced to provide help to the unemployed and to transients passing through that community; as resources dwindled, however, people seeking food or lodging were required to work several hours on local projects. Similarly, in the spring of 1932 Wheatland’s unemployed went to work on a city clean-up project while Eden Valley and Green River hired crews of twenty-five men to work on road projects for a week at a time.³³ Hassler

points out that the national Red Cross provided some relief across the state, including sending cotton cloth to Lusk, Casper, and Evanston for use as clothing for relief and carloads of crushed grain for stock feeding in Niobrara County. Casper’s community garden evidently helped alleviate some of the relief burden there.³⁴

The important point to note here is that for the most part this was a voluntary system of neighbors helping neighbors, of communities helping their citizens and those passing through, and of charitable organizations responding to the economic calamity in the same way they previously had come to the rescue in times of natural disaster. And it was true that a crisis in society and economy had fallen over the land, much as a drought or flood had sometimes devastated communities. Meanwhile, as Hassler observes, “State relief on a state level is not a clear picture and is not a potent factor till 1933.” And, T. A. Larson writes, “the legislature in its forty-day session in January and February 1933 gave highest priority to reducing taxes and appropriations.”³⁵

30. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 14.

31. *Ibid.*, 16–17.

32. *Ibid.*, 19.

33. *Ibid.*, 20.

34. *Ibid.*, 21.

35. T. A. Larson, “The New Deal in Wyoming,” *Pacific Historical Review* 38 (August 1969): 253; Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 21.

The Path of Herbert Hoover

As for the federal government in these years, the picture is complex and sometimes deceptive. The response of President Hoover to this worsening problem has sometimes been ignored and often has been reduced to a caricature of abject failure (or stubborn refusal) to take action, namely active government intervention of some kind in the economy, to arrest the downturn. There is, of course, more to the story. Herbert Hoover was not an uncaring person. He was not ignorant of the economic crisis and its contours. And he was not the pawn of the well-to-do in their efforts to avoid helping those at the bottom. The fact is that Herbert Hoover embarked on his own path immediately after the stock market crash (and one can argue before the crash too) in an effort to address the problems and that path is still one that confounds modern observers, though it offers an important perspective. He does not fit the conventional molds into which he has been placed.

Herbert Hoover had made a name for himself in mining and the name was that of the Great Engineer. During World War I that changed to the Great Humanitarian when Hoover left his business interests behind and devoted himself to leading the food relief effort for the millions of Europeans suffering from want caused by the war. He disdained politics, sought to be out of the limelight, and though he served as Secretary of Commerce during the 1920s, he never ran for public office until he ran for president in 1928. While Secretary of Commerce, Hoover developed his philosophy of American society, an amalgam of Jeffersonian agrarianism and modern organization in which the virtues of cooperation and competition were

blended while the dangers of each—coercion on the one hand and materialistic selfishness on the other—were suppressed.

Hoover was as distrustful of powerful, centralized government and business institutions as he was confident in individuals and communities to solve their own problems. His 1922 book, *American Individualism*, both encouraged people to pursue their traditional ideals and attacked monopoly capitalism as much as Bolshevism: “To curb the forces in business which would destroy equality of opportunity and yet to maintain the initiative and creative faculties of our people are the twin objects we must attain.”³⁶ At the same time, Hoover called for a renewed spirit of cooperation: “What we need today is steady devotion to a better, brighter, broader individualism—an individualism that carries increasing responsibility and service to our fellows,” a spirit in which “we will glorify service as a part of our national character.”³⁷ His ideas had a special resonance in Wyoming, which remained rural, had been a state less than half a century, and possibly reflected some of the ideals—in fact and in mythology—that Hoover espoused. Declaring that “the farm is more than a business; it is a state of living,” he echoed the sentiments of many Wyoming farmers and ranchers who were resisting the forces of modernizing, business-oriented organization of their operations and he eulogized the settlers of the Midwest in terms reminiscent of Wyoming’s own past: “They combined to build the roads, bridges, and towns; they co-operated together to erect their schools, their churches, and to raise their barns and harvest their fields. They asked only for freedom of opportunity and an equal chance. In these conceptions lies the real basis of American democracy.”³⁸ This was not the blithe philosophy of laissez-faire for which he has been roundly denounced; it was a spirit of individuals fulfilling their responsibility to others in their communities. It was the spirit evident, in fact, in Wyoming communities as the devastation of the Depression spread wider and deeper into the fabric of life.

The problem was that Herbert Hoover happened to be president just at this moment. Hoover drew upon those values and that philosophy as he confronted what turned out to be the greatest economic downturn in American history. And the problem was, further, that Hoover, like Wyoming’s farmers, ranchers, and city dwellers, was facing forces of change over which individuals increasingly had but slight control. Yet Hoover tried, and he tried using the formula for voluntary cooperation central to

36. Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1922), 54.

37. *Ibid.*, 66.

38. Hoover quoted in Albert U. Romasco, *The Poverty of Abundance: Hoover, the Nation, the Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 104.

39. Romasco, *The Poverty of Abundance*, 36.

his political and social philosophy of individualism. What this meant in large measure, given his antipathy to strong centralized institutions that were by their nature coercive, was that he asked leaders in the private economy to take actions voluntarily for the well-being of the economy. Hoover was, in historian Albert U. Romasco's words, "an influential adviser and well-placed cheerleader" as the Depression settled in.³⁹ It should be noted, however, that Hoover was not cheering on the business leaders in whatever course of action they took, but cheering those leaders to follow the path he showed them.

The path that Hoover encouraged was one in which business leaders would demonstrate their own confidence in the economy by purchasing rather than selling, by hiring rather than firing, by expanding instead of retrenching, by lending instead of hoarding. Based on a psychological assessment of economic activity, Hoover's perception was that the fear of worsening conditions in the economy would cause business leaders to reduce their exposure, to cut production, to cut wages, to cut employment, to cut expansion and construction, and by so doing actually bring about the very circumstance of depression that they feared. By encouraging an optimistic view of the economy, and by urging those business leaders to accept that view in their actions, Hoover endeavored to prevent the downward spiral of self-fulfilling expectations of doom and gloom. The subtext of this approach conformed perfectly to Hoover's rural and small-town value set where the strong would save the weak when the weak needed help, where the community would voluntarily come together for the common welfare. The advantages, if this would work, were two-fold: one was that economic collapse would be averted and the other was that it would be achieved without rigid governmental controls. Democracy would prevail over regimentation.

In retrospect, Hoover's approach may seem not just timid but naïve. At the time, however, this was a bold departure from the approach taken by presidents of the United States during previous economic downturns. The pattern had been, in virtually every instance, to wait out the cycle of collapse until prosperity somehow eventually reappeared. As two prominent economists, William Trufant Foster and Waddill Catchings, observed of Hoover at the beginning of 1930, although generally critical of the particulars of his approach, "For the first time in our history, a President of the United States is taking aggressive leadership in guiding private business

through a crisis."⁴⁰ In fact, Hoover was widely heralded at the time for his mastery of the situation. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith, whose study of the Great Crash remains the standard assessment, quotes a variety of newspapers, like the *Boston Globe*, as they observed that the nation "has at the White House a man who believes not in the philosophy of drift, but in the dynamics of mastery."⁴¹

Hoover's first tangible response to the crisis came when he summoned prominent business leaders to the White House and implored them to keep up their levels of activity. Industrial magnates, railway executives, utility company titans, construction company heads, union leaders, and farmer organization leaders formed a parade to Washington, where, in separate meetings, Hoover and his advisors urged them to maintain their production, construction, and wages, to expand their operations, and even to help out those of their employees who needed assistance. Hoover described the objectives thus: "Those conferences in Washington established four understandings vital to the recovery program: (a) no strikes or lockouts that leaders could prevent; (b) wage rates not to be reduced except as the cost of living fell; (c) within their resources, employers to look after the relief of their own employees; (d) where possible, a sharing of work. The three last provisions were currently referred to in our discussions as the 'employers' direct relief."⁴² Invariably, the meetings produced agreement and promises of cooperation, and President Hoover was satisfied that his plan would succeed. And there was some resurgence in the stock market in the short run.

Hoover's fundamental approach was based on the notion that the econ-

40. William Trufant Foster and Waddill Catchings, "Mr. Hoover's Road to Prosperity," *The Review of Reviews* 81 (January 1930): 51. See also William J. Barber, *From New Era to New Deal: Herbert Hoover, the Economists, and American Economic Policy, 1921-1933* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 51-58.

41. Galbraith, *The Great Crash*, 143.

42. Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, vol. 3: *The Great Depression, 1929-1941* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1952), 45.

omy needed ample purchasing power to operate, not only in times of crisis, but all the time. The way for the public to have purchasing power was through high wages: “I have for many years advocated high wages as the economic basis for the country. That is the road to economical production and high consumption of products of the farm and factory.”⁴³ Which then meant that in time of economic crisis, when purchasing power had dried up, when the problem was that of underconsumption, the initial need was to restore purchasing power through higher wages:

The first [need] was to uphold the standards of real wages. The second was to uphold the buying power of our working people until the cost of living had diminished. The third was to prevent that thing which had happened in every previous depression in our history, and that was an immediate attack upon wages as a basis of maintaining profits. This proposal had the sympathetic support of the employers of the country, and for nearly two years they maintained the standard of wages . . . in the face of disappearing profits.⁴⁴

Such were the promises made. But before long those same business leaders began to hedge their commitments and began to pursue exactly the cycle of layoffs, plant closings, wage reductions, and reduced expenditures they had promised to resist. The same panic psychology that had pulled down the stock market pulled down the rest of the economy, but this had a concrete, material element to it, not just psychological. As businesses cut back their spending on all factors of production, their workers and suppliers and distributors and other beneficiaries found themselves out of contracts, out of work, out of money, and that meant that the other businesses in the economy that depended on them were also forced to cut back. As purchasing power diminished, so too did the economy dry up.

43. *Ibid.*, 314.

44. *Ibid.*, 312.

45. Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1975), 166.

46. This radio address is reprinted in part in Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, vol. 3: *The Great Depression, 1929–1941*, 33.

Hoover, meanwhile, watched all of this but was remarkably subdued in his response to those who had broken the carefully extracted promises to build a strong economy, and who moved quickly to save themselves at the expense of the nation. Perhaps the closest he came to striking out at them for abandoning the principle of community service dear to him was near the end of his presidency, in 1932, when he lamented to a friend “The only trouble with capitalism is capitalists. They’re too damned greedy.”⁴⁵ For Herbert Hoover, life, society, economy, and government were about more than capital accumulation.

In addition to Hoover’s disappointment in the leaders of industry who backtracked on their personal pledges to him, his hopes for voluntary cooperation to help the people out of work, the people hungry for food and desperate for shelter, also fell short of what was needed. Hoover encouraged people to contribute to local organizations offering relief for the distressed. Again, it was his philosophy of community responsibility, where those who had been blessed by the community now needed to help out those in need, where the well-to-do would save the poor, where the strong would help the weak, that guided his actions. In a radio address in 1931 Hoover offered this justification and explanation:

In a nation rich in resources, many people [are] faced with hunger and cold through no fault of their own. Our national resources are not only material supplies and material wealth but a spiritual and moral wealth in kindness, in compassion, in a sense of obligation of neighbor to neighbor and a realization [i.e., acceptance] of responsibility by industry, by business, and the community for its social security and its social welfare.

The evidence of our ability to solve great problems outside of government action and the degree of moral strength with which we emerge from this period will be determined by whether the individuals and the local communities continue to meet their responsibilities. . . .

Victory over this depression and over our other difficulties will be won by the resolution of our people to fight their own battles in their own communities, by stimulating their ingenuity to solve their own problems, by taking new courage to be masters of their own destiny in the struggle of life.⁴⁶

In another address, Hoover urged the nation to contemplate the biblical lesson of Cain: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”⁴⁷ The answer for the

nation, Hoover said, was that the people of the nation, as individuals, must accept that responsibility. So through a variety of agencies Hoover sought to coordinate, not command, the voluntary relief effort. At first (1930) under Colonel Arthur Woods, the President's Committee for Unemployment Relief, and then reorganized as the President's Unemployment Relief Organization (often called POUR), under the leadership of Walter Gifford, head of AT&T, encouraged people in their communities to make contributions for the assistance of their neighbors. The organization called for the establishment of nonpartisan committees at the state and local level to collect and distribute this relief, such as those cropping up in Wyoming. Hoover often cited statistics demonstrating the success of this program, but the reality was probably more desperate than he acknowledged. In fact, although Gifford consistently advised Hoover that the relief needs of the nation were being adequately met by this voluntary effort, when questioned by Congress, Gifford could not state how many people were out of work, how many families needed relief, what amount of money was necessary to help them, what standards were being used in distributing relief, or what the resources of the communities were.⁴⁸ As with the effort to get the economic leaders to voluntarily accept their responsibility in sustaining a vibrant economy, getting those who had benefited from the economy to voluntarily help those who did not also fell short.

Business leaders, however, not only declined to fulfill their responsibilities in the Hoover vision but even called upon the power of the federal government to assist them. Gerard Swope, president of General Electric, and Henry I. Harriman, of the United States Chamber of Commerce, in particular pushed a plan for economic rejuvenation in which the federal government would facilitate and encourage business cooperation to reduce competition and set prices and wages at profitable levels without fear of enforcement of the antitrust laws. Where Hoover viewed competition and small business as the backbone of freedom and democracy, the business community, at least the national businesses, saw competition as the problem and wanted to eliminate it. Fundamentally, they proposed that businesses be permitted to combine, to operate as a single unit in the economy, to set production levels and quotas for individual plants, and to determine and enforce what they called "a fair price." Charles Stevenson, the head of a trade association management firm, had been lobbying for emasculation of the antitrust laws, and he endorsed this proposal of central planning by

business with government sanction. And Stevenson made explicit one key feature of this general plan: "the majority in an industry must be given the right of compulsion over the minority."⁴⁹

When Swope spelled out the business plan for consolidation and control in 1931 and urged the president to adopt it, Hoover recoiled in horror. He did not conceal his contempt for economic planning even, or especially, if the planning was done by big business:

This plan provides for the mobilization of each variety of industry and business into trade associations, to be legalized by the government and authorized to "stabilize prices and control distribution." There is no stabilization of prices without price fixing and control of distribution. This feature at once becomes the organization of gigantic trusts such as have never been dreamed of in the history of the world. This is the creation of a series of complete monopolies over the American people. It means the repeal of the entire Sherman and Clayton Acts, and all other restrictions on combinations and monopoly. In fact, if such a thing were ever done, it means the decay of American industry from the day this scheme is born, because one cannot stabilize prices without restricting production and protecting obsolete plants and inferior managements. It is the most gigantic proposal of monopoly ever made in history.⁵⁰

When the U.S. Chamber of Commerce pushed another version of the same general plan, Hoover again rejected it: "I informed [Henry Harri-

47. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, vol. 3, 151.

48. Romasco, *The Poverty of Abundance*, 166.

49. See various iterations of this general proposal in Ellis Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 39–41.

50. This statement is in a note Hoover sent to his attorney general in response to the plan and is reprinted in Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, vol. 3, 334.

man] that if this plan were put into practice it would, through the creation of monopolies, drive the country into the Fascism of which it was mostly a pattern, or toward Socialism as the result of public exasperation.”⁵¹ In fact, Hoover, far from believing that the problem was excessive competition, believed there was too little of it and too much coercion and constraint of smaller businesses in the business community, a factor which both reduced consumer purchasing power and inhibited individual small business opportunity, and he initiated a cycle of enforcement of the antitrust laws. Hoover was opposed to a centralized planning structure, whether in the private or public sectors, and he was committed to a competitive economy that both protected the public and opened opportunities for the entrepreneur.

Herbert Hoover and Public Works

This pattern of urging voluntary action to maintain production and consumption on the one hand, and rejecting coercive schemes that threatened individual liberty and responsibility on the other hand, however, was not Hoover’s only approach to alleviating the economic crisis. He actually did embark upon programs to reverse the cycle and to help those in desperate need. These programs were limited and they were tempered by his com-

51. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, vol. 3, 335.

52. Hoover’s views on taxes were clear as early as at the beginning of the 1920s when, as David Burner says, “Nowhere does Hoover appear more subversive of upper-class interest in this period than in his ideas on taxation.” Hoover “argued that the income tax began too far down on the scale of income and amounted to a tax on necessities. He would tax high incomes more heavily: the rich must come to see the bearing of a heavier burden as a social duty. He also advocated a steep graduation in inheritance taxes, contending that the tools of production should go to the person or agency most fitted for their use, not to a relative or a friend.” Burner, *Herbert Hoover: A Public Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 146–47.

53. Galbraith, *The Great Crash*, 142.

mitment to voluntary cooperation. And they were also tempered by his fear of government relieving the affluent of their moral and economic responsibilities to the less fortunate in society. But he pursued government action in several ways that affected Wyomingites.

The specific actions that Hoover took following the stock market crash involved first of all an effort to increase purchasing power by reducing personal and corporate taxes.⁵² Again Galbraith notes, “Mr. Hoover’s first step was out of the later works of John Maynard Keynes. Precisely as Keynes and Keynesians would have advised, he announced a cut in taxes.”⁵³ The tax reduction, a full percentage point, was weighted so that it reduced taxes on people at the bottom of the scale by two-thirds and those higher up by half; the hope was that this would increase purchasing power and stimulate business investment. Tax rates, however, were already low, and while sound in principle, the reduction probably had little impact on actual consumption.

More importantly, Hoover moved forward with plans for public works, for increased spending on construction of public projects. In particular, Hoover, in the same vein as his exhortations to the business community, urged governments at the local and state level to accelerate their plans for public works so as to maintain employment and boost the construction sector of the economy. When it came to federal public works, however, Hoover was hampered by several factors. One was his commitment to a balanced budget (though that wavered and has often been overstated) and another was his belief that “emergency” public works were ineffective; public works would serve to sustain prosperity, not achieve it. Together these two considerations imposed serious limits on his proposals. The only option left was to accelerate existing programs rather than propose new efforts. Moreover, once the stock market crashed and the nation’s economy began its steady decline, federal revenues dwindled and the budget surplus was shot, so Hoover shelved plans he had developed for a major public works program to be sponsored by the federal government amounting to three billion dollars.

Hoover’s framework in judging such projects made a distinction between “nonproductive” public works, which were directly financed by the federal government but did not provide jobs once they were completed, and “reproductive” public works, which were financed privately or through government loans and which would provide continuing jobs; he would

approve the “reproductive” projects but not the “nonproductive” construction. The distinction was not altogether clear or meaningful to people in need of work, and, as Joan Hoff Wilson observes, “Hoover’s insistence that locally financed self-help programs were more worthy of Americans than direct federal aid eventually became monotonous and repulsive to the average citizen.”⁵⁴ Even so, and even with his veto of popular public works programs passed by the Democratic Congress elected in 1930, Hoover still moved forward briskly with his own public works programs, increasing expenditures for existing infrastructure like roads and bridges and pushing the construction of federal buildings.

Increasingly on the defensive—and for the rest of his life defensive about what his administration did and did not do to combat the Depression—Hoover testily pointed out later the vast sums his administration spent on public works, an amount totaling nearly two billion dollars, which sum, he claimed, “was greater than the whole expenditure during the previous thirty years, including the Panama Canal. It accounted for a considerable part of the deficit.”⁵⁵ This was no doubt accurate. The problem was that so much of Hoover’s public works expenditures were next to invisible because of his commitment to accelerating and expanding existing programs rather than launching new, discrete, programs that carried their own identity. The fact that Hoover persistently placed responsibility for construction and relief at the local and state level also meant that the federal government’s role and contribution would be further diminished in the public (and journalistic) eye, and that the federal government’s role would go without appropriate credit. Had Hoover articulated at the time the pride he took in the government’s construction activities—a sentiment that he expressed two decades later—the remembrance of the Hoover administration would possibly be more generous in more quarters.

There were thus two elements of the Hoover record on public works construction, one completely invisible and the other nearly so—both, as the cliché has it, hiding in plain sight. The federal stimulus of local construction by city and county governments, and by state government too, was largely that of coaching and urging and pleading. Hoover later wrote, “On November 23rd [after the stock market crash], I wired the governors and mayors, asking their cooperation to expand public works.”⁵⁶ Specifically, the president asked local governments to build new buildings, such as courthouses and city halls, and some did. In many instances, however,

those projects were already in the works or had been planned and were not suddenly formulated to respond to the pleas of Washington. They were seldom, if ever, constructed, however, as “federally requested” projects, and thus any explicit connection between them and President Hoover’s effort to stimulate construction and demand never materialized. The second element was much more direct and involved the federal government spending money on federal projects. But that was not much more visible. Because these were not separate programs and projects, because they took place through the existing agencies of the National Park Service (NPS), the U.S. Forest Service, and the Treasury Department, they too remain often not only unheralded but unnoticed as federal work projects.

Sometimes the efforts are even concealed in the camouflage of natural landscape, albeit right in front of the community. In 1931, anticipating the bicentennial of the birth of George Washington the next year, Congress urged states to individually develop their own ways of commemorating the nation’s first president. In Wyoming, state and community leaders settled on a plan to commemorate Washington’s bicentennial with the creation of municipal parks throughout the state—sometimes referred to as “living memorials” because of their natural vegetation. A state bicentennial committee named a landscape architect (Harold L. Curtiss, landscape architect at the University of Wyoming) to help with plans for individual parks, and the acting governor, Alonzo M. Clark, appointed chairs of county bicentennial committees. The Agricultural Extension Service at the university would provide nursery stock to the communities at low cost to assist the effort. In all but three counties (and in at least one of those three counties, the movement was active, but plans were not yet finalized), at least one and often multiple communities had announced plans and started work. By February 1932 the state chair told the press that the public response “had exceeded even the most optimistic expectations” of the commission. In Big

54. Wilson, *Herbert Hoover*, 150.

55. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, vol. 3, 311.

56. *Ibid.*, 42. One can almost detect a weariness in Hoover’s voice, and even poignance, when he says, “They responded with full assurances.”

Albany County Court-house, Laramie, constructed 1931–1932. The Hoover administration encouraged states, counties, and cities to undertake construction projects to put people to work.

Sanborn postcard from the collection of Michael Cassity.



Horn County, Washington parks were planned in Cowley, Deaver, Basin, Greybull, and Lovell. Rawlins, Medicine Bow, and Parco all had plans in Carbon County. In Goshen County, Torrington, Hawk Springs, Veteran, and LaGrange had developed their plans. So it went all across Wyoming: in almost every community there was a volunteer effort, coordinated by the state, to commemorate George Washington's two hundredth birthday by building a municipal park.⁵⁷ Using local and state resources, drawing upon the energies of volunteers to come together for the betterment of their communities, this was exactly the kind of project that Herbert Hoover had in mind as a daily activity in the communities, and which he supported with even greater urgency during the Depression.

On the other hand, although the parks were built, they were built only

with a struggle, and this too suggests the limits of that specific effort. In Jackson, for example, the town square, up to this point a largely vacant parcel with a few cottonwood trees, was to be the Washington Park in that town, despite its small size, considerably smaller than the two-and-a-half acres generally recommended. In April 1932 the Jackson town council designated it the George Washington Memorial Park. But the "nursery units," a specified quantity of trees and shrubs, had to be purchased by the communities and then grown in a community nursery until they could be transplanted to the park. Jackson, like other towns in Wyoming, was strapped for cash and did not have the \$150 to purchase the trees and shrubs. So the money was raised by contributions from members of the public. Then the nursery units were purchased and planted at a local nursery, and a grand parade, ceremony, and public celebration were put together to christen the park. As the nomination for George Washington Memorial Park in Jackson to the National Register of Historic Places notes: "After the celebration, however, the block of land appeared hardly any closer to becoming a park than it had a year or two earlier. Funds had been raised, proclamations had been made, the spirit of George Washing-

57. "Wyoming Approaches Peak of State Memorial Campaign," *Casper Tribune-Herald*, February 26, 1932.



“Bridge construction near Jackson, Wyoming,” March 17, 1932.

National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 30, Records of the Bureau of Public Roads. Photo identifier, 292828.

ton had been both invoked and praised, and the future envisioned, but the land was still bare, the IOOF building [to be removed] still stood on the corner, and the foliage and trees were yet to take root in the soil of this square of fenced land.”⁵⁸

It is unfair to take one example, such as Jackson’s town square, as indicative of the shortcomings of Herbert Hoover’s approach to solving the problems of the Depression. Other parks in other communities were quite likely more successful at an earlier moment. And Hoover focused on more than these small projects. And it was not really a gesture in the direction of solving the problem of unemployment. At the same time, however, these projects did symbolize Hoover’s general vision of community involvement. In fact, the argument could easily be made that this park represented many of the virtues of Hoover’s approach since it did, after all, summon the energies of people, as volunteers in their own community joining together in a common effort, using funds that they provided themselves, to better the whole community. The only problem was that more had to be done.

And the Hoover administration did more, much more.

It is unknown how many courthouses in Wyoming owe their origin

to Hoover’s push for local construction. Albany County’s courthouse in Laramie was begun in 1931, in the midst of the Depression, and it was finally open and occupied by the end of February 1932. This was not a New Deal project (as some believe), but one of the construction efforts associated with the local public building push of the Hoover administration. And there were others around the state, though they can usually be identified only by careful research. They do not carry a federal shield or letters of a work agency, but they remain as significant—even if that significance is different—as their kindred buildings constructed a few years later.

One substantial part of the Hoover administration program was the expansion and acceleration of highway construction. Highways were still in their early stages of development in the nation, but during the Hoover

58. National Register Nomination for George Washington Memorial Park, Jackson, Wyoming, 2003.

administration the federal government offered a new, emergency boost to state highway-building efforts. In the 1920s the federal-aid highway system, officially launched in 1916, began to take shape with the federal government contributing to the construction of highways in various states using a formula that encouraged construction of both interstate (i.e., roads linked to roads in other states) and local, farm-to-market roads. In 1926, the grid of numbered highways, with even-numbered roads traversing the nation from east to west and odd-numbered highways going north and south, was announced by the Bureau of Public Roads (an agency in the Department of Agriculture). What was happening was of singular importance: a modern system of paved (at least with oil, sometimes more) and numbered highways in the nation was emerging from the dirt, gravel, and mud. During the Hoover administration that aid continued and was expanded. Hoover saw this expansion not only as an enhancement of infrastructure but as relief for unemployment and economic distress, noting in his memoirs that, in response to the drought of 1930, he “directed an expansion in Federal highway construction in those localities to aid farmers with supplementary employment,” although it is unclear if “those localities” included Wyoming.⁵⁹

Hoover’s highway program amounted to an acceleration and expansion of efforts already underway, rather than as a new initiative, but it did constitute a significant stimulus to highway construction at a critical moment. Colonel Arthur Woods, Hoover’s close assistant and chair of the Presi-

dent’s Emergency Committee for Employment in autumn 1930, made an explicit link between improving the nation’s transportation infrastructure and providing employment. Woods observed that

carrying out a broad and comprehensive public roads program at a time like this is one of the soundest procedures to meet a situation of depression because it not only employs labor and materials necessary in actual construction, but also utilizes a background of additional labor to provide the materials and the effective completion of such a program. It is estimated that for every man actually employed in working on a road, three other people become gainfully employed as a result, not only in the supplying of materials and equipment, but in other industries all along the line.⁶⁰

This also, it should be noted, was an early and important application of the multiplier effect of public works, for it acknowledged that the money spent did not stop with the specific project funded.

Hoover’s efforts continued in this vein, sometimes against the advice of his cabinet, and road construction became a priority, one that was welcomed in Wyoming. Hoover increased public road construction in 1930 and then again the following year, asking Congress to appropriate an additional \$75 million in 1930 and \$150 million the next year.⁶¹ Again, Hoover and his deputies called for an expansion of state and local construction of highways, and the Wyoming legislature in 1929 (in a special session) authorized a major bond issue for highway construction. The bond issue was approved in the November elections. Three-fourths of the funds generated by the bond issue were to be used to match federal highway funds, and three-fourths of the money had to be spent in each county according to its assessments. As Hassler observes of the 1931 road-building program that resulted, “the program gave jobs to several thousand men who otherwise would have joined the ranks of the jobless. During the 12 months ending November 1, 1931, 619 miles of state highways were oil paved, 502 miles graveled, and 351 miles graded.”⁶² In 1932 the superintendent of the state highway department eagerly looked forward to an additional emergency appropriation for highway construction in Congress since it would, he said, allow Wyoming to hire another one thousand people to work on highways for nine months.⁶³ One of the distinguishing factors of this expanded, emergency highway construc-

59. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, vol. 3, 51.

60. “Three Types of Highway Building Favored by the President’s Emergency Committee for Employment,” *American City* 43 (December 1930): 158.

61. Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933–1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

62. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 33–34.

63. “Bill Carries Road Funds for Wyoming,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, March 1, 1932.



The Federal Building in Casper, constructed 1930–1931, is an example of increased construction in the Hoover administration.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2012.



Green River Post Office, constructed during the Hoover administration.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2009.

tion, from a relief perspective, was that the workers were limited to a thirty-hour week so as to increase the number of people employed.⁶⁴

In addition to road and highway construction, the Hoover administration moved aggressively to expand the construction of federal buildings across the nation, including in Wyoming. In fact, in many places where there was a federal presence in the state, that presence was enhanced with new construction. In the spring of 1931 almost three million federal dollars were set aside for Wyoming projects, including such diverse but routine features as new quarters at Fort F. E. Warren (as Fort D. A. Russell had recently been renamed following the death of Senator Frances E. Warren), new post offices, offices for the Veterans Bureau, and facilities in the national parks. Casper dedicated its new federal building in 1932, and a new federal building in Cheyenne was also authorized and funded in 1931. Post offices in Green River and Thermopolis had been authorized in 1929 and for Newcastle and Torrington the next year.⁶⁵ Kemmerer and Wheatland post offices were authorized but not included in final funding, as was a post office for Yellowstone National Park. Riverton and Evanston were both offered post offices, but the local

governments declined.⁶⁶ This, it should be noted, held more than straight economic importance. As Lois Craig writes of the federal building construction program in the Hoover years nationally, “The federal presence was manifested architecturally in 1,085 communities that had not previously ‘owned’ a federal building. . . . In terms of establishing the image of the United States government, this program was the most important

64. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 34.

65. Historic U.S. Post Offices in Wyoming (Thematic Resources) 1900–1941, National Register nomination (1986), 28. This thematic nomination for the National Register of Historic Places, although nominally concerned with the historical and architectural significance of post office buildings, is almost exclusively focused on architectural significance.

66. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 38.



Veterans' Hospital, Cheyenne. Construction for this building began under Hoover in 1932, and the facility was opened in 1934.
Sanborn postcard from the collection of Michael Cassity.

67. Lois Craig and the Staff of the Federal Architecture Project, *The Federal Presence: Architecture, Politics, and Symbols in United States Government Building* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 281.

68. Phil Roberts, "A Hospital at the Hot Springs: The Politics of Locating Veterans' Health Facilities in Wyoming," *Annals of Wyoming* 81 (Summer 2009): 7.

69. *Ibid.*, 10.

undertaken since the first few decades under the Constitution."⁶⁷ If that symbolism was evident anywhere in the nation, it was especially so in Wyoming.

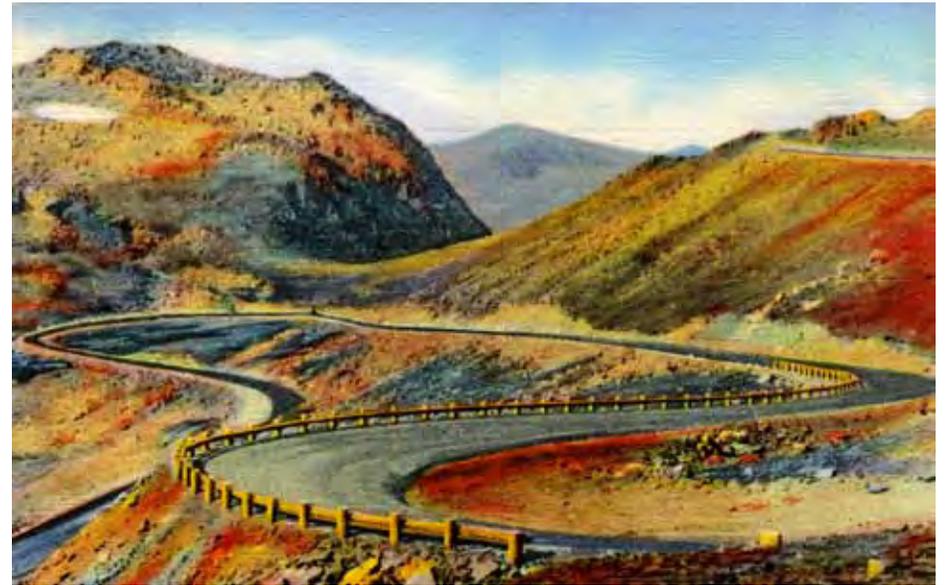
Perhaps the largest federal building project in Wyoming initiated during the Hoover administration was the Veterans' Hospital in Cheyenne. Thermopolis had actively campaigned to have a veterans' hospital constructed in that town near the therapeutic hot springs. This local drive converged with what Phil Roberts terms "a massive veterans' hospital building program."⁶⁸ As Roberts relates, the two efforts moved forward, and the Wyoming congressional delegation endorsed the Thermopolis location, but others in the state began to promote their own communities, especially Casper, as an appropriate home for the new hospital. When President Hoover finally in October 1931 announced the Veterans' Board's designation of Cheyenne—because of its location at a transportation hub, its nearness to veterans located not just in Wyoming but also in Colorado and Nebraska, and the readily available water supply—as the location for the new hospital, residents of Thermopolis were angry and unforgiving.⁶⁹ Hoover, not for the first and not for the last time, encountered a fundamental lesson of politics in the dispensation of rewards: for every person or community made happy by the receipt of governmental largesse, someone else passed over will be equally unhappy and will often have a longer memory than those who received the benefit. In the case of Cheyenne, because the hospital, begun in September 1932, was open and accepting patients only in 1934, many people identify it with the Roosevelt administration, which saw it to completion, instead of with the Hoover administration, which had initiated it.

Another federal presence in Wyoming, the national parks, also took on new life during the Hoover administration. National Park Service historians William E. Tweed, Laura E. Soullière, and Henry G. Law have observed that 1927 marked "the beginning of a period of unparalleled park development," and that the federal government's commitment to the parks and their budgets increased during the following years. The Park Service began to devote a regular, appropriated part of its budget to development of roads, trails, and buildings under Stephen T. Mather and then Horace Albright, who followed Mather as director in 1929. The same historians note that under Hoover, "the new administration was sympathetic to the

Service, and the budgets of the 1931 and 1932 fiscal years were nearly four times as large as that of 1925. Individual park budgets for 1931 and 1932 in most cases represented the highest levels of regular funding reached prior to World War II.⁷⁰

This increase in development appears to have taken place in Wyoming, although somewhat unevenly in the various park units. The administrative history of Yellowstone National Park suggests that funds were dear in that park during the Hoover administration: “Park funds, already severely reduced by forest fires in 1931, were hit hard by a considerable cut in appropriations. The effects on park improvement and protection were significant. Personnel pay cuts of 8¹/₃ percent in 1932 were increased to 15 percent in 1933.”⁷¹ At the same time, however, that study also lists a wide range of new buildings constructed in the park in 1930 and 1931, suggesting possibly that the decline in construction was especially limited to 1932 and 1933. Included in the 1930 and 1931 buildings were comfort stations at Apollinaris Spring and West Thumb and road-camp bunkhouses and mess houses, hatchery spring houses and residences, the fire lookout at Mt. Holmes, various buildings at Tower Junction, a patrol cabin at Upper Miller Creek, a residence at Mammoth, a ranger station at West Entrance, and amphitheaters at both Fishing Bridge and Old Faithful—an impressive record of construction.⁷²

The road-camp bunkhouses and mess houses hint at even more development in Yellowstone. During the 1920s the NPS had committed to a road-building program in the national parks to accommodate the increasing number of travelers to the parks who came by automobile instead of train. But the NPS also determined that the roads would need to be constructed with sensitivity to the qualities of the individual parks, and the roads would need to disturb the land only in deliberately minimalistic ways. So additional funding was appropriated to develop the roads beginning in 1924, and in 1926 the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) and the National Park Service signed an agreement by which the BPR would develop roads in the parks, with design considerations and budget provided by the NPS. Road construction projects in Yellowstone during the Hoover administration included, as itemized by the official history of road system in the park, plans for “Tower Falls Bridge, Seven Mile Bridge, Gardner River Bridge, six bridges on the Red Lodge to Cooke



Beartooth Highway between Cooke City and Red Lodge, near summit. Sanborn postcard from the collection of Michael Cassity.

70. William C. Tweed, Laura E. Soulli re, and Henry G. Law, “Rustic Architecture: 1916–1942” (San Francisco: National Park Service Western Regional Office, 1977), available at http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/rusticarch/part4.htm.

71. Kiki Leigh Rydell and Mary Shivers Culpin, *Managing the “Matchless Wonders”: A History of Administrative Development in Yellowstone National Park, 1972–1965* (Yellowstone National Park: Yellowstone Center for Resources, 2006), 111.

72. *Ibid.*, 165–66. The construction of four new museums in 1929, while generally a part of the surge of construction activities, technically remained distinct from this relief activity because the museums at Old Faithful, Madison Junction, Fishing Bridge, and Norris were built with private funds provided by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, not public funds appropriated by Congress. Rydell and Culpin, *Managing the “Matchless Wonders.”* 101.

City Road, the Pilgrim Creek Bridge and the North Entrance checking station.”⁷³

As for the Red Lodge to Cooke City Road, also known as the Beartooth Highway, this project itself represented significant expansion of the road system and roads mission not just of Yellowstone but of the entire National Park Service. When Congress passed and President Hoover signed the Leavitt Approach Road Act of January 1931, sometimes called the National Parks Approaches Act, it altered the political, economic, and cultural landscape as well as the physical landscape. It authorized and funded construction of “approach roads” to national parks provided they met certain criteria—they could reach no longer than sixty miles, they had

73. Laura E. Soullière, *Historic Roads in the National Park System: Special History Study*, October 1995, http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/roads/shs3a.htm; Mary Shivers Culpin, *The History of the Construction of the Road System in Yellowstone National Park, 1872–1966: Historic Resource Study Volume I* (Selections from the Division of Cultural Resources, Rocky Mountain Region, National Park Service, no. 5, 1994), 142.

74. Red Lodge–Cooke City Approach Road Historic District, National Register Nomination (2005), section 8, pages 29–30.

75. *Ibid.*, page 29.

76. Culpin, *The History of the Construction of the Road System in Yellowstone National Park, 1872–1966*, 143. As for the park south of Yellowstone, Grand Teton National Park had been established less than a month before Hoover took office. It was a smaller, much more limited version of the future park before it took its modern shape in 1950. During the Hoover administration the National Park Service cooperated with John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to encourage the secret purchasing of land in Jackson Hole with the intention of turning it over to the NPS to expand Grand Teton National Park. Horace Albright was an important figure in this regard, and his position as director of the NPS during the Hoover years was crucial. As it happened, Rockefeller turned to exactly the same person as Hoover sometimes turned, Colonel Arthur Woods, to direct the Jackson Hole land acquisition effort. In important ways, the acquisition of land by a wealthy private donor for the public interest was in the same

to be through areas at least 90 percent owned by the federal government, and no more than forty miles could be in any one county.⁷⁴ There were those in Congress who opposed the measure because, unlike the highway legislation of the previous decade, this effectively singled out individual states for federal road funding since it was clear to the participants in the debate that the prime beneficiary would be this road to Yellowstone, although theoretically other parks could qualify. It also acknowledged that the national parks were not separate islands where policies and programs—and visitors—came to a halt at park boundaries; indeed, Red Lodge business people were the primary movers behind the project and they found a ready ally with the new director of the National Park Service, Horace Albright, who had previously been Superintendent of Yellowstone. Moreover, this legislation represented a significant increase in road funding throughout the national park system.

In the final measure to be enacted, funding for the approach roads was set at three million dollars (one and a half million each during the next two fiscal years), but it also included another twelve million dollars for constructing roads within national parks.⁷⁵ Although the act did include two substantially smaller roads connecting to Yosemite and Grand Canyon in addition to the Yellowstone project, this road, as its opponents claimed, was the primary beneficiary. Even so, it is important to note one other road connecting to Yellowstone that was made possible by this legislation: the road from the south boundary of Yellowstone to Moran, Wyoming. Inside the national parks and outside them, the roads were being built and extended and expanded. The Yellowstone road history notes the tremendous work achieved just in 1931. Even though fire duty pulled many road workers away from their primary task that summer (the fiscal years at the time began on July 1),

the Bureau accomplished more in Yellowstone that year than ever before. The Lewis River to West Thumb, the West Thumb to Arnica Creek, the Bridge Bay to Mud Volcano, which included the Fishing Bridge and Lake Junction layouts, and the Mount Washburn loop roads were completed. Different stages of construction projects were carried out on the East Entrance Road, Canyon to Tower Road, Obsidian to Firehole Road, Tower Falls to Blacktail Deer Creek, Mammoth to Obsidian and the Moran to the South Boundary Road.⁷⁶

At the nation's first national monument, Devils Tower, the full-time staff in the early years of the Depression consisted of a single employee—the custodian, who also enlisted the assistance of his entire family in managing the operations at the monument, and this full-time position was created only in 1931.⁷⁷ While this was not exactly a propitious circumstance for fighting the problem of unemployment in the nation, Newell F. Joyner, the custodian beginning in 1932, did in fact seek to do exactly that while improving the monument's resources. As historian D. John Daugherty observes, "Joyner demonstrated genuine concern for the hardships experienced by residents in the area because of the Depression" and notes that Joyner recorded in his first monthly report in 1932 that "there continues to be need among residents by payrolls of the past [that] have helped many who would have otherwise been charges of charity at this time."⁷⁸ One of those previous payrolls had been the 1929–1930 NPS employment of crews to divert the Belle Fourche River with the excavation of a canal and the construction of thirty-nine concrete tetrahedrons, each nine feet high, and placed sixteen feet apart (center to center) to prevent the river from cutting into the old channel.⁷⁹ Subsequently, in 1932, Joyner managed to hire a ten-man crew for two months to perform bridge repairs and riverbank stabilization by piling logs against the thirty-nine tetrahedrons to prevent the river from washing under them.⁸⁰ This was a far cry from the large programs elsewhere but, along with other building projects, this work made a dent in local unemployment. Daugherty concludes, "The Devils Tower payroll made a significant contribution to employment in the county from June [January?] to April 1932, with the National Park Service employing 49 men and paying wages totaling \$3,919."⁸¹

Two other efforts of the Hoover administration need to be noted since they both illustrate the way Hoover hoped to fight the Depression and also provided foundations for future work. Both came in 1932 as the Depression deepened and as the crisis became increasingly politicized because of the elections that year. One measure was the creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). The RFC was established to provide loans to core financial companies in the nation, big banks, big railroad companies, and big insurance companies mainly—the kinds of institutions that would be termed in 2008 and 2009 as "too big to fail." And the RFC was widely criticized as a rich man's dole, as a clear sign not just of political hypocrisy in making money available to the powerful corpora-

tions and not to the poor, but of raw class favoritism in its preferences for the rich. The fact was, however, that Hoover was fundamentally trying to do what the Federal Reserve system should have been doing—making funds available to banks so that the run on banks and other financial institutions, a run created by tight money policies, a run that was gaining in strength, could be averted.⁸²

The second measure of the 1932 election year presented by Hoover was the Emergency Relief and Construction Act (ERCA). Passed in the summer of that year, this measure quite simply sought to provide federal money to both help people who were out of work and to create jobs to put them to work. It did this first by giving the RFC power to loan states \$300 million for direct relief (welfare-type payments) and work relief. It separately authorized the lending of a billion-and-a-half dollars to states for public works projects—dams, highways, and similar construction—and also appropriated \$322 million for federal public works projects such as hospitals, military installations, and other public buildings.⁸³ Not all of the

spirit of civic duty that Hoover had encouraged in all areas of life. See Robert Righter, *Crucible for Conservation: The Struggle for Grand Teton National Park* (n.p.: Colorado Associated University Press, 1982), 48–49.

77. D. John Daugherty, *Devils Tower National Monument: A History of National Park Service Developments through 1966* (Denver: National Park Service, 1984), 11–12.

78. *Ibid.*, 21.

79. *Ibid.*, 11.

80. *Ibid.*, 20–21.

81. *Ibid.*, 22.

82. It should also be noted that the RFC has been criticized for acquiring valuable assets of the banks to which it lent money (as opposed to acquiring the assets that had proved to be overvalued), thus giving some degree of public control over those institutions, and, in the view of Friedman and Schwartz, leaving little to meet the demands on the banks. Friedman and Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States*, 330–31n.



Herbert Hoover campaign sign.
From the collection of Michael Cassity.

funds appropriated were actually spent, a fact which minimized its impact and also further weakened the image of Hoover as leader in the fight against the Depression. On the other hand, the state of Wyoming received and used \$78,834 from the Hoover administration specifically for the purpose of helping people in distress.⁸⁴ In addition, in a broader context, the RFC and the ERCA provided not just models for programs for the next administration, but even the institutions for the implementation of similar programs.

The approach of the Hoover administration to the problems of the Depression in Wyoming certainly had its limits. And Hoover himself encountered some of those limits as he called on the nation's business leaders to help out the communities—and the nation—that needed help, the same communities and nation that had blessed them with prosperity earlier; in Hoover's view, they needed to fulfill their public responsibility to their neighbors as a matter of civic and moral duty. But they needed to do so on their own, voluntarily. That proved to be a serious obstacle since those who had prospered the most, the corporate titans and economic leaders, declined to heed the president, and even called on the government to use coercive measures to help them—but not others. And this proved to be a further obstacle because Hoover himself refused to take certain steps—most notably providing a system of public relief—because he feared that such steps would relieve the rich of their responsibilities to the poor.

Hoover's approach also was limited in another way. While the federal government actually did embark on ambitious and expansive programs to put people to work, the administration did little to publicize the effort as targeting the economic ills of the nation, and the expansion took place within existing agencies and programs with the result that much of that work remained to some degree invisible—invisible then and since. But the legacies of Hoover's relief programs can still be seen all across Wyoming, from the Beartooth Highway and some of the buildings in Yellowstone National Park to the veterans' hospital in Cheyenne, and they included post offices, roads, federal buildings, and other buildings and structures still in use. Although Franklin Roosevelt relentlessly attacked Herbert Hoover for not doing anything to combat the Depression, that was politics. In fact, as Rexford Tugwell, a key Roosevelt advisor, acknowledged four decades later, "We didn't admit it at the time, but practically the whole New Deal was extrapolated from programs that Hoover started."⁸⁵

83. Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism*, 28.

84. Hassler, "Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934," 22. This federal funding for relief actually contradicts some observations that Wyoming rejected federal funds until well after the start of the New Deal. T. A. Larson points out the issue in his "The New Deal in Wyoming," 254n17.

85. Wilson, *Herbert Hoover*, 158.

The New Deal Comes to Wyoming

1933–1934

Values have shrunken to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone.

More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return. Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment.

Franklin Roosevelt, inaugural address, March 4, 1933

Rexford Tugwell's comment about the essential continuity between the Hoover and the Roosevelt administrations carries much truth, but it also obscures some of the fundamental policy and program differences between the two presidents. It also, moreover, oversimplifies the Roosevelt administration itself, implying that the policies of the New Deal were generally consistent, possibly even a cohesive body of legislation and administrative measures, moving toward a single, definable goal. The reality of the New Deal, when considered in its general historical pattern in the half decade after 1933, was that the cohesion was never there, and historians for decades have referred to the First New Deal of 1933 and 1934 and the Second New Deal of 1935–1938 as vastly separate—even conflicting—sets of legislation, goals, and programs. For that matter, within the First New Deal itself the initiatives, assumptions, and objectives were sometimes not exactly consistent and at times even seemed to work at cross-purposes with each other.

Banks, Industry, and Agriculture

It is important to remember that between the election on November 8, 1932, and the inauguration of the new president on March 4, 1933, four whole months passed during which the economy continued to decline, factories continued to close, unemployment increased, runs on banks spread like a virus from one to the next, and the nation awaited an answer to all kinds of questions, as one administration had been explicitly rejected and another waited to take office. The four-month wait was itself a reflection of the early days of the republic when travel took longer; the adoption of the Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution on January 23, 1933, shortened that lame duck gap so that the new president would take office on January 20 following the election. This change did not apply until the 1937 inauguration, however. Meanwhile, during these four long months, the crisis deepened.

When Wyoming and the nation elected Franklin Roosevelt president, the path that he would take was anything but clear.

Campaign poster from the collection of R. O. Joe Cassity.



One particular element of the crisis rose above all others and spread to other parts of the economy. The national banking crisis continued generally unabated. The banking crisis had been an ongoing problem since 1921, and especially since 1924. After the stock market crash, President Hoover, in one of his conferences to stimulate the economy and avert a Depression, called upon the nation's central bankers to make more loans, to follow an easier money policy, so that (1) individuals and businesses would increase their purchases and investments, and (2) the pressure on the weaker banks would be alleviated. And, indeed, there were some gestures in this direction. But the problems were systemic in nature, and individual banks did not operate in a vacuum. When any one bank could not meet the demands on it of its depositors (because the money had been invested in securities that had declined in value), the fear that other banks would also be unable to pay their depositors led to an increase in the run on the banks, a self-perpetuating cycle of fear that was threatening the entire system. President Hoover had hoped to halt that cycle by assuring the public that their deposits were safe and by urging the big banks to make money available to the small—to follow an easy money policy. But the nation's biggest banks, pleased to see the smaller ones go under, declined.

As for the Federal Reserve System, which regulated banking, it followed a policy that actually increased the difficulties under which the banks had to operate. As Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz write, “the policy followed should be regarded as one of monetary ‘tightness’ not ‘ease.’”¹ And banks continued to close, especially the small banks, the rural banks, the banks of Wyoming. At the beginning of 1933, the banking system reached a critical juncture with a new wave of closures threatening the entire system.² During January and February 1933, as Friedman and Schwartz document,

there was nothing that could be called a System policy. The System was demoralized. Each bank was operating on its own. All participated in the general atmosphere of panic that was spreading in the financial community and the community at large. The leadership which an independent central banking system was supposed to give the market and the ability to withstand the pressures of politics and of profit alike and to act counter to the market as a whole, these—the justification for establishing a quasi-governmental institution with broad powers—were conspicuous by their absence.³

1. Friedman and Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States*, 375.

2. Because the number of bank closures in the official data are not sorted by states by month, it is impossible to tell exactly how many banks in Wyoming failed during these several months.

Nationally the banking system was in serious trouble. As the strains on the banks increased, one state after another declared various forms of a “banking holiday,” closing the banks to prevent their collapse. With each state closing its banks, the pressure just increased on the states that did not have such a holiday. Wyoming did not declare a holiday, but on March 5, Acting Governor A. M. Clark issued a proclamation limiting withdrawals to 5 percent of the total account. The timing, as it happened, converged with national events. The day before Clark’s proclamation, Franklin Roosevelt became president at noon on Saturday, March 4. At one o’clock A.M. (eastern time), well before the banks opened on Monday, Roosevelt issued a proclamation suddenly closing all the banks in the nation, strong banks and weak banks, members of the Federal Reserve System and nonmembers, state banks and national banks, every single bank in the United States, calling the closure a banking holiday. During the next several days, according to the plan, the banks would be subjected to an audit, and the healthy banks would be allowed to reopen, thus restoring confidence in the system. On the following Thursday, Congress convened and passed (Roosevelt’s proclamation was set to expire this same day) an Emergency Banking Act that included an extension of the holiday and audit, allowing the ranking of banks according to the health of their holdings, and their subsequent reopening over time—in effect legitimizing what had already been done.

The banking holiday appears to have been observed all across the United States, but there was one exception, possibly more, and that exception was in Wyoming. The Farmers’ State Bank in Jay Em stayed open during the banking holiday, at least during the first day of the holiday, and one account says flatly, “the bank at Jay Em did not close and for many years claimed the distinction of being the only bank in the country that had operated continuously through the bank holiday and was still in business.”⁴ Whether this violation of the holiday was, as variously reported, due to communication lapses caused by weather, personal pique and symbolic gestures of independence, or other circumstance remains open to conjecture.⁵

Ultimately most of the banks reopened in Wyoming and across the nation over the next several weeks.⁶ Those that opened for business again were the ones that were certified as possessing enough assets to meet the demands to be made on them or that became solvent through reorganiza-



Farmers’ State Bank of Jay Em.
Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

3. Friedman and Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States*, 391.

4. Woods, *Sometimes the Books Froze*, 126–27.

5. Paul Andrew Hassler records that the Jay Em bank was notified of the holiday by mail since there was no telegraph service at Jay Em, thus the delay. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 43.

6. “Bank Reopenings to Begin on Monday,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, March 12, 1933; “Casper Banks Await Word,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, March 14, 1933.

tion. Nationally these tended to be the largest banks. Exactly how many banks in Wyoming were permanently closed, and what portion of the state's deposits they represented, is unclear and possibly unknowable. The closest reckoning is probably that of Paul Hassler, who suggests that all 25 national banks reopened and that 40 of the 45 state banks reopened, but those numbers (and dates) are themselves imprecise.⁷ Nationally, as Friedman and Schwartz make clear, more than 5,000 of the nation's 17,300 banks were not licensed to open and do business at the end of the banking holiday.⁸ It is difficult to imagine that only five of those banks were in Wyoming, given the strains already evident in Wyoming's banks.

With the end of the banking holiday and the reopening of banks, however, the fundamental crisis in the banking system was dampened. Wyoming, and the nation, would probably never have as many banks as it once had, and the banks that had closed down would not be reopening, and the smaller towns would be the places in Wyoming without banks. But then, too, a further run on the banks had been stopped by two measures that restored confidence in the system—thus averting the fear and panic that had brought down so many already. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation was created by the Banking Act of 1933—the Glass-Steagall Act—and this amounted to a system of insurance for deposits in banks. All national banks were required to participate in the FDIC and state banks that participated had to become members of the Federal Reserve System. This still left out some banks, the small ones, of course, and also provided a competitive advantage for those who participated, since they could attract customers by offering the insurance.

The same Glass-Steagall law also separated commercial banking operations from investment banks; this drew a line between two different kinds of banks, those that provided normal commercial banking services like checking and savings accounts and loans, and those that dealt in securities—investment banks that issued financial securities, underwrote them,

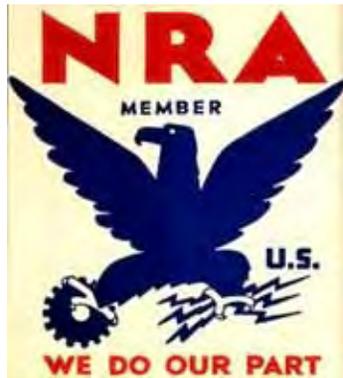
traded them, or otherwise invested in them. Commercial banks could not affiliate with investment banks. The law also, however, permitted national banks to engage in branch banking if state laws permitted. The idea was that bankers who speculated would no longer bring down innocent customers who never intended their money to be used in that way, and, if a bank did close, and if it had participated in the FDIC, its customers would be insured up to a specified amount. The measure still gave the advantage to bigger banks, but it also stabilized the banking system, and that support for both stability and centralization was a key, nearly defining element of the First New Deal.

Banking was a critical element of Wyoming business, and the fate of Wyoming's banks spread to the rest of the economy in the state. There doubtless was no business—or farm or home or community—that was not impacted by the turmoil in the banking system. But other businesses felt the ravages of the Depression on their own, apart from the banking crisis, and the Roosevelt administration turned to them with one of the largest and most ambitious programs that the federal government had ever embarked upon in peacetime. In fact, the fundamental effort of the New Deal to promote business recovery was modeled after the War Industries Board of World War I, when a vast system of controls in the economy had been established to regulate and mobilize the nation for the war effort under the leadership of Bernard Baruch, increasing both the productivity and profits of business. That approach had been revived and proposed during the Hoover administration. The Swope Plan, put forth by the president of General Electric and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, had called for federal intervention in the economy to stabilize prices and wages and thus assure profits. Hoover had rejected it, however, because he viewed it as a mechanism for businesses to use the power of government to fix prices and establish their control of the economy through monopolies.

When the same proposal was offered to Roosevelt, the new president accepted it. As ultimately enacted by Congress in June 1933, the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) created an administrative agency, the National Recovery Administration (NRA), that would implement and enforce agreements in different industries with the goal of raising prices, controlling production standards, and setting wages. An explicit suspension of the antitrust laws, the act enabled trade associations to set prices, ostensibly with concurrence of a representative of workers in the industry

7. Hassler, "Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934," 43.

8. Friedman and Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States*, 423–26.



The blue eagle indicating participation in NRA codes to regulate production and set prices and wages.

Courtesy the Library of Congress.

(though not a guarantee of collective bargaining), and with oversight of a government agency, in codes of what was called “fair competition.” Those codes were

the critical part, the very essence of what the NRA was all about. When approved by the president, the codes had the force of law; once signed, cooperation was mandatory, not voluntary—the compulsion that the business groups had sought. And there was substantial pressure to sign.⁹

As the process turned out, the trade associations dominated the code-writing process and the largest businesses in each industry dominated the trade associations. That was generally the reason that former President Hoover referred to the NRA as a fascist measure, one in which business used the power of government to control the economy and the public,¹⁰ and small businesses in particular joined in the protest against the codes and the new system. Nonetheless, in Wyoming there were signs of some enthusiasm for participation in the code-making process, though in some places more than others and with conspicuous exceptions. Part of the surge toward NRA participation derived from the agency’s appeal to patriotism, in which businesses were asked “to do their part” to help the whole economy. A spirit of sacrifice helped many overcome their hesitation, and the blue eagle symbol of the NRA appeared all over the state in store windows and publications that joined in the codes for their industries. The strongest reception for the NIRA in Wyoming came in the parts of the economy that were most organized and most concentrated—and that meant especially coal mining. In Rock Springs, for instance, the development of a code among the coal producers was sometimes seen as a device for stabilizing an industry in decline by bolstering prices—and also wages. One important, though often

symbolic, provision of the law creating the NRA was Section 7(a), which very loosely and ambiguously seemed to affirm the rights of workers to organize for collective bargaining. In the coal mines, already heavily unionized, this provision strengthened the United Mine Workers by encouraging miners to join. Nonetheless, as one Rock Springs history records, “gains in hours of work each week came much slower. In a 1934 contract the miners got a seven-hour day and the thirty-five-hour week with no cut in base pay, but most mines were only working two or three days a week.”¹¹

That union support for the coal mining codes then spread to other NRA codes. As Robert Rhode writes of Rock Springs, “in a highly unionized community the pressure was on for all parts of the community to display the Blue Eagle, an emblem signifying participation in the NRA recovery plan.” There the editor of the local newspaper launched a drive “to get signatures on a pledge to buy only at stores displaying the Blue Eagle.”¹² And the codes were widely adopted and agreed to not only in Rock Springs but throughout the state. Paul Hassler reports that by early September, just a few months after the enactment of the NIRA, 3,500 codes had been

9. Historian Bernard Bellush has summarized the NIRA thus: “In essence, Title I of the NIRA turned much of the nation’s power over to highly organized, well-financed trade associations and industrial combines. This was achieved through the regulation of prices and wages, the extension of monopolistic practices, and the elimination of the closed shop and of the rule of the majority in collective bargaining. The unorganized public, otherwise known as the consumer, along with the members of the fledgling trade-union movement, had virtually nothing to say about the initial organization of the National Recovery Administration, or the formulation of basic policy.” Bellush, *The Failure of the NRA* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975), 176.

10. See the chapter in Hoover’s memoirs, “Fascism Comes to Business—with Dire Consequences,” Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, vol. 3, 420.

11. Rhode, *Booms and Busts on Bitter Creek*, 155.

12. *Ibid.*, 156.

agreed upon in Wyoming businesses that employed 12,300 workers. With an average of 3.5 workers in those establishments, it is clear that the vast majority of these were small shops and retail businesses of various sorts. And they were in small towns and villages around the state. In October, when the president issued an exemption of towns with fewer than 2,500 residents from NRA code obligations, a nebulous territory that included two-thirds of Wyoming's population, confusion over who was covered and who was not was rampant.¹³

Clearly some Wyoming businesses found the NRA's codes to their liking. T. A. Larson records that "automobile dealers were delighted with code prices for used cars, and for a time there was hope that the coal industry would benefit."¹⁴ But the NRA followed a rocky path in Wyoming for its short life (it would be declared unconstitutional in 1935) and probably did little to put Wyomingites to work. In fact, at exactly the same time that the codes were fighting competition as if it were the root of the problem of the Depression, Wyoming's public leaders were trying to restore competition. While Wyoming's leaders attempted to reduce prices to levels that the public could afford to pay, the federal government was enforcing higher prices.

The fundamental problem with the NRA in Wyoming rested in the theory underlying its approach to the problem of the Depression. That theory maintained that low prices, caused by cutthroat competition, caused a loss of business profits and the subsequent economic downturn. Yet Wyoming had experienced exactly the opposite trend, one toward business consoli-

dation, in the years leading up to the Depression. Price competition had been the main vehicle by which small, mom-and-pop businesses could compete with the national businesses and chains; and consolidation meant the decline of competition. Instead of prices being too low, many people in Wyoming believed that they were too high, especially as the Depression deepened and purchasing power shriveled even more. Thus in 1932 Leslie Miller campaigned for governor on the promise of lowering gasoline prices in the state. This was his central objective, and campaign posters around the state reminded voters, "A vote for Miller is a vote for lower gasoline prices in Wyoming." After his inauguration in 1933, Miller set out to fulfill that promise and began a series of conferences designed to force the oil companies to lower their prices on gasoline. The new NRA, however, approved gasoline prices that Governor Miller considered excessive and unfair. Although Miller then went to court against one of the oil companies, charging Continental Oil Company with discriminating against the state, it was a losing battle.¹⁵

This conflict between responding to the needs of businesses for higher prices and the needs of the public for increased purchasing power, and between centralization and decentralization, went to the heart of much of the controversy surrounding the New Deal in Wyoming. And that tension can also be seen in the New Deal's agriculture program in the state. Wyoming agriculture had evolved over the previous seven decades from its solid roots in a tradition of independent homesteaders providing for themselves on the land by growing a diverse range of crops and livestock in a generally self-sufficient, or comparatively self-sufficient, way characterized by small holdings, neighborhood cooperation, and family-based systems of production for consumption.¹⁶ As that system was increasingly undermined by growing opportunities and pressures related to market agriculture, mechanization, specialization, and other forms of modernization, including even the adoption of a business orientation for the operations, Wyoming's farmers and ranchers found themselves, to varying degrees, more and more deeply enmeshed in a cycle of transformation. Responding to the latest wave of scientific agriculture demonstrations and adopting the methods of increased production made available through new technologies and practices also meant acquiring debt for the new equipment and larger holdings. To pay off the debt, however, also meant increased dependence on producing for

13. Hassler, "Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934," 27.

14. T. A. Larson, "The New Deal in Wyoming," 260.

15. T. A. Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 435

16. See Michael Cassity, *Wyoming Will Be Your New Home*. The following discussion is largely drawn from this study, and the reader is directed to it for an examination of Wyoming agriculture and agricultural policy that goes beyond the present inquiry.

the market instead of producing for domestic consumption. In a curious anomaly, often those farmers and ranchers who were seemingly the most prosperous were also the most debt-laden while their subsistence counterparts with small holdings and labor intensive operations had the greatest freedom from the fear of a knock at the door by the sheriff carrying a foreclosure order from the bank.

Circumstances seemed to conspire to increase the pressure under which all farms and ranches in Wyoming had to operate in the early 1930s. On top of troubled agricultural markets was a widespread, ongoing drought. Already in rough shape, the range was seriously depleted by the drought of 1933 and 1934 (and which, with a partial respite in 1935, would resume in 1936). Wave after wave of foreclosures and other distress sales, record low crop and livestock prices, continuing mortgages that had to be paid, and taxes that came due each year meant that in the 1930s it was all the harder to make a living on the land in Wyoming.

The core idea in the New Deal response to the crisis in agriculture—as with other problems in the economy—was that overproduction had led to reduced prices and profits. For the industrialist (or, for that matter, for the coal miner) the solution was to increase income by raising prices (or wages) by creating an artificial scarcity—by limiting production or limiting work. At one time the economy had operated on the homily that hard work and long hours would be rewarded by economic prosperity; the new dispensation turned that on its head so that the key to prosperity was not to produce more, but to produce less, and to make sure that everyone else did the same.

According to the New Dealers—agricultural experts like Henry Wallace, Rexford Tugwell, and Mordecai Ezekiel—agriculture in the nation suffered especially from its decentralized, unorganized, individualistic character; farmers and ranchers, they said, hurt themselves by overproduction, by producing so much that the markets were glutted. What they needed, from that perspective, was more integrated operations, carefully organized and coordinated, just like industry, where output could be controlled. Historian Richard S. Kirkendall, who has studied New Deal agricultural policy more closely than anyone, writes that Tugwell, for instance, “believed that government should promote the consolidation and rationalization of agriculture, reorganizing it along the lines that industry had followed. The area of land in production should be limited so that the system

would include only the most efficient farmers operating the best land, and the cities and factories should absorb a very large number of people from the farms.”¹⁷

Thus was born the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), created by the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, one of the main pieces of legislation in Roosevelt’s “Hundred Days” special session of Congress. As with the NRA, which imposed production quotas on everything from automobiles to carloads of coal, the AAA would likewise impose production quotas to create an artificial scarcity of agricultural commodities in an effort to push the price higher on those goods.

The Agricultural Adjustment Act encouraged farmers to take some of their land out of production, it relaxed the antitrust laws and encouraged agreements between producers and processors to set market prices, and it subsidized agricultural exports. The key objective, however, that of reducing production in the name of higher prices, would be achieved by providing incentives or rewards for farmers who took land out of production and who thinned their herds of livestock. This led to the creation of farm subsidies, or, as they were known at the time, “benefit payments.” In addition to the benefit payments for reducing production of crops, the government’s Drought Relief Program, mainly administered by the AAA, literally thinned the herds of livestock in an effort to push the market price up on the remaining cattle and sheep. Generally the Wyoming cattle and sheep purchased by the government fell into three categories: some would be shipped away to be used in relief programs, that is, as meat distributed to people who would not be able to buy food on their own; some evidently were taken to the Shoshone Agency/Wind River Indian Reservation and other reservations for slaughter; and some were slaughtered in the field and left to rot, their carcasses protected not from scavenging animals but from hungry people.

This last, while applied to only a minority of the livestock culled from the herds, nonetheless provided the most enduring images with which the Depression, and the New Deal’s approach to the Depression, are for-

17. Richard S. Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966), 44.

ever associated. Mabel Brown, revered as a recorder and interpreter of Wyoming history, recalled, “killing the cattle, . . . and just leaving them lay. . . . When we’d drive in from the Osage field to Osage there would be cattle just lying along the road. Bloating in the sun, their legs stiff and up in the air. They’d pay the ranchers \$20-\$25 and then shoot the cattle and leave them lay there. They wouldn’t let anybody go in and butcher them to use for meat because that would be defeating the purpose of the slaughter of the cattle in the first place. It was to try to make the price go up and reduce the supply.”¹⁸ The price paid to ranchers in Weston County may have been as high as Mabel Brown recalled, but it was usually much lower. The agent in Campbell County, Floyd Dominy, seldom paid more than \$8 a head, and the Wyoming Stock Growers Association figured that the average price was \$12.52 per head of cattle.¹⁹

The results of the AAA program were substantial—at least in terms of the reductions that were achieved. By 1935 the number of beef cattle in Wyoming had dropped to the number in 1928 and dairy cattle also were reduced after a number of years of increase. The wool clip and the numbers of lambs both declined as well. Wheat production was also low (as wheat reduction contracts were reinforced by drought pressures). These declines, however, did not necessarily translate to higher commodity prices since the farmers and ranchers were operating in a national, even global, market and not everybody reduced production. (Moreover, the future would show that as crops were taken out of production, usually it was the least performing acreages that were sacrificed and the remaining acres were cropped more intensively.)

It is clear that the herd thinning and crop reduction and attendant benefit payments failed to help the people who needed help the most. The benefit payments actually were calculated on the basis of past and potential production—the number of acres taken out, the number of head of livestock removed. The more acres that a farmer could take out of production,

18. Mabel Brown interviewed by Phil Roberts, May 9, 1979, Wyoming State Archives, OH-412.

19. Agnes Wright Spring, *Seventy Years: A Panoramic History of the Wyoming Stock Growers Association* (n.p.: Wyoming Stock Growers Association, 1942), 144.

the higher the subsidy; the more cattle or sheep to be sold to the government, the higher the payment received. If the farmer or rancher had only a small operation with a hundred, or a few hundred, acres, or with a single flock of sheep or small herd of cattle, then that operator, who operated on a shoestring anyway, would receive only a small payment. In the eyes of many, the agriculture program during the Depression seemed to operate on the formula of the greater the need, the lower the payment, and the less the benefit. On the other hand, if the farmer or rancher were one of the new generation of vast operations with holdings into the thousands of acres and very large herds, the payments would be correspondingly large. Moreover, because the large operation had greater resources to fall back on, and because the reduction in production would result in substantial savings in labor and other costs (taking land out of production also meant laying off farm workers or evicting farm tenants), the gain was multiplied. The result of this set of priorities and formulas was to actually increase the consolidation of farms, to reward and encourage the largest farms and ranches, and to increase the pressure on the smallest operators already struggling with the effects of the Depression and drought.

Despite, or even because of, the programs to help farmers and ranchers, those who needed help the most found themselves still in need of help, often forced to move to town to find a job. Would the jobs be there? Or would the newly homeless and landless just join the ranks of the unemployed seeking either relief or work relief?

The Tree Army Takes Root

The work projects of the New Deal in Wyoming, and in the nation, emerged from a cluster of programs designed to address the problems of the Depression and they are best understood in the context of the larger effort of the New Deal to combat the economic downturn. They were part and parcel of a larger package of legislation, policies, and programs and, at first, were but a small part of that package. In the Hundred Days of Congress after Roosevelt’s inauguration, defining elements of the New Deal—major pieces of legislation—sailed through Congress. They addressed business recovery (NIRA), banking (Banking Act/Glass-Steagall Act of 1933), government deficits (trying to achieve a balanced budget by cutting

government salaries and expenditures with the Economy Act of 1933), regulating the stock exchanges (creating the Securities and Exchange Commission), rehabilitating the South (with the Tennessee Valley Authority), and more. The core element of consistency in this disparate group was an emphasis on planning, and on centralized planning at that.

Beyond centralized planning, however, the goals of the New Deal often held a precious ambiguity. The nub of the issue was especially evident in the work projects that the government sponsored, for the federal government wanted two different things—to put people to work and also to accomplish something enduring for the nation—and those were not always compatible or, at least, were not always a natural fit. President Roosevelt even revealed some of the tension, or at least ambiguity, as early as his 1933 inaugural address when he said, “Our greatest primary task is to put people to work,” and then homing in on what that work would be about: “but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources.”²⁰ That formulation raised questions: Which was to be “the greatest primary task”? Which would take priority when there were conflicts, as surely there would be? The link between the New Deal, as a whole, and the work projects was clear and is essential in understanding the historical significance of the projects. But there is more. While some accounts simply narrow these projects to their activity in putting people to work, the actual context of the implementation of the programs grants them a more specific, though subtle, meaning and significance. This can be seen with one of the first such programs the president initiated.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was a pet project that Roosevelt brought with him to the White House, a project he hoped would serve the cause of conservation, and conservation in his mind meant development. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his history of the New Deal, argues that creating a national policy for resource development was a major objective for Roosevelt’s administration, “even if it had to take second place to the war against depression. And surely depression itself offered opportunities to promote the cause of resource development.”²¹ In New York, Governor Roosevelt had created exactly such a program, putting ten thousand unemployed people to work at reforestation. Later, on the last day of March 1933, President Roosevelt signed into law legislation creating the Emergency Conservation Work (ECW) program to



CCC Camp F-17-W, Chimney Park. Under the leadership of army officers and drawing upon local individuals with specific skills, the camps themselves maintained a crisp military appearance. The camps would carry the designation of a military company (832 in this case) and a government agency—the F for Forest Service.

Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, Stimson Collection, Stim/5044.

20. Franklin Roosevelt’s inaugural address, March 4, 1933, is widely reprinted. A convenient copy is located at: <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres49.html>.

21. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, vol. 2: *The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), 336.

put even more unemployed people to work in the cause of conservation and resource development across the nation. Emergency Conservation Work was the official name of the project, and its initials ECW are seen everywhere in the documents, but the “tree army” that this legislation created was widely known as the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The operation of the ECW/CCC required the cooperation of several federal departments and agencies. While this “corps” was a distinct and separate group of workers, paid for by separate funding, the actual work was integrated into and supplemented existing programs. The Department

of Labor selected the people to be employed by the CCC; the Army (in the War Department) drew upon its cadre of Army Reserve officers to administer the camps; and the U.S. Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture and the National Park Service in the Department of the Interior put them to work on specific projects. Even the Veterans Administration got involved because of the mandate for the ECW to employ veterans of World War I who needed help. Later, other agencies were called upon to utilize their services as the program grew.

Immediately after its creation, the CCC sent out the call for unemployed workers, but the numbers that applied exceeded the ability to handle them. The fundamental stipulation was that enrollment in CCC was limited to unmarried unemployed men between 18 and 25 years old from families on relief. They would be paid 30 dollars a month, of which 25 would be sent directly to their families; they could keep (and spend for themselves) the remaining 5 dollars. And, of course, they were supplied meals and lodging, a considerable benefit in the Depression. African Americans were permitted to enroll but were strictly segregated in separate units and camps. Soon eligibility was extended to American Indians and to service veterans.²²

The response to the establishment of the ECW/CCC was enthusiastic. Communities across Wyoming, and the nation, clamored for camps and enrollees to be located near them. In fact, as early as April 1933, even before the legislation had been passed to create the ECW program, the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce wrote the regional forester for the Forest Service in Washington, D.C., asking that Congress consider the needs of the Cheyenne area as it worked out the “reforestation legislation” and that “the use of the services of the unemployed” be directed toward that part of the state. The Chamber listed eight projects that could be undertaken on Pole Mountain and on the military reservation. W. O. Wilson, president of the Cheyenne Chamber, coordinated with the entire Wyoming congressional delegation and the Forest Service for the “adoption of plans which would result in the greatest benefit to the Pole Mountain area and likewise to our military forces at Fort Francis E. Warren and the citizens of Cheyenne.”²³ It would not be a problem finding places to locate the camps.

By June 1933, 1,300 CCC camps had been created in the United States and by July somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 enrollees were at work on CCC projects. In Wyoming, 24 camps were up and running

22. John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1967), 33–37.

23. W. O. Wilson, president, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, to Col. Allen S. Peck, Regional Forester, Washington, April 8, 1933. Box 7, Record Group 95, Records of the Forest Service, Regional Forester, National Archives and Records Administration, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver.

24. An important word of caution about counting CCC camps: Various tallies exist, most of them based on reasonable evidence, but the final counts are conflicting, problematic, and uncertain. For example, the number of camps reported here (24 in Wyoming the first year) comes from an official Emergency Conservation Work map showing numbers of CCC camps by state. That map is reproduced in Alison T. Otis, William D. Honey, Thomas C. Hogg, and Kimberly K. Lakin, *The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933–42* (Corvallis, Ore.: USDA Forest Service, 1986), http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/ccc/ccc/index.htm. See the map of the United States indicating numbers of camps in each state, chap. 2, fig. 5. At the same time, however, James Hanson reports in his dissertation on the CCC in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, “Wyoming had no camps during the winter of 1933–4, so all camps in the state were new. There were nineteen, eight more than in the summer of 1933.” James Hanson, “The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wyoming, 1973), 71. Despite the apparent certainty offered by precise numbers, there is always some latitude in counting CCC camps at any given moment.



CCC workers building a stone culvert at Saratoga Hot Springs State Park. Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, *Wyoming C.C.C. Camps*, 32B.

by August 1933.²⁴ These included 7 camps attached to the National Park Service—4 in Yellowstone and 3 in Grand Teton.²⁵ Fifteen camps were attached to the Forest Service in 1933, including 7 in Medicine Bow National Forest (at Pole Mountain, Chimney Park, Centennial, Arlington, Encampment, French Creek, and Ryan Park) and at least one in the Bighorn National Forest (Camp O'Connor near the subsequent Muddy Guard Station in the Buffalo Ranger District). The locations of the remaining 7 Forest Service CCC camps in the first season are not known since a complete inventory of the camps throughout Wyoming has yet to be prepared.²⁶ One camp may also have been located on the Wind River Reservation, or Shoshone Agency, before 1937. The remaining Wyoming camp was probably GLO-1, which was operated by the General Land Office but was located on private land near Gillette for fighting coal fires.²⁷

Each camp was ordinarily expected to house two hundred men, orga-

25. John C. Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, 1933–1942: An Administrative History* (n.p.: National Park Service, 1986), appendix C, table C-1. This book can be found online at http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/ccc/index.htm. It needs to be remembered that Grand Teton National Park in 1933 (just created in 1929) was much smaller than the park it came to be in 1950.

26. See, however, Dave McKee, “A Cultural Resource Inventory Report for the Bottle Creek Campground Reconstruction Project,” (no date) MB-04-92-011 in files of Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, Cultural Records Office; and Carl McWilliams, “Administrative Buildings and Structures on the Bighorn National Forest: A Historical Analysis” (Loveland, Colorado: FRASERdesign, 1992).

27. Again, see the map in chap. 2, fig. 5, in Otis, et al., *The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933–42*.

nized in military units as companies, although it appears that at least some units were below target strength in the initial season. In addition, these camps would sometimes be temporarily divided, with contingents of a size appropriate to the task assigned to “side camps” or “spike camps” at more remote locations where daily travel back and forth to the main camp was not feasible. These spike camps were obviously smaller in size, were temporary and shifting according to the job, and generally housed the enrollees only during the workweek, with the men returning to the main camp on the weekend.

Enrollees would enlist for an “enrollment period,” which consisted of six months, and the preference was for a maximum of two enrollment periods, although in later years a maximum of two years was permitted for an individual. In 1933, the first year of the ECW, it appears that all of the Wyoming camps operated for one enrollment period only, closing for the winter, and then reopening the following spring. By the fourth enrollment period, which is to say the winter of 1934–1935, one National Park Service CCC camp in Yellowstone continued to operate during the winter and perhaps a few Forest Service camps did also. One issue that continually dogged the CCC in Wyoming was whether the facilities should be temporary or permanent—and the climate was an obvious factor in that consideration. The preference of the national CCC administrator was for temporary lodging—tents—but by 1935 portable wooden structures became fairly standard and represented a compromise between permanent structures and flimsy canvas tents. Spike camps continued to use tents in most instances. Although the canvas tents sound primitive (and dreadfully cold at times, which they were), they were usually military tents with wooden floors and often included wood stoves.

There was still, whether tent camps or portable wooden structures, considerable camp construction to be done, and the standard policy was

to hire local labor for that construction—thus putting even more people to work and also maintaining positive relations with communities. Moreover, supplies would be purchased locally as much as possible. Even more local people would be hired to supervise the work on the ECW projects, again increasing the impact on unemployment and local economies. The Locally Experienced Men, or LEMs, made for a personal connection to local communities that transcended providing employment for some of the out-of-work in those areas. The main camps could be substantial, especially after the partial strength of the first enrollment period. One description of these camps seems typical, noting that the camp would usually have “11 buildings including 4 barracks, a mess hall, a recreation hall, an infirmary, officers’ quarters, truck garages, latrine, and shower buildings. The recreation hall, not included in tent camps, was 20 by 140 feet and contained writing and reading rooms, a library, and a lecture hall. Cooking and heating stoves, fire extinguishers, and lighting plants were purchased for the permanent camps.”²⁸

During the second year of the ECW, the number of camps in the nation mushroomed and obviously expanded in Wyoming as well, as indicated by scattered reports from and about camps that had not existed the previous year. The National Park Service (NPS) opened two more camps in Yellowstone and also began to provide assistance to state parks in Wyoming. State park CCC camps actually were an important element of the CCC’s mission in connection to the NPS, perhaps more so in the East than in the West, because the development of state parks was still inchoate and further development was made more difficult by the Depression. In Wyoming the work proved significant, and in 1934, the second year of the CCC, two camps appeared at Lake Guernsey (with at least the first of the two operating under a cooperative agreement between the NPS and the Bureau of Reclamation), and that autumn a year-round camp appeared at Saratoga Hot Springs State Park.²⁹

The Forest Service camps also increased during 1934, but where and by how many is not certain. A study of CCC camps in the Bighorn National Forest notes that the first CCC camp in that forest, Camp O’Connor, with its contingent of 164 enrollees and 34 local men hired as foremen, was supplemented by a camp the next year in Dayton. That camp, with approximately 200 men, operated in the winter and included “six wood barracks, a mess hall, cook house and commissary.” In the summer, the

28. Otis, et al., *The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933–42*.

29. Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service*, appendix C, table C-1.

Dayton enrollees went to a camp at Turkey Creek near Fallen City, where they worked on the construction of Sibley Lake Dam.³⁰ Together, these two camps constituted one official camp identity: Camp F-34-W. (F in a camp number indicates Forest Service, P indicates National Park Service, SP indicates state parks.) Yet another camp, Crazy Woman CCC Camp, was also opened in 1934 in the same forest. Tracking the individual camps can be either a satisfying detective effort or an exercise in frustration as locations, seasons, and jobs shifted from enrollment period to enrollment period, from year to year, and as records are often incomplete.

The kind of work undertaken in the name of Emergency Conservation Work is commonplace today, but at the time it sometimes represented a significant departure from established practice. Although natural resource management had already achieved a recognized role in both the Forest Service and the Park Service, now both agencies had increased manpower to move forward with a long list of projects. The Forest Service generally divided its work into forest improvement and forest protection. Protection included fighting forest fires and preventing damage due to disease and insects, although this was sometimes stretched to include building lookout towers, trails, roads, and bridges. Forest improvement was more generally focused on the productive aspects of the forests, including “timber stand improvement and inventories, surveys, and forest cover maps” as well as reforestation—planting trees. The forests also used the CCC for the development of recreation facilities for camping, picnicking, and casual use. Picnic shelters, restrooms, fireplaces, and water access were some of the more conspicuous of the efforts in this regard.³¹

The National Park Service ECW program followed similar paths, although the Park Service obviously did not include timber harvest-related goals in its objectives. But that agency nonetheless managed nature in similar ways, and the historian of the CCC in the Park Service lists the work as including “forest improvement projects, construction and maintenance of fire breaks, clearing of campgrounds and trails, construction of fire and recreation-related structures, road and trail building, forest fire suppression, survey work, plant eradication, erosion control, bridge building, flood control, tree disease control, insect control, campground construction, and landscaping.”³² This also extended to the work done in the state parks.

One important element in this conceptualization of the objectives of

Emergency Conservation Work in both the Park Service and the Forest Service was the growing division among resource management professionals concerning the issue of preservation *versus* development. In that tension, the CCC resource was generally applied on the side of development. This was clear not only in the Forest Service with its emphasis on commercial uses of forest resources, but in the national parks and monuments as well. Historian Richard W. Sellars writes of this use,

The “conservation” aspects of the Civilian Conservation Corps were indeed utilitarian, oriented toward what was in effect “wise use” of the national parks’ scenic resources through accommodating public use and enjoyment. Virtually all of the CCC’s park development and much of its direct manipulation of natural resources was in one way or another intended to address such utilitarian concerns. The CCC and other New Deal park programs thus represented a continuation of the Service’s traditional goals.³³

Even in its most “conservation” oriented work, the CCC activity was very much directed toward development, toward stimulating economic activity, toward fighting the Depression and building an infrastructure for future economic growth. This was not a wilderness preservation endeavor.

In Wyoming the specific projects are as difficult to track as the individual camps, and in the early years, at least, the work assignments and accomplishments are seldom separated by camp and year in the various accounts of the CCC program. There is sometimes a tendency

30. McWilliams, “Administrative Buildings and Structures on the Bighorn National Forest,” 11–12.

31. Otis, et al., *The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933–42*.

32. Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service*, chap. 1.

33. Richard W. Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 101.

for accounts to lump CCC activities together over time as if they were uniform and unchanging. Nonetheless, a pattern emerges from scattered references. At the Bighorn National Forest, the CCC workers, in the words of one study, “included such mundane tasks as building campground improvements (fire grates, picnic tables, privies and the like), grading parking overlooks, stringing telephone lines, building fences, planting trees, building roads and trails, digging ditches, and perhaps least appealing of all, cleaning up roadsides.” In addition to the “mundane” work—and in the early years almost all of it was labor intensive—the CCC workers at that forest also worked on the construction of Sibley Lake Dam, and participated in building “the Meadowlark Dam, the Shell-Tensleep Road and the Crazy Woman Canyon Road.” Plus, the building of roads and creation of dams were substantial projects that required significant engineering, planning, coordination, and work hours, and they also left an enduring mark.³⁴ And the lamented roadside cleanup work could even include thinning the forests for a certain distance along the roadways, a form of work that went significantly beyond

34. McWilliams, “Administrative Buildings and Structures on the Bighorn National Forest,” 12

35. John Daugherty provides a concise summary of CCC work at Grand Teton: “landscaping headquarters; improvement and development of a campground at Jenny Lake; construction of fireplaces; construction of barriers at Jenny Lake campground; construction of table and bench combinations at Jenny Lake; construction of permanent employees’ dwellings headquarters; extension of water system; Jackson Lake shore cleanup; trail construction at Phelps Lake–Granite Canyon and Teton Glacier–Garnet Canyon; telephone line construction at the headquarters at Death Canyon; maintenance and lakeshore cleanup; and general trail maintenance.” John Daugherty, *A Place Called Jackson Hole: The Historic Resource Study of Grand Teton National Park* (Moose, Wyo.: Grand Teton National Park, 1999), 321–22.

36. Daugherty, *A Place Called Jackson Hole*, 195, 318–19.

37. Mary Shivers Culpin, *The History of the Construction of the Road System in Yellowstone National Park, 1872–1966*, 146.

picking up trash that had accumulated. One common duty that also befell the CCC workers was the fighting of forest fires, whether in the national forests or national parks, and while this duty was unplanned, requiring response as the emergency required, it was also invariably time consuming, labor-intensive, and fraught with potential danger.

In Grand Teton National Park, five camps emerged to undertake a variety of projects that went beyond the usual trail building, forest planting, and campground improvement work.³⁵ In that park CCC workers provided labor for the construction or repair of the park’s road system. They also launched, starting in 1934, two projects that would take several years to complete. One was the construction of “the superintendent’s residence, rustic log houses, garages, and three maintenance buildings” at the park headquarters at Beaver Creek; later the CCC would add on to the Stewart Ranger station at that site, which served as park headquarters.³⁶ These were significant buildings, and they still serve as reminders of the CCC work. At Yellowstone, as soon as the camps began their work, they moved in a myriad of directions. Mary Shivers Culpin describes the expansive CCC work in the first year at Yellowstone: “The CCC projects were telephone line repair, bank erosion control, roadside cleanup, cleanup of old dump grounds, campground cleanup, truck trail construction, fire protection, trail construction, landscaping, range improvements, reforestation, insect control, old fence removal, repair and building of new fences, removal of old buildings and fire suppression work.”³⁷

One of the largest CCC projects is completely unseen today, but it was important at the time precisely because the need for it was so conspicuous. In 1916 the Reclamation Service had constructed Jackson Lake Dam, with the result that the natural lake was much enlarged. As the lake filled, however, it also flooded more land and eight thousand acres of timber that had been above the waterline previously were now submerged. The timber died but remained—stark, barren, dangerous, and an object lesson of poor planning. The cleanup began in 1929 under the Hoover administration but was assigned to the CCC in 1933. Historian Robert Righter notes, “Over 100 young men spent the summer of 1934 cutting and piling some 17,000 cords of wood to be burned during the winter months.” The project continued into the coming years, but, as Righter points out, “by the mid-1930s the shoreline tragedy of Jackson Lake had been removed.”³⁸



CCC workers clearing dead timber from shores of Jackson Lake.
Courtesy the Grand Teton National Park Archives.



CCC bathhouse at Jenny Lake, currently in use as office and other purposes.
Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

There is yet another enduring contribution of CCC activity and construction that can still be seen in Grand Teton National Park: remnants of the camps themselves. Three different camps operated in that park initially, and two more were added in 1935. Those camps created their own infrastructure. John Daugherty identifies some of the Grand Teton camps with their locations at Leigh Lake, Lizard Point, Hot Springs near Colter Bay, and the most prominent camp, one at the south end of Jenny Lake. This was also the most permanent, occupied and used by the CCC until 1942, and even then the permanent buildings were put to other uses in the park—and at least two of the buildings remain in active use.³⁹

One other kind of project is not frequently noted in the official histories of the program and its agency sponsors, but it was both notable and important at the time. An abiding feature of life in northeastern Wyoming, in the Powder River Basin, was the perpetual fire occurring in some of the exposed coal seams and abandoned mines. Coal was a valuable resource, but it was also vulnerable to ignition by natural causes, and lightning had

caused some of these seams to start burning decades before, perhaps even longer. The fires were large but also somewhat inaccessible, and suppressing those fires required a substantial, focused workforce utilizing modern strategies and operating over an extended period of time. That had not been achieved yet and the fires continued to burn . . . and burn. At least seventeen of these fires were burning in Campbell County. In the spring of 1935, Robert Fechner, director of the CCC, issued a report in which he singled out a Wyoming CCC effort in this regard:

An unusual project engaged in by the CCC was an attack on the coal

38. Daugherty, *A Place Called Jackson Hole*, 173; Robert Righter, *Crucible for Conservation*, 90.

39. Daugherty, *A Place Called Jackson Hole*, 320, 321.

bed fires in Campbell County, Wyoming. During the summers of 1933 and 1934 a camp under the jurisdiction of the General Land Office was established. One of the jobs was the control of a fire 2,000 feet in length mentioned by the Sawyer Expedition of 1865. Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees constructed a temporary bridge with a 64-foot span to reach the blaze. The other coal beds worked on were generally twenty-five to forty-five feet in thickness, and the fires in some cases were 1,000 feet in length along the outcrop. Thus an opportunity was had for the first time to develop and test out on a large scale the technique of controlling coal bed fires.⁴⁰

Generally the CCC would either dig out the burning material and then cover the remaining exposed coal with sand for a depth of several feet or seal the fire and deprive it of oxygen, thus extinguishing it.⁴¹ The results of this battle against the coal fires appear to have been impressive, but the going was slow.

The CCC did not finish the job in the first summer, or in the second summer, on the coal fires or on other projects elsewhere. Those arduous projects would continue in the years to come, but in the case of the CCC they would continue with widespread support from nearby communities, from the state, and from the nation. The Emergency Conservation Work program, the Civilian Conservation Corps, was making a difference. It may have been a tree army, but it was not a picnic in the woods.

40. "Two Years of Emergency Conservation Work (Civilian Conservation Corps): April 5, 1933–March 31, 1935," report prepared by Robert Fechner, director of Emergency Conservation Work, April 5, 1935. This copy of Fechner's report is located in the Gerald W. Williams Collection, ScholarsArchive, Oregon State University Libraries.

41. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942*, 127.

42. Hassler, "Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934," 35. See also the *Biennial Reports of the State Highway Commission*, copies located in the Wyoming State Library, Cheyenne.

43. Hassler, "Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934," 35–36.

Big Dam Projects—and Beyond

The National Industrial Recovery Act signed into law in June 1933 is best known for creating the National Recovery Administration and its multitude of codes regulating production, prices, and wages in industry. Title II of the same measure, however, was entitled "Public Works and Construction Projects," and it created the Public Works Administration (PWA). Funded with 3.3 billion dollars, administered by the Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes, the PWA would become one of the premier construction programs of the Depression. Moreover, PWA activities in Wyoming indicate a clear link between unemployment relief projects and the development of economic infrastructure—and also some of the issues surrounding that effort.

The PWA, from the very beginning, poured money into Wyoming, and in 1933 much of the focus was on highway construction. In 1929 and 1930 President Hoover had called upon the states to expand their construction activities, and Wyoming embarked upon a substantial road construction/resurfacing program under a \$2.8 million bond issue approved in 1930 specifically to finance roadwork. This construction continued in the Roosevelt years, and the PWA, during six months of 1933, made available another nearly five million dollars for Wyoming highways, while slightly over a million dollars went for municipal projects.⁴² Employing both skilled and unskilled labor, about two thousand workers in the first year, the road projects in 1933 included 228 miles of grading and draining, 355 miles of surfacing, 489 miles of oil surfacing, and 70 bridges. They also included a grand total of five-and-a-half miles of road paving. PWA funding covered about 36 percent of the costs of these projects while the rest came from state and other federal sources.⁴³ PWA funding of highway construction and resurfacing was significant, but it was a minority of the funding for such projects. Moreover, PWA funding for specific highway projects was overshadowed by the other PWA projects, like big dams.

Senator John Kendrick had long pressed for construction of dams that would allow for the irrigation of land in the North Platte River drainage above and below Casper. The idea for the North Platte Project had been developed early in the twentieth century at the beginning of the drive launched by the new Reclamation Service. Pathfinder Dam and Reservoir and Guernsey Dam and Reservoir were constructed to control the North

Platte River and provide sufficient water for farmers in the eastern part of the state, and into Nebraska as well. At the same time, surveys were conducted of the dramatic canyon near the small town of Alcova about thirty miles west of Casper to determine the possibility of locating another dam on the North Platte. The project was not acted upon, and in the 1920s additional studies, funded jointly by the Bureau of Reclamation (as the Reclamation Service became known in 1923) and the state of Wyoming, again promoted the possibility of a dam at Alcova, or, as it was increasingly known, the Casper-Alcova Project.

John B. Kendrick, a former cowboy and successful rancher, had emerged as a leader in the state. After first serving as governor, in 1917 he left that office to serve in the U.S. Senate, which he continued to do until his death in 1933. In the 1920s he became as much an advocate for the agricultural settlement of Wyoming by irrigation as Congressman Frank Mondell from Wyoming had been for dry farming settlement. It was in that effort that Kendrick took up the cause of the Alcova project. His fundamental objective, according to Jo Ann Fley, was to provide Casper the opportunity to grow its own food, food that it otherwise had to import. As Fley notes, "There was an abundance of water near the city; the only thing that was needed was a dam. There was rich soil surrounding the city; the only thing that was needed to make it fruitful was water. Because Casper was so large, all food raised on the project would be consumed by that city and consequently the products would not be competing with farm produce from other parts of the country."⁴⁴

In 1926 Kendrick introduced legislation to authorize construction for the Casper-Alcova project; it passed the Senate but failed in the House of Representatives. At the time many people believed Colorado's political pressure helped defeat the measure, and indeed Colorado's senators did not support it and Congressman Edward Taylor (author of the future Taylor Grazing Act) vehemently opposed it. Much of this opposition had to do with the competition between Wyoming and Colorado for the waters of the North Platte. But Kendrick continued to introduce and push for his legislation, and he even included a provision so that it would not draw upon federal funds (including the Reclamation Fund) but would be financed by Natrona County oil and gas revenues that would otherwise go into the Reclamation Fund. Each of his attempts to promote the legislation failed and Casper (and elsewhere in Wyoming) business people lob-



Modern, muscular, scientific, industrial, and engineering-oriented, this logo sometimes used by the Public Works Administration conveyed an image of what the agency was all about.

From America Builds: The Record of PWA (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), frontispiece.

44. Jo Ann Fley, "John B. Kendrick's Career in the United States Senate" (master's thesis, University of Wyoming, 1953), 121.

Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior and Administrator of the Public Works Administration.

Courtesy the Library of Congress.



bied Congress and neighboring states seeking support for the law but to no avail—until 1933. When Franklin Roosevelt was inaugurated, Kendrick saw a new opportunity. In March 1933 the Casper Chamber of Commerce committee on irrigation reported that Kendrick was about to submit his legislation once again.⁴⁵

When Kendrick pressed his program on the new president, Roosevelt turned to Ickes for his thoughts. Ickes told the president, “It was the one reclamation plan that I might consider favorably. The President indicated that it could be built under the Public Works Bill.”⁴⁶ The Public Works Bill, of course, was Title II of the NIRA. In late July, when the Special Board for Public Works, the body that reviewed proposals for PWA projects, refused to approve the Casper-Alcova Project and another one on the Upper Mississippi River, Ickes went to the president and, as Ickes describes, “he wrote directions to me in his own handwriting instructing me to put these projects through at the next meeting of the board. Later, at his regular press conference, he announced that these projects would be approved at the next meeting of the board.”⁴⁷ And they were.

As early as October 1933 contracts were awarded to firms from Dallas and Los Angeles for construction first of the diversion tunnel and then of Alcova Dam. In 1934 a third company received the contract for construction of Seminole Dam and Powerplant.⁴⁸ The Casper-Alcova Project was thus begun, and this project carried with it an appropriation of twenty-one million dollars for the construction of the dam and the irrigation of 50,000 acres of land.

While Kendrick returned to Wyoming with a hero’s welcome in Casper, including a special parade, he faced the ire of others in the state who wanted similar projects for their areas—including especially the Heart Mountain Division of the Shoshone Reclamation Project. Business people in the Powell area saw the Casper-Alcova Project not just as a possible competitor for funds, but as a drain on Wyoming’s share of future reclamation funds that would thus keep the Heart Mountain Project from being constructed.⁴⁹

When John Kendrick died in November 1933, Secretary Ickes urged Roosevelt to rename the Casper-Alcova Project in his honor, and Roosevelt agreed, although formal change of the name did not come until 1937. As approved, the project included two dams—Alcova and Seminole; the dam at Seminole was to have a power plant, but Alcova would not have

45. “Kendrick to File Project Bill Again,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, March 8, 1933.

46. Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The First Thousand Days 1933–1936* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 39–40.

47. *Ibid.*, 72.

48. Leisl A. Klajic, “The Kendrick Project (Casper-Alcova),” Bureau of Reclamation paper (2000), 12, at http://www.usbr.gov/projects/Project.jsp?proj_Name=Kendrick%20Project&pageType=ProjectHistoryPage.

49. Fley, “John B. Kendrick’s Career in the United States Senate,” 124–25.



Site of the future Alcova Dam at the time construction was authorized and for a good while afterward.

Sevey's photo postcard from the collection of Michael Cassity.

power-generating facilities until two decades later. Although technical, legal issues (especially interstate water rights) stymied progress on the project, construction proceeded systematically, though slowly. This project was lumped together with Grand Coulee and Bonneville as showcase projects for the New Deal, and work on them received national attention.⁵⁰

At the same time, however, the projects were closely scrutinized, and the attention they and the PWA received was not always friendly. The fundamental issue was that while the huge projects obviously contributed greatly to the economic development of the region, they did not really make a dent in unemployment. Indeed, this was the reason the Casper-Alcova project had been turned down by the Special Board for Public Works. Historian Jason Scott Smith writes that Assistant Secretary of Labor Turner Battle in particular objected to the weak employment possibilities provided by Casper-Alcova, despite its great cost. Too little of the money was going directly to hiring workers. Smith writes, however: “Elwood Mead, the head of the Bureau of Reclamation, responded that public works, such as the Casper-Alcova project and Colorado’s [i.e., Colo-

rado River’s] Boulder Dam, had important and overlooked repercussions. The indirect employment stimulated by such projects was equally, if not more, important than the employment required to complete the project itself. Direct employment, Mead asserted, ‘is a very small part of the contribution that development has made to the need of the unemployed.’”⁵¹

50. See, for example, Richard L. Neuberger, “Four Huge Dams to Aid the West,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1936.

51. Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933–1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46–47. This limited employment opportunity was clear at the outset, and Eugene Carroll writes that W. P. Wilkerson, secretary of the Casper Chamber of Commerce and key promoter of the project, “indicated that even with a few hundred people working on the Casper-Alcova Dam and the Seminoe Reservoir, the unemployment problem would be helped.” Eugene T. Carroll, “John B. Kendrick’s Fight for Western Water Legislation, 1917–1933,” *Annals of Wyoming* 50 (Fall 1978): 333.

In fact, this was a sensitive issue and vulnerable point for the PWA generally. Overall costs for these projects were vast, material expenses were huge, and clearly some people were put to work, but they did not really focus on the unemployed; instead the workers tended to be highly skilled professionals (including ample lawyers and engineers) who were not always found in the unemployment offices and bread lines. The fact that, as one study reports, the Bureau of Reclamation at Casper-Alcova “contracted with the Natrona County Transient Relief Camp to send volunteers to clean the Alcova Reservoir site”⁵² probably did not satisfy critics. The sensitivity of the administration to this issue was profound. Some reports indicate that Roosevelt asked Ickes for weekly progress reports on PWA projects, and program administrators fought for broader acceptance of big construction projects. As Smith notes, “it was becoming clear that a public works policy that favored development over unemployment did not benefit just hydroelectric projects.”⁵³

In the short run, the political vulnerability proved delicate. The administration could either respond to the cries for fighting unemployment by putting people directly to work, or with grants to put people to work in labor intensive projects (sometimes criticized as day-labor construction), risking the wrath of contractors who wanted to do the projects themselves, or it could put the money into big projects, contracted out with a much less direct impact on employment. The tension between these two approaches would continue as the New Deal attempted to steer the nation out of the Depression. And in a large sense the New Deal attempted to satisfy both pressures.

There was another problem with the PWA that weakened its blow against unemployment. That problem, if it really was a problem, was its

administrator. Harold L. Ickes was an old line Chicago progressive with deep Republican roots and a commitment to honest, efficient government. The public funds he had in his PWA program, apart from the regular agencies in the Department of Interior, were considerable, a record amount. And Ickes could be trusted with them, could be trusted to see that there was little waste, no corruption, and minimal partisanship. By the same token, he was slow to turn loose of that money, even though the nation was in the Depression and people and businesses urgently needed the money to operate. As Arthur M. Schlesinger sums it up, “As for Ickes, the public works problem was not to spend money fast but to spend it honestly. While [NRA director] Hugh Johnson raced over the country, whipping businessmen into codes, Ickes sat at his desk in Interior examining projects with stingy and meticulous care. Given this wary approach to spending, PWA trickled money into the economy at too slow a pace to give much initial push to NRA”—or to the economy.⁵⁴ Slow starting as it was, and with a battery of safeguards to protect the public’s money, the PWA at its start-up was two or three years away from making a major impact on life in the nation, and in Wyoming.

A Program of Civil Works

The impact on unemployment by these various projects was not inconsequential, but the need was much greater than the remedies offered. The Civilian Conservation Corps was a key program in the First New Deal, a program that helped develop the state’s natural resources as part of an accessible and significant infrastructure, and a program that helped the young men who enrolled as well as their families. But the nation’s unemployed workers numbered around 15 million and the CCC in its first years put about 250,000 to work. In 1933 Wyoming hosted under 5,000 CCC enrollees.⁵⁵ Although the number of enrollees seems to have grown the next year, it still did not absorb the unemployed of the nation, the state, or the local communities. The CCC was not the solution to the problem of economic growth or the problem of unemployment. And the PWA, despite its contributions to road construction in 1933 and despite its promise of jobs and expenditures of funds on the large dams in Wyoming, had yet to realize that promise.

52. Klajic, “The Kendrick Project (Casper-Alcova),” 11.

53. See the discussion in Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism*, 47–49.

54. Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt*, vol. 2: *The Coming of the New Deal*, 109.

55. This number is taken from a comprehensive map in chap. 2, fig. 5, in Otis, et al., *The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933–42*.

But unemployment was a problem every day. And unemployment was a problem not just for those people out of work, and not just for their families; it was a problem for the merchants whose business was to sell groceries and gasoline and clothes and cars to those people, and it was a problem for the people who needed to sell or buy houses, and it was a problem for state and local governments who depended on the taxes unemployed people would pay if they had jobs, taxes to support roads, schools, and the everyday functions of government. The problem of unemployment was not solved by starting up the CCC and the PWA, nor, for that matter, by banking reform and industrial codes that raised prices. The problem of unemployment continued.

Put another way, the problem of need was at the bottom of what the Depression was all about. Relief of some sort was essential. For the first several years of the Depression, relief to the needy was provided mainly by individual contributions to private, charitable organizations and by communities. The state government sometimes served as a coordinator of relief efforts but did not launch a systematic program for the aid of the distressed in Wyoming until 1934. The federal government under the Hoover administration avoided most suggestions for federal relief that smacked of a dole, of a handout, although it made limited amounts of money available to the states for exactly that purpose—but never with great fanfare. Meanwhile, people went hungry.

That included people in Wyoming.

In 1933, in the flurry of legislation enacted during the Hundred Days, the New Deal offered a response to the problem of the destitute, the hungry, the unemployed and their families. This was the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA), which created the Federal Emergency Relief Administration under the leadership of professional social worker Harry Hopkins. The idea behind the FERA was similar to that of the Emergency Relief and Construction Act (ERCA) of the Hoover administration, and, in fact, ERCA “provided a nuclear regional organization which Hopkins took over when he started work.”⁵⁶ But there were differences. Where the ERCA had offered loans to states (through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, or RFC) to provide relief for the hungry, FERA provided grants. Where ERCA had made available to the states \$300 million, much of which was never loaned, FERA had \$500 million to provide in grants. And Hopkins intended to spend every bit of it. The day after Hopkins went to work at



Harry Hopkins, director of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and Civil Works Administration.

Courtesy the National Archives and Records Administration.

FERA, the *Washington Post* commented on his propensity to waste no time putting that money into circulation, for better or worse: “The half billion dollars for direct relief of States won’t last a month if Harry L. Hopkins, new relief administrator, maintains the pace he set yesterday in disbursing more than \$5,000,000 during his first two hours in office.”⁵⁷

While Wyoming politicians often boasted of their reluctance, even refusal, to accept assistance from the federal government during both the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations, the state did receive relief funds from both administrations. During the eighteen months preceding the change of administrations, Paul Hassler reports, Wyoming received \$78,834 from the Hoover administration specifically for relief, evidently

56. Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper Bros., 1950), 37.

57. The *Washington Post* is quoted in Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 36.

using the ERCA authority to draw upon the RFC.⁵⁸ As early as June 1933, Wyoming started to receive FERA funds, the first payment being about \$45,000; and a chunk of \$23,000 of that went to five of the most needy counties—Platte, Hot Springs, Sweetwater, Lincoln, and Weston. By the end of the year, Wyoming had accepted \$95,443 in grants from the federal government for relief.⁵⁹ This was not much, however, given the size of the problem.

In other words, unemployment continued to be a problem in Wyoming despite the New Deal. T. A. Larson reports that in Wyoming at the end of 1933—which is to say, after the New Deal had been running for nine months—“one Wyoming person in five was receiving some form of relief and the unemployed numbered twenty thousand.”⁶⁰ Hassler relates that

58. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 22; see also Larson’s discussion of this in his “The New Deal in Wyoming,” 254, and Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 443. In “The New Deal in Wyoming,” Larson notes (p. 254n17) that some of the observations by officials are not entirely consistent or corroborated by other sources; accordingly, as with other sources they should not always be accepted at face value.

59. Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 443.

60. *Ibid.*, 444.

61. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 22–23.

62. “Review of C.W.A.: State of Wyoming,” 5. This final report is an unpublished typescript in the Wyoming Civil Works Administration microfilmed project records, Record Group 69, maintained by the National Archives and Records Administration, Reel 9, beginning at Document #22807. These Wyoming CWA records are on three reels of microfilm (numbered 7, 8, 9). The organization of the records is generally by county. Many, *but not all*, documents in those records have a stamped document number that helps in locating particular projects and records and is used here as the primary reference when available.

63. “Review of C.W.A.: State of Wyoming,” 5.

Hot Springs County alone showed 357 families needing assistance because of unemployment. Those families included 637 adult dependents, 532 children, and 140 single men who were registered as unemployed and in need.⁶¹

Precise data about the extent of unemployment in 1933 do not exist, and they did not exist at the time. One report, in the spring of 1934, simply observed that “an accurate index of the extent of unemployment in Wyoming is not available” for the time around the middle of November, 1933.⁶² So it used the active registrations compiled by the Re-Employment Service, and those figures themselves were not derived from a direct count but from compilations and then subtractions to come up with an accurate estimate. Probably the total of 14,976 unemployed is close, but it is also likely to be an underestimate because of the unemployed who were not, in fact, listed on the job-search rolls. Not surprisingly, while unemployment was generally spread throughout the state, and agricultural unemployment was a serious and stark feature in the state, it was especially concentrated in Wyoming’s industrial centers, in particular Sheridan, Rock Springs, and Casper, but it was also in the coal camps, oil fields, and beet sugar raising/refining districts.⁶³

In December 1933, Governor Leslie Miller, who took great pride in the state’s independence from the relief money provided by the federal government, revised his assessment. The previous January the new governor had warned the state against accepting federal money, since doing so would result in higher taxes and bigger government. After nearly a year in office, however, Governor Miller was contrite:

There is abroad in our State a condition arising from long continued unemployment and the ravages of drouth more acute than is generally realized and I have been convinced of late that as public servants we have failed to measure up to our responsibilities in these matters. Prior to last spring, by act of Congress certain funds had been made available to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for loans to states for emergency relief purposes, which loans would have to be repaid out of future federal aid road appropriations. Wyoming was the single State in the Union which refrained from borrowing any of this money and in this fact we took considerable pride for some time. I have been wondering recently whether we are entitled to indulge in that feeling of pride. As a result of surveys which I have

caused to be made through reliable agencies, there are now being revealed thousands of cases of undernourished children, and likewise, many cases indicating a lack of proper clothing for both children and adults.⁶⁴

FERA, or the dole, as it was often labeled, operated in Wyoming to provide help to needy families, but it operated under serious constraints. Not all the needy found help through that channel.⁶⁵ It is also fair to say that no one liked the dole—not the people opposed to government handouts, not the social workers who dispensed it, and not the people who received it. It was accompanied by a means test that carried with it an inevitable humiliation, for its object, unlike every other test that a person endured, was not to prove how capable, how successful, how talented, how skilled, or how resourceful you were; instead the object was to prove how much a failure you were and how you could not make it on your own without assistance. This was distasteful to everyone involved. In fact, it was so odious that from the very start of the dole, the agency dispensing funds sought to come up with some kind of an alternative that provided relief but with more dignity to the recipient and with more value to the community.

The way the FERA operated was far from the organized, centralized system that would characterize later relief and welfare offices. In only three Wyoming counties in 1933 were there paid officials who administered relief funds—Sheridan, Natrona, and Albany. Funds from county coffers, of course, were distributed by county commissioners, while federal funds—FERA moneys—were distributed by local county committees appointed by the state relief committee. In other words, there were two separate, and two loosely organized, systems of direct relief—one administered by the counties and one by the state, using separate funds, separate sets of volunteers, and probably separate sets of requirements and methods. A year later one report noted, “In some instances a member of the County Board of Commissioners was also appointed to membership in the County Relief Committee but there was no planned effort to correlate the functions of each.” The State Relief Committee included a chair appointed by the committee, the governor, the Executive Secretary of the State Board of Charities and Reform, the State Highway engineer, the head of the Re-Employment Services in Wyoming, and a member of the State Highway Commission.⁶⁶

Thus, as the winter of 1933 approached, the need for assistance in Wyo-

ming was high but the available means of providing that assistance was weak, disorganized, and even scorned. Winter in Wyoming can be a challenge under the best of conditions, but given the circumstances of hunger and lack of shelter and heat and clothing, the months ahead looked especially daunting. And this would be the fourth such winter in the Depression. Patience was growing thin and belts were tightened—both to the point of despair. In Washington, Harry Hopkins, the administrator of the FERA, was mindful of those circumstances throughout the nation and charted a new course for helping the unemployed. Hopkins wanted to provide *work* relief as an alternative to *direct* relief; work relief would be more expensive than the dole, but it would restore people’s morale, skills, independence, and dignity. It was already October, and whatever he proposed had to be done fast if it were to address the problems intensified by winter. Roosevelt, frustrated that the PWA was so slow to get started, agreed with Harry Hopkins.

Franklin Roosevelt seldom felt bound by ideology or theory both in his personality and in his management style. What he called (and what some historians have also called) his “pragmatic” approach was less an example of pragmatism, or a formal philosophy, as it was simply a matter of trying different approaches to problems, even at the same time, even if those approaches and solutions were in conflict. By the same token, Roosevelt also proved broadly tolerant of the wide-ranging ideas and agencies of his subordinates, often to the consternation of those same officials; when their programs and agencies were in conflict, he would not feel obliged to intervene to establish a consistent program, invariably leaving one group or another of his cabinet members and advisers rankled and disappointed. This is what happened with unemployment relief.

64. Miller is quoted in Larson, “The New Deal in Wyoming,” 255.

65. Historian Jeff Singleton has noted how the dole meant different things to different people, almost always, however, negative. Jeff Singleton, *The American Dole: Unemployment Relief and the Welfare State in the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), 93.

66. “Review of C.W.A.: State of Wyoming,” 6.

When the PWA was not solving the problem, Roosevelt created by executive order a new agency, the Civil Works Administration (CWA), on November 9, 1933. The goal of the CWA was ambitious and urgent: to put four million unemployed Americans to work by the middle of December. Roosevelt transferred \$400 million from the PWA budget (to the dismay of administrator Harold Ickes) to the CWA, named Hopkins the administrator, and watched an unplanned and unprecedented approach to the Depression take shape. Hopkins simply used his FERA staff and the existing state committees to initiate work projects around the nation, and ideas and proposals for work came both from Washington and from the communities where the workers were to be employed. Nationally, the goal of four million workers was not achieved until after the middle of December, but in Wyoming, the quotas were reached early and then expanded, so that by February 1934, the CWA employed more than ten thousand workers in the state.⁶⁷

The Civil Works Administration in Wyoming started in the middle of November, about a week after the program came into existence with the naming of a state administrator, Casper oilman Burke Sinclair, who then drew upon the existing state and local relief committees—volunteers mostly—to launch the CWA in Wyoming. When needed, the county chairs hired assistants, but even so, the officials often paid their own expenses without remuneration. The final report for the Wyoming CWA program noted that those contributions of work and money called “for the highest commendation that could be paid to unselfish citizens in times of public emergency.”⁶⁸ In important ways, this was a case in which the spirit of neighbor helping neighbor prevailed.

At first the CWA program headquarters were located in the state capitol, but about November 25 the agency found a new home: the Wyoming

Governor’s Mansion. The mansion had been unoccupied after the death of Governor Frank Emerson in 1931 and through the tenure of Alonzo M. Clark as acting governor. After Leslie Miller was elected in 1932 to fill the remainder of the term, he did not move into the mansion, so as to save the state the utilities and related expenses, but now it was made available to the CWA. As the CWA report noted, “This is a three story building, with basement, in a residential district, and fits admirably into the situation.”⁶⁹ Even before the move to the Governor’s Mansion, Wyoming officials of the CWA were at work.

As soon as the CWA officers for Wyoming were appointed—and within a few weeks Sheridan rancher and attorney Will Metz replaced Burke Sinclair, who went to Washington—the regional administrator briefed them on their responsibilities and expectations, and then the state officers called a meeting in Casper, inviting county chairpeople, representatives of local governments, and representatives from civic organizations to attend, which they did—evidently in impressive numbers. The state administrator invited applications and proposals for work projects, and the state office was quickly flooded with requests. Time was of the essence, and the CWA final report describes the scene: “The State Administrator aided by his Deputy, although being able to check only the most important features of the applications and supplementing their information on some by numerous telephone and telegraph messages, not waiting for the slow method of letter writing, approved projects by phone and telegraph fast enough that generally over night project decisions were made and the next morning the unemployed were put to work in their respective neighborhoods.” (Ultimately that haste generated criticisms of wasteful and inefficient projects, and thus served as a warning to future work projects; however, when future projects replaced the haste with more review to safeguard against waste and favoritism, they were then accused of being too bureaucratic.) The goal was to transfer all able-bodied people on the relief roles to the CWA, and the administrators in Cheyenne and around the state worked feverishly to meet that and other goals. Will Metz, the state administrator of the CWA, commended them: “Due to a special type of loyalty on the part of the CWA administration employees, normal hours of work were completely disregarded, and the entire state quota of 3250 men was at work December 10, 1933, five days before the national dead line set by Harry L. Hopkins.”⁷⁰ That “special type of loyalty” was not an institutional

67. *Ibid.*, 9.

68. *Ibid.*, 8.

69. *Ibid.*, 8.

70. *Ibid.*, 8, 24.

loyalty but a loyalty to community and neighbors—even if the community and neighbors were spread all across the state.

Finally, the New Deal had come to Wyoming. And it came with a powerful sense of commitment, of sacrifice, of community assistance, and of urgency.

The Civil Works Administration in Wyoming is one of the most overlooked and underestimated Depression programs, one frequently confused or conflated with other agencies, and an effort too easily dismissed, consciously or otherwise, as unimportant among the many work programs that emerged in the state during the Depression, all of which is unfortunate and unjust. People may disagree with its goals and methods, but it marked a distinct change. The CWA was reviled and praised by different groups and individuals, but they were all aware of what it was doing. It did not last for long, and its primary objective was to help people without jobs, incomes, and hope get through the winter of 1933–1934, but it covered the state and was active in every county of Wyoming, probably in every community, large or small, and in almost all the neighborhoods and the multitude of school districts in the state. The CWA *was* the New Deal to much of Wyoming in 1933 and 1934.

Between November 1933 and April 1934, the CWA undertook a total of 932 separate projects in the state. In addition, 783 supplemental projects were also undertaken, but those appear mainly to have been continuations or modifications of the original 932 for a variety of reasons, including some project expansions. Projects totaling 402 were completed, and 334 were subsequently transferred to other programs or to the FERA for completion, while 196 were either never started or were dropped for one reason or another.⁷¹ In comparison with the PWA projects, they were small; in fact they were small by virtually any standard except relating to employment, and there the comparisons were reversed. The CWA put a lot of people to work on a multitude of small projects; the PWA put a small number of people to work on a few big projects. Ordinarily, the sponsoring agency—a county government or a town or city—assessed its own needs and also saw this available pool of labor and put the two together. The sponsoring government body would provide a general plan and outline of the project, provide tools and equipment, and sometimes materials, and the CWA would provide labor, but sometimes also the materials.

One of the main groups of projects focused on road and street

improvement, and also some highway work, since, as the CWA noted, “transportation facilities is the paramount public need in this state.” Generally this work did not involve constructing new roads or highways but rather consisted of repairs to existing roadways to eliminate hazards or just make them more usable. And they were ordinarily either in towns, or near towns, where grading and graveling city streets was important. The same kind of work was done for county roads. Some projects actually were sponsored by the state highway department, such as the widening and backsloping of portions of the Telephone Canyon Road east of Laramie.⁷² Likewise one project in Sweetwater County involved “shaping up and graveling shoulders on both sides of state highway between Rock Springs and Green River, cleaning out ditches and culverts on same road,” and another in Converse County performed the same kind of work on the Douglas-Glenrock highway. On the latter project, however, blasting was necessary in order to do the job properly. In Carbon County one project required more than three thousand pounds of dynamite, but the road was essential, and in this case it was a new road; it was the road into the Seminole district, the only road leading to the PWA worksite of the dam under construction. Some new roads were built, such as the Casper Mountain road winding its way up the north face of the mountain, although it is unclear how far that work went.

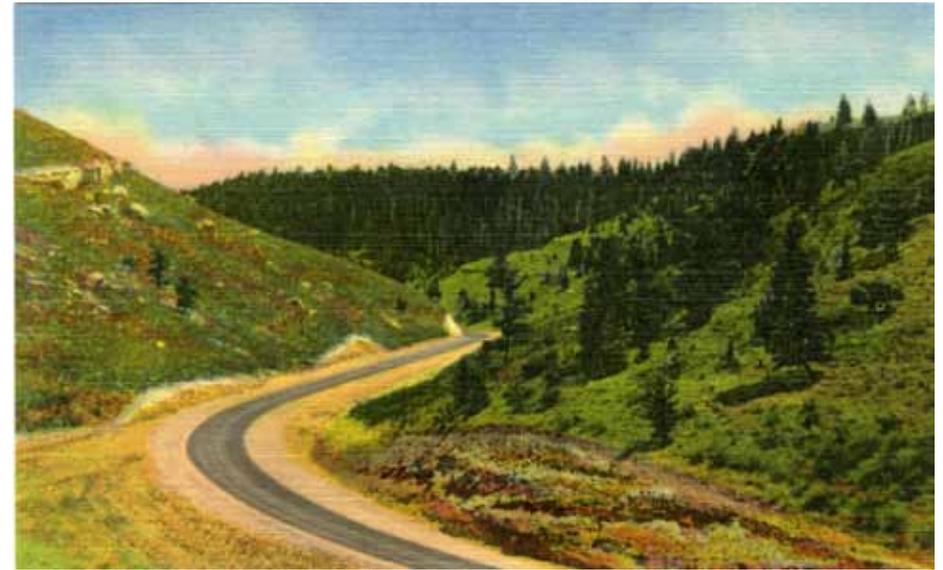
The local identities of the roads are evident in the definition of the terminus of some of the projects, such as the project to “Gravel Wheatland-Bosler highway in the muddy places from Thrasher’s store to approximately two miles west of Jones’ ranch.” These projects were locally identified and locally prioritized—not imported from Washington planners. The description of the Wheatland-Bosler highway also indicates the general conditions of the roads and why they needed attention. The roads also needed attention to improve commerce in the communities. In Niobrara County,

71. *Ibid.*, 10.

72. Telephone Canyon: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 9. # 21724; Sweetwater County highway: Reel 7, #18626; Douglas – Glenrock Highway: Reel 7, #16641, 16636; Seminole Road: Reel 7, #16437.



Telephone Canyon Road. Although postmarked in 1937, this postcard image shows the road before it was widened by the CWA.
Sanborn postcard from the collection of Michael Cassity.



Telephone Canyon Road after widening with shoulders.
Sanborn postcard from the collection of Michael Cassity.

a local priority was to connect the new Highway 85 with the old Highway 85, “giving all the people of the north-east portion of the county a direct road into Lusk, thereby, keeping Lusk as the trading center of the county, in place of losing a great deal of trade to South Dakota and eastern Nebraska.” For some small towns, and even for villages, opportunity for improvement converged with the need for transportation to survive. In Laramie County,

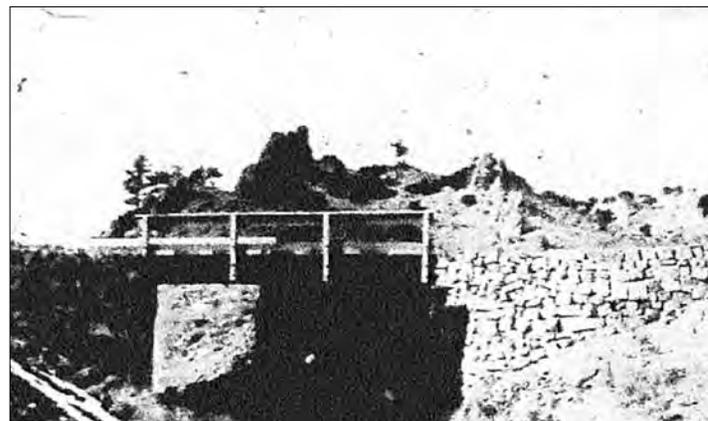
it was critical to “grade and gravel county highway through Hillsdale,” and “raise the grade and gravel five miles of road north of Horse Creek.” In Big Horn County, the road that connected the main highway between Greybull and Cody to the cemetery at Emblem was finally improved and with much gratitude: “It has been almost impassable in time of wet weather and is now in fine shape and is much appreciated by those who travel over it.”⁷³ These were not grand engineering projects, and often they were probably little noticed outside the counties in which they were located, but they were vital in a rural state, a state with a dispersed population, and a state where change was still underway in the transformation from horse-and-buggy commerce to automobile and truck. Moreover, they were taking place all over Wyoming.

Just as important as the roads were the bridges on the roads, some being built anew and some in dire need of repair and reconstruction. At

73. Wheatland – Bosler highway: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #18060; Niobrara Highway 85: Reel 7, #17725; Hillsdale, Horse Creek highways: Reel 7, #17130, 17125; Big Horn County highway connector: Reel 7, #16237.



CWA hand labor constructing Casper Mountain Road, 1933.
“Review of C.W.A.: State of Wyoming,” Wyoming CWA Project Files, Reel 9, Document #22843.



Completed CWA bridge on Hanna–Casper Road, showing rock-work and “unusually large clearance for floods.”
“Review of C.W.A.: State of Wyoming,” Wyoming CWA Project Files, Reel 9, Document #22841.

Meeteetse the CWA built a bridge over the Greybull River for the simple reason that high water isolated the community from the people it served. The local justification for the bridge explained, “A grave need exists for this bridge. It serves a rural community that is otherwise totally cut off from all means of travel to and from their homes during the flood or high-water period of the year and during the remainder of the year is forced to rely upon a temporary, unsafe and wholly unsatisfactory bridge. Most important of all, this bridge is depended upon to transport children of school age to and from Meeteetse daily during the school year.”⁷⁴ Local people there volunteered their time, equipment, and materials for this bridge project but depended on the CWA assistance to complete the project. In fact bridge repairs, and often reinforcement of the river or stream banks near bridges with riprapping, proved an altogether common project throughout Wyoming, a kind of project that demonstrated how basic transportation

was, and how easily it could be thwarted, in a rural state. Without bridges, the highways and roads could not work.

In many cases, the highway through town was the same as Main Street, and that thoroughfare was a priority for communities, but they also worked to have the other streets in town graded and graveled as well. Work on municipal streets—grading, graveled, draining, and more—took place all over the state: Van Tassell (“this will not only be a needed improvement to the town, but will supply work to a great many who have in the past received relief aid from the county and state”); Lusk (where especially the work on Pine Street made it “possible for travel,” and “has aided considerably in the traffic on Lusk business blocks”); Casper, where many streets

74. Meeteetse bridge: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 9, #20850.

were graveled; Cokeville (grading 8,400 feet of streets and surfacing 3,000 feet); Ft. Laramie (graveling 15 blocks); Riverton (previously dirt: “dusty in dry weather and muddy in wet weather”); Hudson; Dubois; Douglas (especially Second Street); Lost Springs; Rawlins (especially both the Lincoln Highway through town and the street leading from the highway to the county memorial hospital); Gillette (“make streets of Gillette into all-weather streets for major part of town; surfaced 40 blocks with scoria.”); Byron (15 blocks); Worland (alleys specifically included); Evanston (using cut and fill for streets from work on banks of Bear River); Pinedale (streets of town graveled, streets drained, culverts replaced, 10 new culverts built); Clearmont; Ranchester; Wheatland (35 blocks of streets); Powell (21 blocks graded and graveled); Guernsey (graveling the main streets); Basin; Chugwater; Evansville (grading and graveling 3 miles of streets, plus installing some curbs and culverts: “This filled a much needed want which the City of Evansville could not take care of financially.”); and Edgerton. In Lovell, the project was comprehensive, according to the official report submitted by the town government: “All the main streets in the residential district of the Town of Lovell, Wyoming, were graded and culverts rebuilt and

75. Van Tassell: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #17772; Lusk: Reel 7, #17757, 17761; 17771, 17777; Casper: Reel 7, #17571, 17311; Cokeville: Reel 7, #17319; Hudson: Reel 7, #16715; Riverton: Reel 7, #16761; Dubois: Reel 7, #16742; Douglas: Reel 7, #16634; Lost Springs: Reel 7, #16626; Rawlins: Reel 7, #16748, 16476; Gillette: Reel 7, #16396; Byron: Reel 7, #16292; Worland: Reel 7, #18759; Evanston: Reel 7, #18710; Pinedale: Reel 7, #18415; Clearmont: Reel 7, #18290; Ranchester: Reel 7, #18088; Wheatland: Reel 7, #18037, 18033; Powell: Reel 7, #17932; Basin: Reel 7, #16292; Chugwater: Reel 7, #18042, 18046; Evansville: Reel 7, #17553; Edgerton: Reel 7, #17580; Lovell: Reel 7, #16266.

76. Sheridan sanitary sewer: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #18315; Powell: Reel 7, #17956; Casper: Reel 8, #20713, 20710, 20706, 20702; Diamondville: Reel 7, #17349; Kemmerer: Reel 7, #17334, 17338, 17343; Thermopolis: Reel 7 #16998; Riverton: Reel 7, #16816; Douglas: Reel 7, #16602; Medicine Bow: Reel 7, #16452, 16454, 16456; Greybull: Reel 7, #16329; Jackson: Reel 9, #21477, 21473, 21480; Clearmont: Reel 7, #18295; Sheridan water system: Reel 7, #18217.

repaired. There were approximately 13,000 tons of crushed gravel spread on the streets. Six miles and 4 blocks were graveled.”⁷⁵ In its cities and villages, Wyoming’s streets were being lifted, literally, out of the mud and mire.

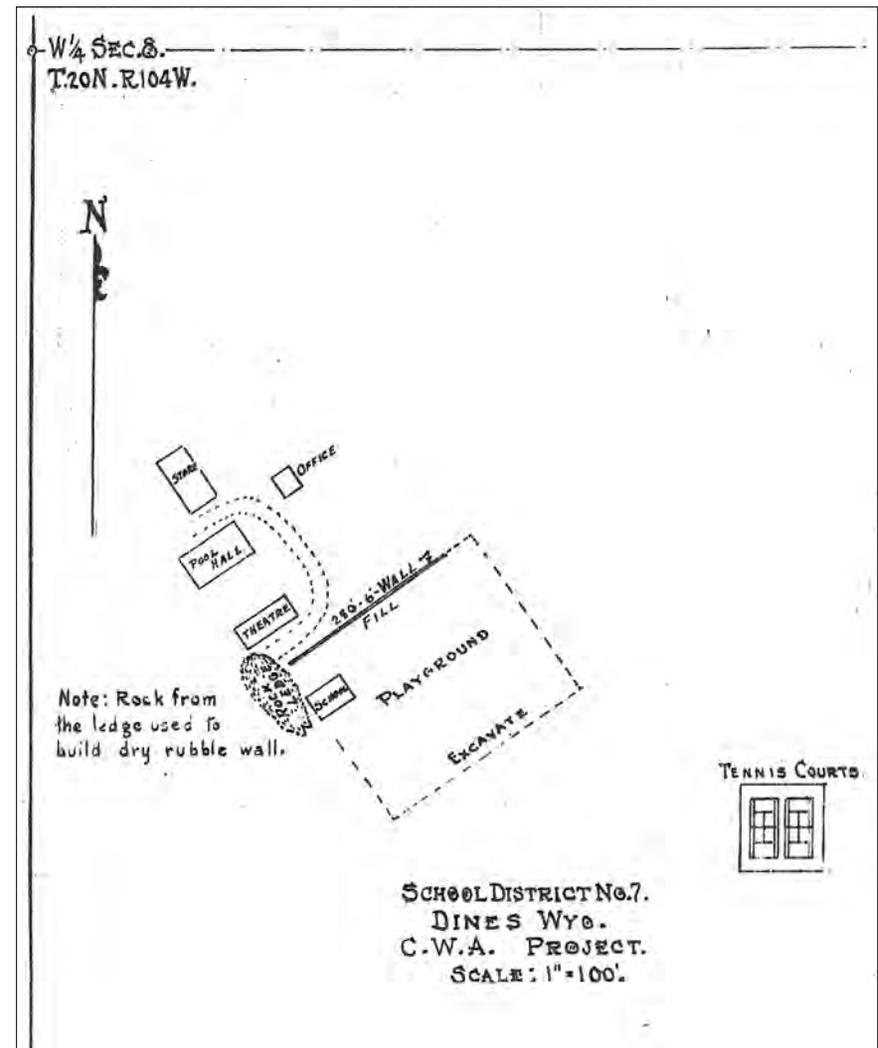
If the graveling of city streets sounds mundane and utilitarian, which it was, it was also necessary. Moreover, there were other tasks that were even more basic to be done. In a great many parts of Wyoming the ubiquitous outhouses and privies stood like small annexes near the homes, not just in rural precincts but in many towns too. The CWA provided an opportunity for towns to install or upgrade or expand their sewer systems and their water systems—and ultimately with the need for running water, there was a systematic linkage between the systems. Often this work was connected to street improvements, but just as frequently it stood alone. (And this was in addition to and separate from projects to install, clean, and extend storm sewers in the towns.) In Sheridan, CWA workers installed “two hundred feet of six inch and eight inch sanitary sewer from the north side of Heald Street in a south-easterly direction for improving sanitary conditions for residents and a tourist camp in this vicinity.” In Powell, one CWA project set out to “extend, excavate, backfill Powell sewer for 1800 feet; lay 18” sewer pipe, construct manholes and connect to present sewer system.” In Casper, the CWA improved and extended the sanitary sewer system to a part of town previously without. Likewise in Diamondville; Kemmerer; Thermopolis; Riverton (1400 feet of sewer ditch dug and sewer laid at an average depth of 4 feet); Douglas; Medicine Bow. As for running water, Greybull’s experience was repeated for a number of other communities. CWA workers replaced a wrought-iron water line on Third Avenue with cast-iron pipe and replaced 2,200 feet of pipe on Greybull Avenue: “This change of pipe was badly needed and the change of pipe has helped to greatly improve the Greybull Water System.” In Jackson, Mayor C. W. Huff put CWA workers on an ambitious project to expand and supplement the town’s water system. At Clearmont, the water main was repaired at the same time the streets were resurfaced, and the laying of four hundred feet of water pipe on Big Horn Avenue improved the water pressure for the town’s residences. Sheridan installed a new water main on the north side of town, replacing 2,650 linear feet of 4-inch wood pipe with 6-inch cast-iron pipe, and noted with satisfaction the result: “improving water system and providing employment for needy citizens.”⁷⁶

Proposal for leveling the school playground and constructing 250-foot rock wall, 6 feet high, to separate school grounds from theater and pool hall in Dines.

Wyoming CWA Project Files, Reel 7, Document #21381-21382.

So too with electricity for Wyoming communities: in Lingle, a CWA project repaired and rebuilt the municipal electrical distribution system. The final report for that project noted, "This project is a great improvement to the town of Lingle, as the light system has long been in need of repair, and could not have been [completed] without CWA funds." Torrington's experience was similar. There the electric light system for the community was repaired by CWA workers. Upton built a power plant and installed electric lines. Casper put a slightly different twist on this kind of project; the fire alarm system, a separate system by which businesses were connected to a central fire-alarm center through lines on poles, was extended and rebuilt; in this case, workers cut poles from Casper Mountain and installed them in town.⁷⁷

CWA municipal projects improved the core infrastructure, but they also improved and provided the amenities of life to residents. City parks in town after town received much-needed attention, and the incomplete Washington memorial parks in so many Wyoming communities were finally finished (although the future would demonstrate that parks are seldom "finished;" instead they continue to evolve). In Laramie, Washington Park was expanded with CWA labor. In Guernsey, Washington Memorial Park was fenced, graded, and given sidewalks and water mains. In Casper, Washington Park gained a swimming pool. Jackson's Washington Park, the town square, was significantly improved with excavation to level the ground, replacing the removed soil with loam for seeding grass and shrubbery. Both new and old parks in other towns, some Washington and some other municipal parks, also received attention. In Green River, Island Park was leveled with traditional cut-and-fill methods to raise the low spots so that flood water from Green River would no longer stand, and this was followed by installing lawns, roads, and paths. Roads and trails were improved at Rotary Park, south of Casper, near Garden Creek Falls, while



77. Lingle: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 9, #21931, 21929, 21925; Torrington: Reel 9, #21932, 21936, 21938; Upton: Reel 9, #21644; Casper: Reel 7, #17598.

a log building was constructed at the camp for children at the Casper Lions Club on Casper Mountain. Triangle Park, the three-sided “square” in Kemmerer, got a heavy dose of fertilizer and horticultural attention. Afton’s park was prepared for planting trees, Riverton’s park (or parks) received a half-mile of irrigation ditches, and Cheyenne’s entire city park system was slated for improvement by CWA workers.⁷⁸

In its short tenure, the CWA program does not appear to have actually built more than a few school buildings, but schools remained central to the life and purpose of many Wyoming communities, and schools featured prominently in the CWA’s activities. Sometimes the work on schools was cosmetic, as in the numerous cases where the buildings were painted, where school grounds were cleaned up to get rid of brush, install sidewalks and shrubbery, and otherwise improve their appearance, and where various degrees of redecoration brightened the schools’ interiors. But often the cosmetic work came after other, more substantial work by CWA crews to both repair the structure and infrastructure of the facilities and to expand the utility of the buildings and grounds. Rock Springs School District #4, in a standard approach applied to many other schools, used the CWA to conduct general repairs and overhauls of the buildings, treat the roofs, upgrade the plumbing, paint walls and varnish woodwork, and repair the windows and doors of the schools. Washington and Yellowstone

schools were singled out for special treatment, but it appears that most of the schools in the district, and in the county, were included in this rehabilitation and repair work.⁷⁹ That scenario was repeated around Wyoming, from Cheyenne to Jackson, from Opal to Acme, from Jireh to Greybull, and from Otto to Fossil. The winter of 1933–1934 marked a busy year for the schools of Wyoming, not just for students sitting at their desks, but for buildings, grounds, and workers hired temporarily by the government to upgrade educational facilities.

Rural schools appear to have been in particular need of attention, and they received it. In Platte County, one project focused on the need for fifteen rural schools to be improved with CWA labor. In Niobrara County, the justification for working on the rural schools was explicit, and, again, reflective of the circumstances of life in rural Wyoming in the 1920s and 1930s: “These country schools are in a run down condition, the school yards are very uneven and unfenced.” At Manville, the application for CWA funding noted how rundown the school was and how desperately it needed repairs, but “due to the financial condition of the district, it was impossible to do the work.”⁸⁰

The improvements were often basic. The Bitter Creek School in Sweetwater County used CWA labor to add a drain and cesspool. At Upton, the CWA built equipment for the science laboratory, and perhaps even more noticeably, installed plumbing at the high school. One unidentified school in Teton County appears to have installed plumbing, a sewer system, and a sewage disposal plant. In Uinta County, the schoolhouse at Hilliard asked for, and received, the digging of a water well. It turns out that the well, twenty-three feet deep and four feet in diameter, was needed sorely, the “water for school children being hauled 3½ miles by school wagon.” Likewise at Washam, in Sweetwater County, where the CWA dug a short tunnel into the hillside to tap into a mountain spring to provide water for the school.⁸¹

School life appears to have been significantly upgraded by CWA workers at schools in towns and countryside alike. Playground facilities, often taken for granted, emerged now where there were none previously. At Keeline, five schools added playground equipment such as teeter-totters, merry-go-rounds, and swings. Superior’s students received a skating pond courtesy of CWA workers. At Grovont, in Teton County, the school district built a barn and fuel house to protect the students’ horses from rain and

78. Laramie: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 8, #19327, 19317, 19313; Guernsey: Reel 7, #18047; Casper Washington Park: Reel 8, #20701, 20699, 20697, 20693, 20689, 20685; Jackson: Reel 7, #18667, 18666, 18663; Green River: Reel 7, #18615, 18611; Casper Rotary Park: Reel 7, #17463, 17456; Casper Lions Club: Reel 8, #20738, 20736, 20732; Kemmerer: Reel 7, #17333, 17329, 17325; Riverton: Reel 7, #16734, 16728, 16724; Cheyenne: Reel 7, #17162.

79. Rock Springs schools: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #18605, 18603, 18599.

80. Platte County: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 9, #20119; Niobrara County: Reel 7, #17839; Manville: Reel 7, #17844.

81. Bitter Creek School: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 9, #20119; Upton: Reel 8, #19016; Teton County: Reel 9, #21477, 21488; Hilliard: Reel 7, #18700; Washam: Reel 7, #18598, 18592.

snow. Even the larger schools in the county seats and commercial centers felt the helping hand of the CWA. The Sheridan high school added a practice field newly leveled and landscaped by CWA workers. At Thermopolis, the high school steps, a hundred feet long, were raised. The flooring and stairways in the Lovell high school were torn out and replaced with concrete structures.⁸²

Aside from the skating pond, the teeter-totters, and the plumbing, the degree to which students at the schools appreciated and were enthusiastic about the new additions, facilities, and grounds is always subject to some degree of skepticism because these buildings were primarily associated with education, but it also needs to be remembered that the schools were not just schools. At the Cheyenne River School (and elsewhere too), the justification was plain: “this school house, in addition to being an institution of learning is used as a meeting hall by all people of that part of the county. It is badly in need of the outlined repairs.”⁸³ These were investments in education and in the community, not to mention the provision of employment during the winter months for neighbors without jobs.

There was always in Wyoming a fine line between schools and their communities, and the facilities for one often served the other. And sometimes a school would receive an addition that was intended for the whole community. In Casper the CWA launched a project to construct a new stadium for the high school, remarking, “There is at present no Stadium in Natrona County.” And the stadium for which they quickly developed plans and proceeded to build was as notable as the school itself. CWA workers had to clear away the old grandstand, fences, and other remnants and start with solid, underground footings, then install columns, and then construct the stadium itself, which had to be built in three sections. The stadium, not just a grandstand, had nighttime lighting, bathrooms, dressing rooms, concrete ticket sales booths, and used thirty thousand bricks for its construction. It was the pride of Casper and Natrona County.⁸⁴

And the communities, and the public buildings beyond the local schoolhouses, also put CWA workers to work. County courthouses were prime recipients of repair, renovation, remodeling, and redecorating. In Green River, CWA workers not only painted and renovated the exterior and interior but also the furniture and fixtures of the courthouse. Likewise in Sheridan County the CWA painted the outside woodwork, the cornice, and the dome of the courthouse, and the workers also reworked

the entire inside of the building, the commissioners noting with pride upon the conclusion of the project, “The work is completed and has made a very wonderful appearance in the building.” In Lusk, the courthouse and library were both about a decade old, but had, during the hard times of the 1920s, fallen into disrepair, and the CWA brought to both much-needed renewal. The CWA repaired and remodeled the city hall in Mills, reworking virtually everything from reshingling the roof to replastering the jail in the basement; “the building is now in first class condition,” reported the town councilors. Dubois received a new jail, without the city hall. The beautiful, but already aging, David Street Fire Station in Casper gained its share of attention when workers painted and applied a calcimine, chalky solution to the walls and ceilings. Meanwhile, at the south end of town, Casper’s armory finally found workers in the CWA projects to build a retaining wall. These workers used cobblestone so that the building would no longer be flooded by drainage from the adjacent hill; they also graveled and oiled the roadway and parking area, adding fencing while they were at it, since “the grounds were utterly useless and there was no available parking space.”⁸⁵

CWA workers converged on Wyoming’s courthouses, city halls, libraries, jails, fire stations, and public buildings of all kinds during the winter of 1933–1934, but most of these were already standing structures in need of repair although some new town halls or “community buildings” also

82. Keeline: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #17825, 17824, 17823, 17822, 17818; Superior: Reel 7, #18501; Grovont: Reel 9, #21489, 21495; Sheridan: Reel 7, #18236; Thermopolis: Reel 7, #16970; Lovell: Reel 7, #16315.

83. Cheyenne River School: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #17803.

84. Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 9, #20631. As with many substantial CWA projects, this stadium appears to have been completed (via transfer at the conclusion of the CWA) by the Wyoming Federal Emergency Relief Administration.

85. Green River: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #18425; Sheridan City Hall: Reel 7, #18241; Lusk: Reel 7, #17779; Mills: Reel 7, #17643, 17638, 17641; Dubois: Reel 7, #16741; Casper fire station: Reel 7, #17634; Casper armory: Reel 7, #17679, 17666, 17665, 17661, 17648, 17644.

appeared, such as the community halls at Recluse and Farson.⁸⁶ In Arvada, the town received a new community hall courtesy of the CWA. The CWA constructed a forty-by-sixty-foot log building on a concrete foundation, with a maple floor, stage, and additional rooms including kitchens or dressing rooms, and finished it with a rubble masonry fireplace. The community named the building Kendrick Hall in honor of the late senator and reported, “the entire community is delighted with this building.” In Shell, the CWA constructed a log “community house,” a building that was “equipped with a fine dance floor and the building will serve not only the people in the vicinity but will serve a large number from the entire county as this building is located [in the] recreational section of the Big Horn Mountains.”⁸⁷ Probably other communities built new community halls too, but in many the remodeling of their schools served the same function.

Several extensive CWA projects took place at state facilities rather than community sites. The state hospital in Evanston, the industrial institute in Worland, the state penitentiary in Rawlins—these and other institutions operated by the Charities and Reform Board needed help and received attention that had been too long deferred. In Lander, the State Training School, with facilities described as “archaic,” was substantially modernized, from driveway to electrical system and plumbing, and the plumbing was particularly in dire need of upgrading.⁸⁸ Similarly,

86. See the concise history of the Farson Community Hall, constructed by the CWA, which burned in 1936 and was reconstructed with insurance proceeds and WPA labor, in Young, “The Community Hall,” 73.

87. Arvada: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #18259, 18251; Recluse: Reel 7, #16385; Shell: Reel 7, #16242.

88. Lander training school: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #16825, 16829, 16838, 16839.

89. Sheridan industrial institute: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #18348, 18346, 18341, 18329.

90. “Review of C.W.A.: State of Wyoming,” 10–11.

the Wyoming Girls’ Industrial Institute in Sheridan was transformed with paint, plumbing, and additions. Again, the plumbing proved critical: “This project will very greatly improve the sanitary conditions at the institute, as the old sewer system was not of sufficient capacity or of design to handle the sewerage from this institution. The old septic tank was modernized so as to afford a sewage system from a portion of the buildings that were served by the former system.” CWA workers even added a basement to the existing administration building, a daunting task. They repaired the barn where the school raised and kept livestock and they added a recreation room.⁸⁹ Out of sight of most people in Wyoming, and too often also out of mind, these institutions received critical attention—at long last.

In at least one regard, the CWA projects in Wyoming appeared to function not just to preserve and enhance previous building efforts but even to pave the way to the future. What was often called the Air Age had dawned in the nation in the 1920s, and in the 1930s it was taking firm hold in Wyoming. Air travel still was not systematic and organized, as, for example, rail traffic was, and it certainly did not compete with other modes. And just as railroads did not reach every part of the state and just as highway travel was sometimes dependent on roads that were roads mainly in a nineteenth-century sense, some people in Wyoming looked to the skies as a way to overcome some of the barriers that had always hampered transportation in the state with its small, widely dispersed population. One limit to air traffic was basic: the need to land and take off in something other than a pasture or other cleared field. The Civil Works Administration sought to build new airports and to expand existing facilities. As a separate category, this was a major aspect of CWA operations, ranking just behind roads and highways in amount of expenditures. As Will Metz reported in his final summary of CWA activities in the state, “Future development in this state should be materially developed due to the great number of high class airports and landing fields made possible by the Civil Works Program. The airport work in Wyoming also ties in with the National airport program in an excellent manner.”⁹⁰

Some of those airport projects were predictable in their location and effort: they sought to expand and improve airports in communities like Sheridan, Rock Springs, and Buffalo, and the project at Casper brought to completion an ongoing effort that had been stymied by budget cuts for



From the Pony Express to the Air Age, Casper celebrated the dedication of its new airport, made possible by CWA workers in 1934. The accompanying brochure announcing the dedication of the new airport proclaimed that it also marked “the advent of air mail, [and] the new \$125,000 airport stands as a fitting monument to the new Era of Aviation, as well as the last word in air terminals.” It also boasted that the airport “is the largest federal relief unit of its kind constructed in the United States.”

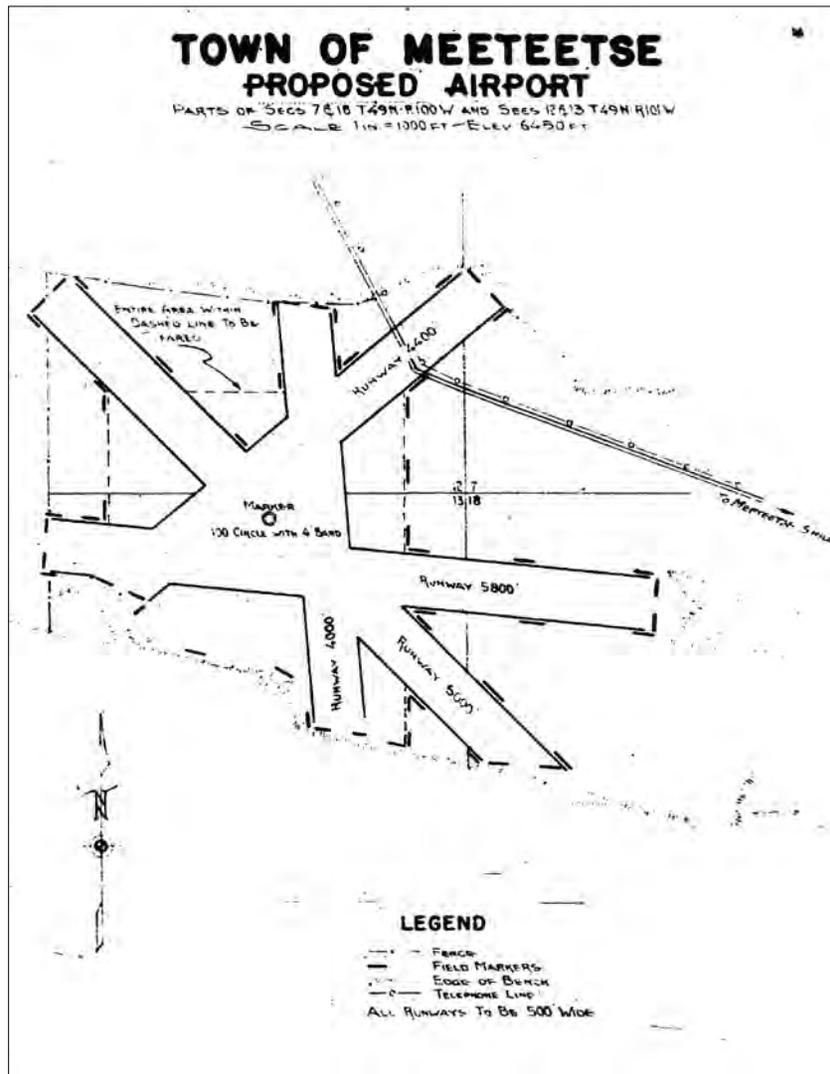
Airmail cover and brochure from the collection of Michael Cassity.

several years. Wardwell Field, north of town, was substantially remodeled, and when it opened in 1934 the city celebrated the accomplishment in a way that linked Casper’s modern air facilities with the area’s transportation history dating back to the Pony Express and the Oregon Trail in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. New airports appeared at Rawlins and Gillette and Laramie. In addition, airport work at Cody, Meeteetse, and Powell promised to open that region to air traffic. And a proposal for a new Frank Mondell Airport at Newcastle began to take shape under the CWA. The inauguration of airmail service around the state (Cheyenne, Rawlins, and Rock Springs were already part of the national east-west airmail route) was a specific goal of this airport construction, and soon communities all over Wyoming began to provide some form of airmail.⁹¹ That then provided the basis for new or improved local or regional air freight operations too. Two years after this CWA work, Albert Park, who had served as chief engineer for the Wyoming CWA, told of this accomplishment, saying, “Forty airports, some with hangars, were constructed.”⁹²

CWA airport construction was, sometimes, toward the simple end of the spectrum, and one standard plan was for “emergency landing strips” that mainly included just a couple of strips, ordinarily in an X configuration. These small fields rarely included buildings and offices and control

91. Sheridan: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #18246, 18242 and Reel 9, #21146, 21062, 21058, 21054; Buffalo: Reel 8, #20142, 20140, 20138, 20136, 20134; Rock Springs: Reel 9, #21201, 21198, 21194; Casper: Reel 9, #20605, 20603, 20601, 20599, 20595, 20590; Rawlins: Reel 8, #19555, 19553; Gillette: Reel 8, #19503, 19497, 19495, 19491; Laramie: Reel 8, #19283, 19281, 19279; Cody: Reel 9, #20798, 20892; Meeteetse: Reel 9, #20829, 20825; Powell: Reel 7, #20822, 20818; Newcastle: Reel 9, #21610, 21607.

92. Albert Park in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming* (Casper: National Emergency Council, 1936), 38-E.



While some airport facilities were minimal in design and materials, others were more substantial. Although this design for the airport at Meeteetse initially lacked a hangar, it also held the potential for growth.

Wyoming CWA Project Files, Reel 7, Document #20816.

towers, and the air traffic they handled was also fairly undeveloped. In fact, those simple landing-strip projects were installed by the CWA in a number of communities across the state, including locations where modern air travel seems an unlikely option. CWA worked to build, and sometimes expand, airports in places like Big Piney, Farson, Chugwater, Dubois, Glendo, Saratoga, Kaycee, and other small towns and landing strips made by “grubbing sagebrush and clearing field” in places like Lysite, Shoshoni, and Baggs.⁹³ Although it may seem in retrospect that some of these communities may not have been optimal locations for burgeoning air traffic, and thus not worth the investment of an actual airport, they also were communities that could be linked with others for air service of one kind or another. And generally the materials used in this simple construction were cheap—dirt cheap. The alternative, to reinforce the isolation that these communities sometimes experienced, may even have been substantially more costly in the long run.

But a number of the airports were indeed substantial. At these the projects took a priority position and the airports were the only category of project where the local sponsor did not have to provide all the materials; the federal government did that. And these airports—a good number of the forty that Albert Park mentioned—were substantially greater than the emergency fields that appeared at some places. Consider Casper’s Wardwell Field. The project summary described the work:

Project was instituted to remodel & improve Wardwell Field located about 6 Mi. north of Casper, to the extent of lengthening, widening and grading runways, building new runways and erecting a completely new and modern hangar with toilet & rest rooms, waiting rooms, luncheon service, shop, living quarters for crew & weather equipment. Building is to be of concrete brick and steel and as nearly fireproof as possible. The field proper

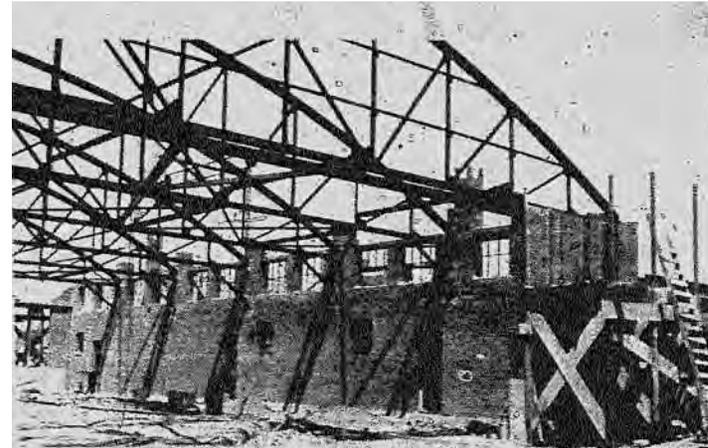
93. Big Piney: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 9, #22318; Farson: Reel 9, #21206, 21210; Chugwater: Reel 9, #20939; Dubois: Reel 8, #19765, 19759, 19755; Glendo: Reel 9, #20936, 20932; Saratoga: Reel 8, #19567, 19566, 19563; Kaycee: Reel 8, # 20152; Lysite: Reel 8, #19790; Shoshoni: Reel 8, #19789; Baggs, Reel 8, #19572.

has been laid out to meet all government requirements & will be well marked and graded & runways are such as will enable practically any type of plane to land under almost any conceivable condition. The hangar itself will be the only one of its type in the State outside of Cheyenne.⁹⁴

At Sheridan, a substantial airport project conducted by the Civil Works Administration had begun as what was termed a “local” project, meaning that it ranked in priority and allocations of funds alongside other projects like city streets, water systems, and schools. The project was suddenly closed, however, not to terminate the effort, but to transfer it to a different CWA program with different funding. In the process, the airport project at Sheridan was expanded. As the report on that project described, “the program was enlarged to embrace a much larger program on airports” and “this project was superseded and no further work was carried on. . . . This project is closed and the work on the airport is being carried on under project designated as AP-1.”⁹⁵ The change from a local project to an “AP,” or airport, project shifted it and others to the government’s focused effort to build airports, still using CWA labor. A clue as to why airports received such preferential treatment is evident in the benefits indicated by each airport in the state CWA report: “Commercial–Military.” That defined the “national” program of which each Wyoming airport was a part.

In addition to the “typical” construction projects undertaken by the CWA in Wyoming, there were the others, the distinctive projects, the projects where people needed to be put to work in less conventional ways. Several cemeteries were fenced and improved, such as the one in Cody, and the old cemetery at Green River was removed and the graves transferred to a site at the new cemetery—all with CWA workers. At Pine Bluffs, the water main was extended about a half mile so that it would reach the cemetery; to do so, CWA workers dug a five-foot trench and laid three-inch cast iron pipe, refilled the trench, and then placed four hydrants in the cemetery. The Sheridan County fairgrounds grandstands, fences, and buildings were painted, and “this improvement,” its sponsors said, “will provide employment for needy citizens and preserve frame construction.”⁹⁶

The Civil Works Administration moved in one bold new direction, even if just slightly. Recognizing that others besides construction workers were out of work, the CWA attempted to find work for them too, work that was



CWA construction, in progress, of hangar at Wardwell Field, north of Casper. “Review of C.W.A.: State of Wyoming,” Wyoming CWA Project Files, Reel 9, Document #22839.

appropriate for their skills, work where the community could benefit from those skills. To do this, the CWA transferred funds to the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), in the Treasury Department, which put artists to work decorating public buildings. In Wyoming, the director of the PWAP, Frederic Hutchinson Porter, served without pay and pushed the project forward. The result was three products, a mural in the library of McCormick Junior High School in Cheyenne, a decorative frieze in the same library, and some work inside the dome of the State Capitol, all artwork done by Libbie Hoffman and Jeanette Kaiser. The mural at McCormick was titled “The Reading of Shakespeare to Scout Jim Bridger,” a supposed

94. Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 9, #20605.

95. Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #18246.

96. Cody: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #17927, 17923, 17919; Green River: Reel 7, #18573; Pine Bluffs: Reel 7, #17198; Sheridan: Reel 7, #18116, 18117, 18111.



Sheridan also entered the world of airmail communication in 1934 following CWA work on its airport. Such work all across Wyoming was a high priority for CWA and FERA projects. More and more communities followed.

Airmail cover from the collection of Michael Cassity.



One of the earliest New Deal art projects in Wyoming was the Public Works of Art Project in which artists Libbie Hoffman, Jeanette Kaiser, and William Reed painted the state and territorial seals and other ornamentation and applied gold leaf to the ceiling of the dome in the State Capitol.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2012.

scene from Wyoming history. The capitol dome work included the territorial seal and the state seal as well as some application of gold leaf, work in which William Reed of Laramie joined Hoffman and Kaiser. The CWA participated directly in this effort since it required a separate project of constructing the elaborate scaffolding required to complete the artwork.⁹⁷

In some instances, CWA projects were not actually construction oriented, or even used to improve physical facilities of any kind. A Casper CWA project was developed to hire a stenographer for the local NRA activity; previously that work had been sponsored and financed by the local Chamber of Commerce. In an era before photocopy machines, CWA workers in Cheyenne made copies by hand of tract books in the land office. Other CWA workers gathered information, county by county, about farm tax delinquency, farm land values, and living and housing conditions. Intriguingly, in at least two counties, CWA workers were used to rehabilitate books so that they could be used again, and again. The Uinta County school district used the CWA to repair, clean, and rebind school books, perhaps an indication of how desperately in need the district was for textbooks or how desperately it needed to put unemployed people to work (although nationally, mending and rebinding books proved widespread). Likewise in Basin, in Big Horn County, “mending and recasing books” at the county library was on the list of projects alongside street and building construction.⁹⁸ The uses to which CWA funds and workers were put seem to have been limited mainly by the imagination of the local governments proposing them, and also by the nature of the needs in the community.

There was, however, one other project that was almost universally undertaken in the state, and that project was, in terms of its impact on the physical landscape, one of the most ephemeral, but in its impact on the social and political landscape of much greater significance. This was the ubiquitous CWA sign marking the projects. The Hoover administra-

tion had undertaken extensive public works projects and those projects had made a big difference in public buildings and structures and facilities, had put people to work, and had also generated some controversy. At the same time, however, those projects, expansions of existing programs rather than new, separate programs, were undertaken quietly and without great fanfare or publicity. They were, for that reason, often almost invisible as depression-fighting endeavors, and Hoover then and later received little credit for that work. Harry Hopkins, administrator of the CWA, made sure his program would not suffer the same lack of recognition. In county after county in Wyoming, the records show that local CWA workers were instructed to construct signs that went up at most project sites indicating that each was a CWA project. Workers were detailed to construct and paint signs measuring 4 feet by 6 feet that proclaimed the site as a CWA project. This, the documents say, was “in accordance with instructions from Harry L. Hopkins.” Natrona County’s report notes, “They were made and given to the supervisors of the different projects to be placed on the site of each project.” Actually the projects were so numerous that often they were erected only at the largest projects. In Sheridan, the CWA signs were placed “on twenty of the most important projects.”⁹⁹

The Civil Works Administration was never intended to be a permanent agency and its particular purpose was to see as many unemployed people as possible through the winter of 1933–1934. It clearly succeeded in that mission. A multitude of projects suddenly appeared all over the state, small projects, labor-intensive projects, projects responding to specific local needs (in terms of skills and numbers of unemployed people needing work and also in terms of public infrastructure needing development), decentralized projects, neighbors working with neighbors, building up their communities, building up Wyoming. By the middle of January 1934, CWA employment in Wyoming reached its peak of 10,738 workers. By the middle of February, the CWA began to reduce its activities, and its jobs, so that by the end of that month fewer than 6,000 workers were employed. In March, that number was cut in half again.¹⁰⁰ By the middle of April, the CWA was effectively out of business in the nation and in Wyoming.

As the CWA closed down, it could look upon its accomplishments in several ways, and not least was the extensive addition, improvement, and enhancement of public infrastructure—the roads, parks, water and sewer systems, public buildings, airports, and other tangible products of work



CWA sign at Cheyenne Municipal Warehouse, a brick building constructed by CWA workers.

“Review of C.W.A.: State of Wyoming,” *Wyoming CWA Project Files*, Reel 9, Document #22837.

97. Jacqueline B. Petravage, “A Study of Three New Deal Art Projects in Wyoming: Their Administration and their Legacy” (master’s thesis, University of Wyoming, 1972), 25–26; Herbert R. Dieterich, “The New Deal Cultural Projects in Wyoming: A Survey and Appraisal,” *Annals of Wyoming* 52 (Fall 1980): 32; Herbert R. Dieterich and Jacqueline Petravage, “New Deal Art in Wyoming: Some Case Studies,” *Annals of Wyoming* 45 (Spring 1973): 54–56.

98. Casper: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #17633; Cheyenne: Reel 8, #19078; Uinta County: Reel 7, #18716; Big Horn County: Reel 7, #16255.

99. See, for example, signs constructed in Natrona County: Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #17536, 17540; Sheridan: Reel 9, #21088; Washakie County: Reel 7, #18787; Laramie County: Reel 7, #17136.

100. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 31.

that were needed in the state and that were finally provided. But the significance of the CWA was greater than the construction projects themselves. Farmers and ranchers in the state deeply appreciated the improved transportation opportunities—thus the emphasis on roads in CWA activities—but the state administrator of Wyoming CWA operations, Will Metz, was especially sensitive to (1) the cooperation the agency received from the Wyoming business community and (2) the impact of the CWA projects on Wyoming business. At the end of the project, Metz reported that interviews had been conducted with “hundreds of the various firms in Wyoming” and that they reported increases in their business as a result of CWA projects: “Retail trade was probably increased about forty percent, on the whole, with food and clothing firms enjoying much higher increases. The immediate stimulation noticed when Civil Works was started and the drop in retail sales as CWA was tapered off, would indicate that CWA was the chief factor which brought about the improvement in business conditions.”¹⁰¹

If Metz overstated the impact of the CWA infusion of money into the Wyoming retail economy, it was only because his sources—Wyoming business owners—believed the CWA provided an important stimulus to their activity and reported exactly that impact to him. There is no reason to believe it was any less important than the businesses claimed. The CWA had a perceptibly large impact since it was, in truth, the first major work relief program to hit Wyoming communities since the start of the Depression four years earlier. And the CWA money was mainly spent on wages, which were then spent almost completely in the communities, rather than on materials that benefited businesses outside the state. As Metz pointed out, given that Wyoming was not an industrial state, “this state did not and could not gain by increased indirect employment as a result of CWA material purchases.” Some materials and tools were purchased for CWA

projects, of course, but Metz viewed the main beneficiaries of those purchases, even allowing for local vendors, as eastern manufacturers.¹⁰²

Nationally the CWA was subject to substantial criticism and in fact that criticism contributed to the termination of the program. Some found it to be a boondoggle—simply making work, unnecessary work, unproductive work, to put money into people’s hands. There was, for example, the apocryphal story of CWA workers wiring Washington headquarters asking for a new shipment of a carload of leaves since the leaves they had been raking from one place to another had become worn out. That probably never happened anywhere, and in Wyoming it is unclear which of the many projects might have been remotely considered boondoggles. Was it the cleaning and rebinding of textbooks for school children? Was it the improvement of a city park? Was it the painting of a city hall? Possibly, but there were clear benefits to each of these, not to mention the extension of sewer lines, improvement of roads, and construction of airports. Some found the CWA to be expensive, and indeed it was, although not nearly as expensive as the projects that the government contracted out with the PWA. And how expensive it was to *not* improve the roads and schools and water systems and similar public infrastructure elements is difficult to calculate.

There was finally another question, only hinted at in the calculation of the costs of the program: Was the alternative to spend no money at all? Will Metz grumbled about the high wages paid to CWA workers; he felt that in many cases they could have been employed for a lower wage. But even Metz recognized the reality of the situation as the program wound down, projects were terminated, and workers were laid off. At that point:

the relief rolls mounted in direct proportion to the reduction of the Civil Works employees showing that the evil day when these folk would have to depend on some kind of assistance, had only been put off during the continuation of CWA. It also shows that these people had reached bedrock as far as financial resources were concerned and in many cases had used up what credit they could get prior to the establishment of Civil Works, and that it was necessary that they seek relief assistance shortly after the CWA program ended.¹⁰³

Indeed, Metz also maintained that most complaints about the program in Wyoming came from the unemployed themselves: “They certainly con-

101. “State of Wyoming Review, C.W.A.,” 23.

102. *Ibid.*, 23–24.

103. *Ibid.*, 22.

sidered and freely suggested the opinion that the program was entirely inadequate to meet the whole situation. From this group came the greater part of the complaints.”

Perhaps in all these ways—physical construction, work relief to aid the unemployed, economic impact on Wyoming businesses and agricultural operations, limitations in duration and extent, organizational structure, and public support—the significance of the CWA can be seen. There is one final point too. The CWA was a short-lived program, one whose tenure was measured in months instead of years, one whose public recognition was in some ways limited to the signs that went up at the various project sites instead of in the cornerstones of buildings, and one where people who had been on the relief rolls previously found themselves back on the relief rolls after they were laid off the CWA projects. It also, however, endured beyond its brief institutional life as an example of what could be done given focused priorities of (1) putting people to work, (2) stimulating the economy, and (3) building up the public infrastructure. The CWA would prove to be the model for future work relief efforts, both those undertaken and those denied.

It should also be noted that during its short life, and with its abrupt termination, many CWA programs were never brought to completion, but that does not mean they were completely abandoned or forgotten. Those projects brought forth plans and in many cases started work that would be picked up by future work programs—whether they might be starting construction of something like the restoration of Fort Caspar, the development of recreational facilities at Guernsey Lake, the improvement of statewide parks and utilities, the building of new roads, or the construction of schools. The projects had a way of surfacing again and again for more work, for expansion, always with an eye to putting people to work in their home communities. The shadow of the CWA reached long across the state and into the future.

As the Civil Works Administration faded from public notice, as projects were completed, and as the CWA signs came down, the future of the New Deal itself seemed to be in question. A year after the legislation of Roosevelt’s Hundred Days was signed with great fanfare, the evidence of reduced unemployment in the towns and countryside seemed to fade, and the promise of economic rejuvenation and reform appeared a chimera. But some of the CWA projects continued, although perhaps as but a thread

of the larger lifeline that had already existed. Those that were unfinished but could marshal a compelling argument, or mobilize sufficient public support, were transferred to the Work Division of the Wyoming FERA around April 1, 1934, for completion, and a good number of projects were so transferred.

Most frequently termed FERA projects because of the federal program sponsoring the state projects, or occasionally SERA, for State Emergency Relief Administration, or just ERA or Wyoming ERA projects, the considerations and objectives were identical with those of the CWA. For that matter, in Wyoming the FERA program was administered by Will Metz, just as the CWA had been. Eri Hulbert reported on the Wyoming FERA’s Work Division, which essentially continued the CWA projects after the termination of that agency in April 1934. Since he was reporting in November 1934, the tabulations that he made were incomplete (the program would continue until replaced in 1935 by new federal legislation, and even then there was a gradual phase-out of some projects). His findings demonstrate that there remained a continuing effort to combat unemployment through work relief, although, as the increase in relief rolls shows, fewer people were put to work under the FERA than under the CWA. Yet the purpose was the same: “Although work relief is more expensive than direct relief in immediate dollars and cents its ultimate value in the preservation of morale, in the worth of the things accomplished, has been generally recognized in the present emergency throughout the country. The work projects in Wyoming for the most part have been entirely constructive and of a nature that has done much to preserve morale.”¹⁰⁴

Not all FERA projects were equal—some were small and some were substantial—and the numbers themselves are not always reflective of the size of project (as measured in work-hours or funds invested), but they do give a general idea of what was going on. The greatest number of projects conducted by the state FERA fell into the category of “public property projects.” This category included construction of roads and streets and related features (sidewalks, gutters, pathways); repair and maintenance

104. Eri Hulbert, *Report of the Study of the Public Welfare Services of the State of Wyoming* (Cheyenne: State Board of Charities and Reform, 1934), 110.

of public buildings; repair and maintenance of waterways and levees, and other flood control features; landscaping and grading parks and airports and other places; and building new public buildings, as well as a host of other projects. A total of 1,130 projects were counted in that group, and the second largest was that of “production and distribution of goods needed by the unemployed,” a category that included 995 projects. It is impossible to tell exactly how the State Board of Charities and Reform, which published the most detailed survey, defined “projects,” but it appears contextually that the projects themselves were extremely decentralized and local. But the total number of projects undertaken by the Wyoming FERA was impressive, both in scope (public buildings; production of goods; public health, welfare, and recreation; public education, arts, and research; housing, and more) and in number. By November 1934, the Wyoming FERA reported working on 2,488 projects and had spent nearly a half million dollars on them.¹⁰⁵ Very little beyond raw statistical data is known of these projects and more research is needed to determine how these projects operated and how they represented a continuation or departure from previous work projects undertaken by the CWA in Wyoming.

105. *Ibid.*, 113–14.

106. “State of Wyoming Review, C.W.A.,” 13.

107. Wyoming CWA Project Files Reel 7, #16489.

108. Hulbert, *Report of the Study of the Public Welfare Services of the State of Wyoming*, 115. In fact, these sewing rooms and canning centers served not just as employment centers but also as community resources. Other women, in addition to those who were heads of families, the same report said, “may, in community work rooms, make use of sewing machines, canning equipment, and other facilities which they have not available in their own homes.” Two years later Albert Park noted that “Some 700 women were taught how to sew, card, spin, weave, knit and do many things for themselves,” but his time/project reference could be the CWA, the CWA and FERA, or even early WPA. See Albert Park’s comments in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 38-E.

The sheer number of the projects may indicate something of their structure. As a general rule, it appears that the greater the number of projects, the greater the decentralization of the work structure—the more likely they were to be developed according to local needs, to respond to local pockets of unemployment, and to be locally administered. Conversely, a smaller number of projects with the same number of workers usually indicates larger projects over a larger area with greater centralization of control. In the case of the FERA in the state, and also with the CWA, the large number of projects undertaken suggests at a minimum that they were being located where the workers lived, and this was a program requirement: to put locally unemployed people to work on locally important projects.

Some of those FERA projects appear to have been focused on employing women. This was new—at least in some degree. In reporting on the CWA programs, Will Metz claimed that “no women’s projects or self help projects of importance were initiated under CWA.”¹⁰⁶ But some projects had been set up under CWA that were intended to help women. It may be that Metz, from an administrator’s perspective, did not consider these projects to be “of importance,” but a few existed. They were small and they were scattered, and they were virtually independent operations in each community where they existed. For instance, in Rawlins, the county established a CWA project where women were employed at “converting cloth into garments, to be distributed under relief program and for public institutions.”¹⁰⁷ This kind of project happened in a few other communities as well, but they were not incorporated into a single coherent administrative framework; they were independent, autonomous, local operations. That effort grew under the FERA in Wyoming, and projects were set up in various communities of the state so that women on relief who were heads of families “may work out their budgets.”¹⁰⁸

It was mainly after the CWA closed its operations that a more sustained and focused effort began to create work for women who needed employment, and this was “a continuous struggle.” As the Emergency Relief Administration picked up, as best it could, where the CWA left off, the state launched a Women’s Work Program in autumn 1934. By May of the following year, eight counties had work projects for women, but even so these relied on voluntary contributions of space and equipment from schools, service organizations, and individuals. At the same time, the

accomplishments were substantial, at least in terms of training workers: “Sixty-nine women were trained in all steps of mattress making, nine girls were thoroughly trained for maid service, 210 women previously unable to do their own family sewing learned renovating and plan sewing and about 120 (under well trained supervisors) were so trained that they could earn a living at the trade if the demand existed. Over 90 percent of all these workers received their first experience in working in group relationship.” The FERA also attempted to identify the women who needed this assistance, of whom an average of 770 were on the payroll. According to the information the ERA project gathered, 72 percent were widows; 16 percent were classified as “deserted”; and 12 percent were “single, self-supporting women.” The women in the program averaged three dependents each.¹⁰⁹

As aggressive and sensitive as the Wyoming FERA may have been to women’s issues after the closing of the CWA, most workers, men and women alike, on the CWA projects were simply unable to find work after the projects ended. Those workers who had been laid off from the CWA, a depressing development itself, returned to the relief rolls from which they had been recruited, and the direct relief efforts in the state (as well as the work relief projects) were, in 1934, largely funded by the federal government. Andrea Sundby Morgan reports in her master’s thesis on the New Deal in Wyoming that during this year the U.S. government contributed \$3,389,530 to relief activities in the state, while the state contributed \$24,223 and localities contributed \$64,922.¹¹⁰

The federal government continued to put money into other ongoing projects, like highway construction, that were intended to hire unemployed people. While highway construction seems to have dipped in 1934, federal funds (mainly PWA money), were applied in a formula where 85 percent of the cost was borne by the federal government, and those funds came to the state as grants instead of loans or advances on future appropriations; during road construction season, admittedly a limited period of the year in Wyoming, the federal government managed to put one-fourth of the men on the unemployment rolls to work.¹¹¹ But this was hardly a visible element of the assistance that many hoped for from Washington.

One FERA project targeted an especially critical and yet elusive problem associated with the Depression—the vast throngs of homeless people wandering the nation searching for jobs, for new opportunities, for anything at all to get by. Especially along the state’s highways and railroads used

by transients—scornfully termed hoboes, tramps, and bums—the relief burden seemed to be heavier, and the resources for assistance especially stressed, because of their presence. Governor Miller and others assumed that it was the presence of these homeless people from other states that, along with the drought, was responsible for exhausting the traditional resources of charity.¹¹² In fact, though, as Eri Hulbert discovered in his study of the problems of relief in Wyoming, the number of transients from other states cared for in Wyoming was about the same as the number of Wyoming residents who were receiving aid in other states.¹¹³ That number, in the fall of 1934, was over three thousand, although it was, by definition of the group served, constantly changing; at any one time in the mid-1930s the number of transients helped in the state was below a thousand. Even that number varied dramatically, climbing in the summers and dropping during the winters, and estimates also vary according to the source.

But what to do with them? Scorn was not enough, and even Governor Miller recognized that. The federal government provided relief through the FERA and established transient centers initially at Casper, Cheyenne, and Rock Springs and two camps at Mountain Home in Albany County and Mountain View in Uinta County. In each instance the homeless people who registered at these centers were provided some modest assistance in the form of temporary lodging and meals, but they were also expected to work, especially if they remained a week or more. So work projects emerged at each location. Of life and work in those camps, little

109. Margaret Sowers in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 38-F-G.

110. Andrea Sundby Morgan, “The New Deal in Wyoming, 1933–1938” (master’s thesis, University of Wyoming, 1969), 39. Morgan also notes, “Although not discontinuing to help itself, Wyoming in only one short year had become almost completely dependent on federal aid.”

111. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 36–37.

112. Larson, “The New Deal in Wyoming,” 256.

has been written or preserved, though hints emerge here and there. At the camp at Mountain Home, and also the camp at Pole Mountain, both in the Medicine Bow National Forest, transients were put to work on projects like those being developed by the CCC, but these projects were housed and paid by the FERA.¹¹⁴ By some accounts, a great many of the transients were youths. And one stark reminder of the shortcomings of prevailing stereotypes of the out-of-work and homeless comes in a note in one of the mimeographed camp publications that emerged. *The Transentinel*, published evidently at the Cheyenne transient center, included a section titled

113. Hulbert, *Report of the Study of the Public Welfare Services of the State of Wyoming*, 118. Hulbert also calculated that the average length of residency in the state of people on relief was seventeen years, and residency in the county fourteen years. Those on relief who had been in the state less than a full year accounted for 0.5 percent. Hulbert, *Report of the Study of the Public Welfare Services of the State of Wyoming*, 9. There are indications that the number of transients was greater, perhaps much greater, before the establishment of a nationwide relief system. Paul Hassler reports that in October 1932, the Salvation Army in Cheyenne aided some 20,000 transients. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 16.

114. Paul L. Armstrong, “History of the Medicine Bow National Forest Service,” WPA Collections, subject file 1550.

115. Mabel Stanley, ed., “Woman’s Page,” *The Transentinel* 2 (no. 1) [undated but probably 1935]. A small collection of these newsletters can be found in the WPA Collections, subject file 1610. In an ironic twist, when many relief functions were transferred to the state, the editor listed for *The Transentinel* was no longer Will Metz, the head of FERA in Wyoming; it was Governor Leslie Miller.

116. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 61.

117. “Drought Aid Work Supports 1,600,” *New York Times*, July 25, 1934.

118. Hassler, “Some Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1929–1934,” 61.

“Woman’s Page.” That page reported from “the Girls’ Shelter,” although it too remained frustratingly opaque on circumstances for the female part of the transient population.¹¹⁵ It does appear that the women in the camps were assigned laundry and kitchen duties.

Most FERA projects were small and scattered, although important to those who used them and those who built them. Because of the drought’s severity, the FERA drilled wells that could be used by communities or neighborhoods. One account details the construction of a well for the town of Sundance.¹¹⁶ Residents of Sundance as well as the surrounding ranchers used that well, and that communal pattern seems to have been followed all over the state. *The New York Times* reported fifty such wells in Wyoming as of July 25, 1934, and more were doubtless drilled after that.¹¹⁷ Other projects were also included in drought relief, but again, that work was labor intensive—putting people to work. As Hassler observes, by June 1934, “of the \$208,668.16 [spent on drought relief], only \$10,635.75 was spent on materials.”¹¹⁸ By the end of 1934, however, it was impossible to tell what direction work relief would take in the future. The most effective program, the Civil Works Administration, had been shut down. And the system that emerged in its aftermath seemed to be without a compass.

Searching for Direction: 1934

As 1934 came to a conclusion, there was no clear direction in which Wyoming was going or where the New Deal was headed. There were only clues, and they were sometimes contradictory.

One of the most visible developments of 1934 was notable both for what it was—and for the exception it represented to the otherwise prevailing pattern. The Public Works Administration held out great promise for improving the nation’s public facilities and also for putting the unemployed to work, but the PWA had also followed such a narrow, restrictive path that the promise seemed to fall short. Vast public power projects, like the Casper–Alcova/Kendrick Project, were years away from fulfilling their promise. But in 1934 a slight shift seemed to emerge in PWA policy and priority, at least insofar as Wyoming was concerned. The University of Wyoming had a list of buildings needed for the campus, and in fact since the 1920s had planned to add some of these buildings, but the onset of the

Depression dashed those hopes and set aside the plans. The unfolding of the New Deal in 1933, however, gave new life to those hopes and plans.

In December 1933, the UW Board of Trustees applied to the PWA for a loan and grant to construct a new auditorium and liberal arts building on the campus at the west end of Prexy's Pasture, or, as it was then known, "the open range." They also requested permission from the legislature to issue bonds to support the loan. While the legislature was willing to authorize the indebtedness, the technical, legal right of the university to proceed proved more contentious. Wilson Clough, an English professor at the university at that time and author of a fifty-year anniversary history of the university, observed that the officials in Washington (perhaps the tight-fisted PWA advisory board that proved reluctant to fund many projects) disputed the university's right to pledge future income from its land for building indebtedness. The case went to court, and in June 1934, the Wyoming Supreme Court decided in favor of the university. After intense effort by the president of the university, Arthur Crane, and Senator Joseph O'Mahoney (who had been appointed in December 1933 to fill the unexpired term of the recently deceased John Kendrick), the PWA approved a loan and grant for the construction of what was known then as the Liberal Arts Building, later the Arts & Sciences Building.¹¹⁹ Victory, at long last, both symbolically and legally, came in 1934 even though not a stone had been placed for the new building.

Construction would not begin until 1935, but its significance was apparent before the cornerstone was laid. This building upon completion would be the largest and most impressive on campus, and it represented a turning point for the university in terms of its expansion after years of financial strain, diminished enrollment, and general contraction and, for that matter, it also represented a shift in the direction of physical growth of the campus. As Clough observed, with the construction of the Liberal Arts Building, "the center of the campus definitely moved eastward, and the 'open range' took a more central position."¹²⁰ The project was expensive from the perspective of the university, with federal funds of \$300,000, including \$83,600 as grant and the remainder as loan, but the project was much, much smaller than the huge projects for which the PWA was known.

In a way, the approval of the Liberal Arts Building seemed to typify the dilemma of the New Deal in the state. People were delighted to receive the

support for the project, and they were grateful that it came. At the same time, though, they were resentful that such a fight had to be waged to secure it. Plus, until ground was broken in 1935, the main people put to work by the project appeared to be lawyers, people who, at any rate, were not recruited from the relief office. If anything, there was great uncertainty hanging over the landscape. And that uncertainty increased. When autumn came in 1934 and highway workers fell from the employment rolls back onto the unemployment lists, when drought relief efforts gave way to clearing snow, and when the political campaigns for the election of 1934 heated up, there was no way of knowing exactly what the future would hold—in Wyoming or the nation.

Several factors were at work to reshape the political landscape. One was that a great many people had, in fact, been rescued from dire circumstances by either direct relief or work relief in the year and a half since the launching of the New Deal, and those people often appreciated the programs that helped them out. There were others—merchants on Main Street, farmers, ranchers, educators, city, state, and county workers, and anybody who had an interest in the economic activity of their community—who also benefited directly or indirectly from the increased purchasing that the federal programs made possible. But there were others who had serious concerns about the changes taking place. Ranchers, in particular, resented the regulations that accompanied the assistance they received. And, although Roosevelt had actively courted, and responded positively to, the largest business interests of the nation, by 1934 the same people and businesses had broken with the president and begun fierce attacks. As is commonly observed, by 1934 Roosevelt had thwarted the radicals who were calling for fundamental changes to capitalism, and the business leaders were grateful for that, but to the business leaders it appeared that now Roosevelt himself was the threat to their power. Plus, the economic recovery that had begun seemed to flag during the summer and fall of 1934.

119. Clough, *A History of the University of Wyoming, 1887-1937*, 164.

120. *Ibid.*

But there were other critics of the New Deal too, such as those that Metz identified for their criticism of the CWA, those who felt that the CWA did not provide enough jobs for long enough. In fact, there was growing sentiment in the nation pressing for more help for the unemployed, for stronger action to fight the Depression, and that sentiment moved well beyond the inadequacies of specific programs to the structure of power and wealth in American society. Huey Long, U.S. senator from Louisiana, was growing in popularity for his attacks on the Roosevelt administration and for his proposal for the government to provide guaranteed annual incomes for those at the bottom to be paid for by taxes on those at the top. Long had been a supporter of Roosevelt, but he launched a sensational indictment of the New Deal when he felt the president was too responsive to business interests; that indictment, and his large following and political power—and his potential as an important presidential candidate in 1936 who could pull electoral votes away from other candidates—grew every day. Both Democrats and Republicans were frightened by Huey Long’s popularity and possible candidacy. Others, like Dr. Francis Townsend, who

recruited millions of seniors across the nation with his Townsend Clubs, called for monthly pensions for older people (anyone over sixty) to be paid for by taxes on business transactions. The Townsend Clubs in Wyoming were particularly noticeable and popular, and they appeared often on the front pages of a number of the state’s newspapers. Governor Miller was especially stung by the power of the Townsend Clubs in the state, writing in his memoirs that there were a number of chapters in Wyoming and that “the movement accounted for a large block of votes and apparently I must have lost about all of them on election day.”¹²¹ And there were others who were equally vocal, some more popular than others, in their assessment of the limitations of the New Deal’s approach to depression, unemployment, and social structure.¹²²

For that matter, the administration itself was beset with rifts, especially between the advocates of centralized planning and the proponents of decentralization and competition in the economy. The New Deal was reaching a crisis, although that crisis was slightly concealed at the polls in November. When votes were counted, Wyoming, as with much of the nation, went overwhelmingly Democratic, electing Leslie Miller governor to a full four-year term, Joseph O’Mahoney to a full term in the U.S. Senate, Paul Greever to Congress, and all the Democratic candidates for state-wide office besides governor. The legislature was firmly in the hands of the Democrats as well.

One should be careful in viewing this as a landslide endorsement of the New Deal, however, since, first of all, the New Deal programs were hardly a unified whole, containing disparate and conflicting objectives, and, second, from Governor Miller on down, the elected state officials often were as critical of Washington as they were of their Republican opponents, and being members of the same party had never been a guarantee of uniform views. Probably the only things that the victorious Democrats, and the majority that put them into office, could agree on was that they would not necessarily follow government policies that protected the interests and profits of business above all else and that federal programs and projects that put people to work and improved communities were helping. And that, in itself, was an important signpost for the future.

121. Leslie Miller, “Autobiography of Leslie A. Miller, Governor of Wyoming, 1933–1939,” 234. This autobiography was never published, despite the efforts of Miller to find a publisher, and T. A. Larson at the University of Wyoming assisted, unsuccessfully, in that effort. This is a carbon copy of a typescript and is found in the T. A. Larson papers in the American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

122. See on this especially, Carl Hallberg, “The Socialist Party in Wyoming, 1902–1940,” *Annals of Wyoming* 81 (Summer 2009): 13–47; *tion and their Legacy* (master’s thesis, University of Wyoming, 1972), 25–26; Herbert R. Dieterich, “The New Deal Cultural Projects in Wyoming: A Survey and Appraisal,” *Annals of Wyoming* 52 (Fall 1980): 32; Herbert R. Dieterich and Jacqueline Petravage, “New Deal Art in Wyoming: Some Case Studies,” *Annals of Wyoming* 45 (Spring 1973): 54–56.

An Expanding New Deal and Wyoming

1935–1938

FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT had been president just under two years when he shifted the course of his administration. With the nation still ravaged by the Depression, with demands growing for urgent action by the federal government to meet the undeniable needs of those experiencing hardships of all kinds, with the blistering criticism of business interests directed at some of the programs of his administration despite his efforts to cooperate with business, and with a fresh victory of his party in the 1934 elections, the course for the future was far from clear; but in 1935 the president firmly moved away from some of the core programs, policies, and approaches of his first two years. There was not a coherent body of proposals presented to Congress that spring (not that the proposals of the Hundred Days of 1933 had been consistent and coherent either), but there was an unfolding of policy proposals, executive orders and announcements, and legislative enactments that spelled out the general contours of what would become known by historians as the Second New Deal.

Those contours included at least two components. (1) The Second New Deal would be more aggressive in its effort to put unemployed Americans to work, including on federal projects. The success of the Civil Works Administration, despite the criticism of some business interests, was not lost on either the millions of down-on-their-luck workers who had found employment over the winter of 1933–1934, the communities that needed work performed, or, for that matter, the merchants whose sales were boosted by people with money to spend. And the officials in the Roosevelt

administration who followed the fates of the unemployed also contemplated some way to renew that effort, and to do so on a larger scale. (2) Where the First New Deal went out of its way to accommodate business interests by sharing vast, centralized planning and decision-making with the largest businesses in the National Recovery Administration, rescuing the largest banks and often sacrificing the smallest in the banking restructuring, and responding to the commercial farm organizations like the American Farm Bureau Federation in the writing and implementation of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, even at the expense of the smallest, subsistence operations and the tenants on the large operations, the Second New Deal would be more critical of business leaders and policies that benefited only the business community.

The Second New Deal had its limits, and one must avoid the facile conclusion that Roosevelt and his administration moved away from capitalism in the Second New Deal. Sentiment in favor of large-scale restructuring of the social and economic order continued to grow, but Roosevelt simply refused to move in that direction. The president actually headed off the growing political pressure for redistribution of wealth by revising the system rather than dumping it. He seldom questioned the legitimacy of big business in modern America; and he only modestly sought to redress the imbalance of power that big business held in the political economy. As historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., expresses it, the question was not so much whether there was to be a partnership between business and gov-

ernment, but which was to be the senior partner.¹ That was one limit, a self-imposed one, in Roosevelt's range of choices. An additional limit to his course was equally self-imposed, and that had to do with government spending. When Roosevelt ran for president in 1932 he had attacked the reckless spending of the Hoover administration and promised to balance the budget; his strong desire for a balanced budget would limit how much he would allow the government to spend, and it also put him at odds with the adherents of deficit spending, the Keynesians, as a means for the government to move the economy out of its Depression mire. Even though in the Second New Deal Roosevelt launched new programs to meet crying needs, and thereby shifted direction somewhat, he did not reverse course or turn a sharp corner.

The Second New Deal

On January 4, 1935, Franklin Roosevelt hinted at the direction he wanted the government, and the nation, to move, although one must always be careful to qualify anything that Roosevelt did because there would be exceptions and hedges on his own part—perhaps that tendency to waiver and compromise was the real consistent theme of the Roosevelt administration.² On that day, Roosevelt delivered his State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress and outlined his proposal for change. Despite the efforts of the first two years of his administration, Roosevelt said,

1. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, vol. 3: *The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 212.

2. See, for example, Schlesinger's observation that "Roosevelt still seemed early in 1935 to be drifting back into a pro-business policy," and Schlesinger's documentation of these concerns among those around the president. Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt*, vol. 3: *The Politics of Upheaval*, 212.

3. "Text of the President's Message Read by Him to Congress," *New York Times*, January 5, 1935. The following quotations from the State of the Union message can be found in this transcript.

"the stark fact before us is that great numbers still remain unemployed." Government handouts were not the answer, and "to dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit. It is inimical to the dictates of sound policy. It is in violation of the traditions of America. Work must be found for able-bodied but destitute workers." So what to do with the five million unemployed people on the relief rolls? Some of these people, about a million and a half, were unemployable, people who for various reasons could not support themselves, but the others could work and wanted to work. "This group was the victim of a nationwide depression caused by conditions which were not local, but national. The Federal Government is the only governmental agency with sufficient power and credit to meet this situation."³

Roosevelt proposed a "single new and greatly enlarged plan" to undertake emergency public works in the United States, something that went beyond the normal building operations of the government. This new plan would operate according to set principles, including the following: the work should be useful and make a permanent contribution to the nation; it should be compensated more than relief provided but less than private employment; the projects should be selected so that they could use a large percentage of direct labor; the projects should preferably be those in which the government would get its money back over time; the projects should be selected and planned so as to compete as little as possible with private business; the projects should provide work to those needing it until private opportunities were available; the projects should be undertaken in areas where they would meet the unemployment needs of the nation and should be coordinated by the National Resources Board.

The kinds of projects Roosevelt had in mind he indicated but only broadly: work would be done in "clearance of slums, which for adequate reasons cannot be undertaken by private capital; in rural housing of several kinds, where, again, private capital is unable to function; in rural electrification; in the reforestation of the great watersheds of the nation; in an intensified program to prevent soil erosion and to reclaim blighted areas; in improving existing road systems and in constructing national highways designed to handle modern traffic; in the elimination of grade crossings; in the extension and enlargement of the successful work of the Civilian Conservation Corps; in non-Federal work, mostly self-liquidating and highly useful to local divisions of government, and on many others

which the nation needs and cannot afford to neglect.” He called this, “an American plan for the American people.”

While Roosevelt acknowledged that there were more people unemployed than the 3,500,000 capable workers on the relief rolls, that there were others who were out of work but had not yet been reduced to seeking relief, he also estimated that putting some people back to work on government projects would benefit many more given the indirect effects of the projects—the purchasing of materials and equipment and then the expenditures of the money earned by the people employed on government projects.⁴ All in all, his proposal suggested that work projects much greater in number and scope than those previously undertaken would be essential to this new phase of the government’s response to the Depression. It also indicated that the straight relief functions, the handing out of money, would be coming to an end as a function of the federal government: “the Federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief.” That meant, in turn, that the Federal Emergency Relief Administration would be closing down, to be replaced with a different agency, one with a different mission. The promises were tantalizing and the details were not yet determined, but it was clear that a large change was underway.

Over the next few months the administration hammered out its new program and worked with Congress to mobilize support, but the details remained elusive. For that matter, on April 8, 1935, when Roosevelt signed a joint resolution of Congress appropriating funds for relief, a critical and symbolic moment, much about the program was still vague, even in the president’s mind. What was clear with that signature, though, was this: Congress had just authorized the single largest appropriation in the history of the nation, had approved allocating nearly five billion dollars (\$4,880,000,000) to some kind of work relief program, and that work relief was supposed to put an end to “the business of relief,” in other words, to end the dole.

The president met with his two work relief administrators, Harry Hopkins and Harold Ickes, and received conflicting advice and recommendations. The conundrum facing Roosevelt was whether to follow the Ickes approach of very large, very expensive, and also very slow, projects or the Hopkins approach of lighter, faster projects, although those tended to be more vulnerable to charges of boondoggling and even corruption as political hacks pressed for specific projects or employees. There was more to the

issue than the different individuals, although their program histories also reflected their different personalities, and the relationship between the two men, and their approaches, though complex, was intensely competitive. By the end of April Roosevelt had made up his mind, and he told yet another adviser, “Ickes is a good administrator, but often too slow. Harry gets things done. I am going to give this job to Harry.”⁵ On May 6, 1935, Roosevelt signed an executive order creating the Works Progress Administration—the WPA—and it was to be directed by the FERA administrator and former CWA director, Harry Hopkins. Roosevelt wanted jobs and he wanted them fast.

This did not settle the issue, of course. The PWA was still around, and it was by no means clear which projects would be undertaken by the PWA and which by the WPA. Ickes and Hopkins bitterly fought against each other for funds, for projects, for presidential favor, and for everything else too. And it was not just a matter of turf competition; it had to do with how they dealt with fundamental issues. One difference was that the two job programs had different approval processes. They would both have to draw upon the same pot of money, even though the pot was exceptionally large, but the selection and approval process for the WPA projects would be substantially smoother than for the PWA projects; all projects had to be approved by the Advisory Committee on Allotments, a committee that liked to study and debate each and every project meticulously, representing a continuing hurdle for the PWA with its singular, complex, large projects, but the multitude of smaller WPA projects would be lumped together in broad categories instead of each individual local project going before the committee. Nationally, the PWA projects were much, much larger; drawing the line between large and small, however, proved delicate. The WPA and the PWA ultimately developed an agreement, approved by the president, that construction projects requiring no loan and costing less

4. “Roosevelt to Make Jobs for 3,500,000 now on Relief; Pushes his Social Program,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1935.

5. Roosevelt was quoted by Raymond Moley in Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt*, vol. 3: *The Politics of Upheaval*, 344.

than \$25,000 would fall within the mandate of the WPA, while the more expensive ones would go to the PWA. In fact, correspondence indicates that regional PWA officials routinely forwarded small projects to the Wyoming WPA for consideration; presumably, WPA officials reciprocated and sent large proposals to the PWA.⁶

Aside from the administratively unenforceable rule of thumb giving big projects to the PWA and smaller ones to the WPA, there were other differences that mattered. One was especially notable. The PWA generally contracted out its construction projects, and the contractors hired the people they needed and wanted; often these were highly skilled laborers who sometimes left other jobs to hire onto the work project. On the other hand,

6. See, for example the correspondence in the Wyoming WPA Projects Files, Planning and Control Section, Project Folders, National Archives and Records Administration, Reel 107, OP 65-83-272, Document #7391. These essential and voluminous files will be referenced simply as Wyoming WPA Project Files. An understanding of the organization of these reels of microfilm, acquired by the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, is essential to their use since they are nowhere indexed and require sometimes extensive browsing to find a particular project. The folders are arranged by Official Project (OP) number. Each project file includes proposals, correspondence, and other documentation on the project. While the projects are generally numbered sequentially (with some exceptions to the sequence), in some instances projects will be revised and assigned a different project number. This means that seeking a particular project is often difficult. Fortunately, most sheets in the files are stamped with an independent document number and that helps locate not just the particular project but the relevant documents within that project file; as the reels of documents go on, however, the document numbers are dropped. As a consistent and precise method of citation I have used the reel numbers and individual document numbers in the WPA Project Files on microfilm when possible.

7. See the distinction between “force account” projects and contracting out the projects developed by Jason Scott Smith at a number of points in his *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933–1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46, 69, 96, 103.

8. Schlesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt*, vol. 3: *The Politics of Upheaval*, 349.

the WPA generally used “force account” construction, an administrative arrangement that meant the government hired and supervised workers directly for specific projects, and those workers largely, but not exclusively, came from the relief rolls (a general ratio of 90/10 was the standard).⁷ This further implied differences in wages paid, skill levels needed and found, and political support. In addition, the WPA could be more flexible in awarding projects since it could use grants instead of loans (which the PWA required) to enable recipients to participate in the programs they sponsored.

There was much at stake in the rivalry between Hopkins and Ickes. The conflict between them was never really resolved, but it soon became clear how it would play out. Roosevelt called a meeting with the two men and some other advisers to determine how to divvy up the \$4,880,000,000. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., summarizes the meeting: “For Roosevelt the determination to employ as many men as possible from relief rolls with as little as possible cost per man remained decisive. A months’ employment on WPA cost \$82; on a PWA project \$330; and the secondary employment generated by PWA did not ordinarily reduce relief rolls. Of the total appropriation, Ickes found that he was coming out with less than \$500 million. It was a rout.”⁸

Such was the direction the Second New Deal was taking.

One explicit goal of establishing the WPA work program was removing the “employables” from the relief rolls and also eliminating the federal management of relief through some kind of dole. This indicates another element of the context in which the work program of the WPA was established. In order to get the federal government out of “the relief business” something would have to be done with the relief rolls. Not everybody would be employable; some were dependent on the relief system because of their age, because of their disability, or because of some other circumstance. These were the “unemployables.” Two systems were thus devised to address the needs of those people. One was the system of Social Security, a federally administered program that provided modest pensions to people once they reached the age of sixty-five (at least initially). Far different from the proposals of others, like Huey Long who was shocked by the extremes of wealth and poverty in the nation and urged a redistribution of wealth, and like Francis Townsend who called for old age pensions funded by a national sales tax, the Social Security system as enacted in August 1935

would be financed by a tax on workers themselves and a tax of an equal amount on their employers, thus a technically regressive system that held the potential of reducing wages and consumption in the Depression.⁹ Moreover, Social Security benefits would be distributed according to past earnings rather than present need. The other part of the relief system was transferred back to the states, albeit supplemented by federal grants.

The WPA was one part of the new system of work relief being established in 1935, but there were others. Some of the Emergency Relief Act of 1935 (with its \$4,880,000,000) funds went to other agencies. One was the National Youth Administration (NYA). Roosevelt created the NYA by executive order in June 1935 in order to better meet the needs of the nation's unemployed young people. Although some FERA funds had been provided to universities previously, to be used for hiring student workers on campuses, education was often overlooked and the needs of students neglected. Huey Long had criticized the Civilian Conservation Corps, in fact, arguing that while the CCC preserved the nation's natural resources by employing young people, it just put them to work; it did not provide them with essential skills for their lives and careers. He urged the creation of scholarships to assist the same group of people. The NYA would do this but also provide help of a broader nature to the youth of the nation, and these young people would be drawn from the relief rolls.

Another agency created in 1935 reached out to the rural poor. Rexford Tugwell, who had been especially influential in creating the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, had anticipated some relocation of the farm population. In his view, the future belonged to large commercial agricultural operations, those that adopted the structure, goals, and methods of industry. This would doubtless entail the consolidation of smaller operations, and the farmers and ranchers who were too small to compete effectively with the large firms would possibly need to move to towns to find work. But even with that expectation, the results of the AAA's efforts disturbed Tugwell since the bulk of the efforts of the agency, and of the Department of Agriculture, were directed at production control and the retirement of submarginal land—at the expense of sharecroppers, tenants, and farm laborers, and Tugwell wanted to help them. The president signed an executive order at the end of April 1935 putting several functions together into a new agency, the Resettlement Administration, with Tugwell as its administrator, charged with focusing on the problems of

the rural poor. The Resettlement Administration would purchase misused or depleted land and, it was planned, resettle the people onto better lands elsewhere; it would also provide assistance for drought victims, loans and supervision to help farmers and ranchers improve their practices, and loans for tenants to purchase their farms.¹⁰ The funds for this agency also came from the Emergency Relief Act.

The Rural Electrification Administration (REA) also came to life in the spring of 1935, once again by an executive order. While the urban centers of the nation became electrified, and then the smaller towns and villages behind them, individual farms and ranches may have had their own wind chargers or gasoline power plants to provide electricity, but few were connected to the power grid of the nation. The electric power industry was reluctant to extend lines into the countryside, and, on those rare occasions when they did, the costs to the customers were prohibitive, so the rural parts of the nation generally remained dark when the sun went down. There was no promise that this would get better so long as the market determined the allocation of utilities. The only alternative, if electricity was to become available at all, was for the government to assist, and Roosevelt had vaguely promised that assistance in his campaign of 1932. So the president created the REA in May 1935, establishing it within the Department of the Interior under the administration of Morris Cooke, the funds coming, of course, from the Emergency Relief Act pot.

Cooke tried offering the private power companies incentives to get them to extend their lines, but they did not budge, so he turned in a different direction. He developed the agency so that it would help local rural electrical cooperatives organize on a nonprofit basis, and then the REA loaned the cooperatives the funds with which to build the power lines themselves; the terms of the loans were attractive and made the power

9. On Huey Long, see Michael Cassity, "Huey Long: Barometer of Reform in the New Deal," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 72 (Spring 1973): 255–69; and Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); on Townsend, see Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 222–26.

10. Richard S. Kirkendall, *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966), 108–11.

lines affordable to people and places previously untouched by the power grid. In that sense, while the REA facilitated construction of power lines, it was not a construction agency; it was a lending institution and an adviser. Once the lines were built, the cooperatives then purchased power from whatever source was available, public or private. The following year Congress made the REA a permanent agency over the bitter protest of the power companies.¹¹ But power was on the way, slowly, to the farms and ranches of America's hinterland.

The list of legislation and executive order actions of 1935 is lengthy and was perhaps even greater than the more famous Hundred Days legislation of 1933. It included the above measures and more, but the agenda was also shaped by actions outside the White House and Congress. One of the hallmark agencies of the First New Deal had been the National Recovery Administration created by the National Industrial Recovery Act. A huge agency, the NRA sought to provide an institutional framework for business cooperation—suspending enforcement of the antitrust laws—and helped businesses set prices and production at profitable levels through the writing of codes of “fair competition,” and offered labor unions, vaguely defined, some degree of participation in the code-making process. The codes, once written, had the force of law when signed by the president. More than five hundred of these codes were so approved (depending on how they were counted, including subcodes, the number was sometimes multiples of this), each one governing practices in a specific industry.

Just because the codes were approved, however, did not mean that they were popular or that the framework was universally endorsed. Neither was the case, although there were pockets of support, and those who stood to gain from the codes obviously defended them. But many, from traditionalists like Herbert Hoover, to labor union advocates like Senator Joseph Wagner of New York, to antitrust proponents in the Justice Department, to consumer advocates, to share-the-wealth adherents, thought the codes

and the NRA that legitimized them deplorable. The “partnership” between government and big business (for it was the largest of the businesses that dominated the code-making process) seemed to many to be a one-sided partnership. The NIRA was set to expire in 1935, and the president was prepared to extend it with some modifications. Before Congress could act on it, however, the U.S. Supreme Court in May 1935 declared the main framework of the law—the code-making process—unconstitutional; according to the court decision, the law amounted to an unconstitutional delegation of authority—in this case to the private parties writing the codes—for making laws. Only Congress can make laws; the president and Congress cannot delegate that authority to others and certainly not to private individuals and corporations. The NIRA was dead.

Many said good riddance. Hoover, appalled at the wholesale transfer of governmental power to big business, had rejected the proposal for this system when presented to him by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, calling it “fascism.” He continued that criticism after the proposal was accepted by Franklin Roosevelt and written up as the NIRA and NRA:

This whole NRA scheme has saddled the American people with the worst era of monopolies we have ever experienced. However monopoly is defined, its objective is to fix prices or to limit production or to stifle competition. . . . These have been the very aim of certain business elements ever since Queen Elizabeth. Most of the 700 NRA codes effect those very purposes . . .

The codes are preventing new enterprises. In this they deprive America's youth of the opportunity and the liberty to start and build their independence. . . .

The whole concept of NRA is rooted in a regimented “economy of scarcity”—an idea that increased costs, restricted production and hampered enterprise will enrich a Nation. That notion may enrich a few individuals and help a few businesses, but it will impoverish the nation.¹²

Interestingly, the criticism of those on the other end of the conventional spectrum from Hoover attacked the NRA for much the same reason. When the Supreme Court, then housed in a chamber next to the U.S. Senate in the Capitol, declared the NIRA unconstitutional, one of the senators in attendance at the Court walked into the Senate and asked for a

11. D. Clayton Brown, *Electricity for Rural America: The Fight for the REA* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 35–66.

12. Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover*, vol. 3, 428.

point of order. Senator Huey Long had charged that the NRA constituted “the waiving of the antitrust laws, the placing of industries under codes, directorships, administratorships, the subjection of 125,000,000 American citizens, white and black, to the ipsi dixit of secretaries and sub-secretaries, negotiators and administrators in the conduct of affairs out of which they make a living.” It was then Long who announced the Supreme Court’s decision to the Senate: “I raise my hand in reverence to the Supreme Court that has saved this nation from fascism.”¹³

Thus died one of the real centerpieces of the New Deal’s inaugural efforts, but the mourning was almost universally light and brief. For one thing, the other important part of the NIRA, as originally enacted, was the creation of the Public Works Administration, and that measure was spared the court’s guillotine; it was separate in structure and thus exempt from the fatal delegation of authority provisions central to the NRA. Moreover, some “Little NRAs” were subsequently enacted to apply to specific industries (such as the 1935 Guffey-Snyder Bituminous Coal Stabilization Act for the coal industry). Finally, the weak labor provisions in the NIRA were strengthened in 1935, in the Wagner Act, which explicitly guaranteed the right of workers to organize for the purpose of bargaining collectively with their employers. The demise of the NRA also removed from Roosevelt’s agenda a major component of his unsuccessful effort to secure cooperation with the nation’s business leaders; that removal then helped guide the direction that he was moving in 1935.

The Second New Deal was not a completely consistent set of measures, but it was one that showed an increased commitment to addressing the problems of the unemployed, renewing the cause of greater social justice, and also using the power and resources of the federal government to improve the conditions of life in the nation for those who had been on the margins of the distribution of the amenities and necessities of modern civilization. This was, as ever, not a black and white issue, and compromise remained essential in virtually every measure enacted or signed into policy. Some parts of society remained in the shadows of official attention, but the tone of 1935 was significantly different from that of 1933.

In Wyoming, the new programs and new directions of the New Deal nationally added to ongoing programs already in place. The Civil Works Administration had closed down and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration continued on, but only as its operations were phased out.

Since the dismantling of the CWA, the FERA had sponsored some construction projects, sometimes those that had been started but not finished by the CWA, and there appear to have been some new ones as well. As a work relief operation, however, FERA in 1935 was being replaced by the WPA and, as a welfare operation, FERA in Wyoming was being replaced by the Wyoming Department of Public Welfare.¹⁴ The Department of Agriculture continued its course and, equipped with new programs, sought to transform the rural landscape of the nation. The Public Works Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps likewise continued into the middle of the decade and left a growing mark on the state. And the WPA organized and embarked on its ambitious program of putting as many of the employable unemployed workers to work. In the middle years of the 1930s, in the years of the Second New Deal, the agencies, programs, and projects of the New Deal reached into every part of Wyoming—socially, economically, and geographically—and that included parts that had been previously neglected.

Transforming the Rural Landscape

The Roosevelt administration’s approach to the problems of agriculture was based on two different perceptions of the problem at hand. One had to do with the economics of agriculture and the other with the condition of the land. Both of these converged into a series of measures that reshaped

13. Long’s antipathy to and criticism of the NRA is discussed in Cassity, “Huey Long,” 255–57.

14. The FERA operation in Wyoming had two functions, one a Social Services Division (including direct relief) and the other a Works Division, both under Will Metz, who had been director of the CWA in Wyoming and who would become director of the WPA in the state. See Eri Hulbert, *Report of the Study of the Public Welfare Services of the State of Wyoming* (Cheyenne: State Board of Charities and Reform, 1934), 16. Copies of this report, submitted in December 1934, are available at the Wyoming State Archives and the University of Wyoming libraries.



“Natural spring cleaned and fenced on land use project. Converse County, Wyoming.”

Photograph by Arthur Rothstein, May 1936, files of Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information, Library of Congress.

the agricultural parts of Wyoming. The economic aspect was evident in virtually every agricultural program because in those programs agriculture was defined first and foremost as a business. And that business, according to the New Deal, needed to be organized in a “modern” way, which is to say, in a way that took advantage of the economies of scale, specialization, and mechanization, in a way that would become more industrial in its configuration and purpose, structure, accounting, and objective—and also in a way very much different from how agriculture had been traditionally organized and practiced in Wyoming.

It was plain enough that Wyoming’s farmers and ranchers were in serious trouble in the mid-1930s and that the government needed to provide assistance. The programs launched with the AAA and the Drought Relief Program endeavored to provide that assistance through credit, loans, price supports, and a reduction of livestock and crops to increase the prices they would draw in the market. It was not plain, however, which farmers and ranchers should receive the help. Ultimately, the pattern was for the government to assist the more prosperous farmers and ranchers, even if that meant encouraging the smaller ones to move to town to find work. The loans that were offered required collateral that the neediest farmers did not have; the crop and livestock reductions through government purchases benefited especially those with the larger herds and acreages to reduce; the programs designed to make agriculture more profitable obviously helped the commercial operators more than the subsistence-level, relatively self-sufficient homesteader or farmer or rancher who operated a diversified unit and sold only a little, the small surplus beyond family needs. Perhaps the most articulate statement of this preference came from Will G. Metz, the head of the FERA and then the WPA in the state. In 1936 Metz traveled to Minneapolis to a conference on drought relief and took to task the others at the conference who had called for help for the small operators. Metz told the group: “Too much emphasis has been placed at this conference by other speakers on the plight of the small stockmen, whereas, to my personal knowledge, there are many hundreds of so-called ‘big stockmen’ who are equally, if not worse, affected by the drought, and for whom measures should be provided at once.”¹⁵

One of the major results of this set of policies was to encourage, in the ways that the economy and weather already were doing, the small operators and the agricultural laborers and cowboys to leave the farms and

15. Spring, *Seventy Years*, 154.

ranches for the city, hopefully there to find different employment. It was at this precise moment, 1935, that Wyoming reached its peak in the number of farms and ranches in the state (17,486, up from 16,011 in 1930 and 15,748 in 1920) and after that began an inexorable decades-long decline as the exodus to cities continued. The Resettlement Administration, beginning in 1935, hoped to soften the impact of this exodus and transition, but it did not reverse it.

The AAA and the Resettlement Administration focused their efforts on those parts of the state that had been most subject to deterioration. They offered loans to “destitute and low-income farm families,” they helped them develop plans for the future so that they would be independent once again, they developed water resources for livestock to use, and they developed land-use plans for whole areas so that the land could be put to the best use. On the other hand, these measures were undertaken within narrow limits. In 1935 Robert Peterson announced in Gillette that the Rural Resettlement Division “will immediately begin work upon long-term plans whereby a farmer is extended credit for buying necessary livestock and equipment and for paying necessary farm expenses with the view of establishing him on a self-sustaining basis with as much as five years to repay.” Peterson cautioned hopeful recipients, however, saying “the idea is to take care of a few clients well, rather than try to get out unsound plans for a large number of people and [he] asserted that the work would be slow.”¹⁶ The next spring, in the same area, Campbell County Agricultural Extension agent Floyd Dominy distributed applications for emergency crop loans for 1936; Dominy also advised caution since farmers were not eligible for those loans if they could borrow money from any other source, including from “an individual, production credit association, bank, or other concern.” He also advised farmers and ranchers that “the security for an emergency crop loan will consist of a first lien on the crop financed. Landlord[s] or others having an interest in the crop to be financed will be required to waive their claims in favor of a lien to the Governor of the Farm Credit Administration until the emergency crop loan is repaid.” The loans themselves were limited “and in no instance may exceed \$200 to one farmer.”¹⁷

One of the key instruments in determining who received a loan, and for how much, was the requirement to develop what was called a Farm Plan. This essentially was a ledger in which the agent sat down with the



Campbell County Agricultural Extension agent, Floyd Dominy. *Undated news clipping, probably from Gillette News-Record, August 1938.*

farm family and developed a budget to determine the income potential of the farm or ranch and through that process determine whether the family was qualified for a loan. Within the Farm Plan the key concept was that of “return on investment.” This was critical since by that standard the plan would calculate not just whether the family’s farm or ranch income was greater than annual operating expenses; it would also calculate the investment in the buildings and property, the “wage” to be paid to each member of the family working, the direct and indirect expenses of operation, and then determine if the farm or ranch would generate a profit above all expenses, including what the operators—the farm and ranch families—paid themselves, and whether that profit was comparable to what could be received if the money had been invested in another business. This substantially raised the bar for defining economic success. In the half year between September 1935 and April 1936, the Resettlement Administration

16. “Relief Farmers in County to Benefit,” *Gillette News-Record*, October 31, 1935.

17. “Farmers May Apply for Crop Loans Now,” *Gillette News-Record*, March 25, 1936

approved and accepted a total of 234 Farm Plans in the state. John Neale, the state director of the Resettlement Administration in Wyoming, anticipated a full case load of about four thousand farm families, but expected less than half that number to be prepared and accepted by summer of 1936; he cautioned, "I might say that at this time it appears unlikely that we will have sufficient money to prepare farm plans for all of these cases. I think our money will cover 14 per cent of the cases."¹⁸

The Resettlement Administration also provided emergency grants, and those grants, to people who could not get money from any other source, "are covered by work agreements allowing the client to work out grant advances on projects." In the spring of 1936, the Resettlement Administration had "probably somewhat more than a thousand men working on these projects."¹⁹ In those work agreements, individuals agreed to work out the amount granted on a local project. R. L. Spurlock, project manager for the Land Utilization Division of the Resettlement Administration, described one of those work projects that extended "throughout the dry areas of our

project" and consisted of developing stock water by constructing reservoirs and springs: "At the present time there have been 18 reasonably large stock reservoirs completed. Work has been initiated on 28 reservoirs in the area. These reservoirs are so located that they will furnish water in areas where, heretofore, the stockmen were unable to reach with their livestock during the dry seasons. Also there have been some 20 springs developed, which has increased the flow of these springs at least 70 per cent."²⁰

Spurlock appears to have been mainly talking about a large area of northeast Wyoming in the Powder River Basin where he was especially active in 1935 and 1936. In fact, many of the workers assigned to these projects were people whom he called "Land Use clients, or those people who have optioned their land to the Government; and Resettlement Clients, or those people who have received grants, loans, or some form of aid from the Resettlement Administration. The remainder of those employed are either Relief clients [people on the relief rolls], or under the heading of the 10 per cent allowance for non-relief labor." As director of Land Acquisition, Spurlock was purchasing the land of the "Land Use clients" for the proposed Thunder Basin project, and then he was putting people to work to make improvements on that land so it could be used for grazing.²¹

The development of water resources on the land was, in fact, a major endeavor of the AAA and of all other agricultural agencies in the state. Again, the projects were many and were extensive under the Department of Agriculture's Range Improvement Program. The county agricultural extension agents would pay ranchers 60 cents per acre for contouring their land, 50 dollars for digging out each spring or seep approved by the county, 15 cents per cubic yard of fill for constructing earthen reservoirs, a dollar for each linear foot of drilling or digging wells, and variable amounts for other activities such as water spreading—a crude form of irrigation that diverts, or spreads, intermittent channel water to adjacent fields.²² County agent Dominy in Gillette calculated his payments in the program at about 30 dollars per section of rangeland.²³

How well people responded to this "assistance" is hard to tell. Floyd Dominy, who personified much of this effort as county agent in Campbell County, was both imperious and well respected, at least in some quarters. He was young and brash, one or two years out of the University of Wyoming when he took his position at Gillette, and he did not stick to the shadows. "Campbell County was my kingdom. When I was twenty-

18. Report of John R. Neale, state director of Resettlement Administration, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming* (Casper: National Emergency Council, 1936), 27-B, C. This document is a compilation of status reports from each federal agency operating in Wyoming as presented in a meeting in the chamber of the Wyoming House of Representatives in Cheyenne, April 13, 1936. Copies are located in the libraries of the University of Wyoming and in the Wyoming State Archives.

19. Report of John R. Neale in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 27 C, D.

20. R. L. Spurlock, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 27 G, H.

21. "Thunder Basin Project OK'ed," *Gillette News-Record*, October 16, 1935.

22. "1936 Annual Narrative Report, Niobrara County, Wyoming, for Extension Work in Agriculture & Home Economics," appendix.

23. "478 Campbell Farmers Apply in Range Plan," *Gillette News-Record*, November 6, 1936.

four years old, I was king of the God-damned county,” Dominy told writer John McPhee years later. Dominy would later become the commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation and build, most notably, the Glen Canyon Dam. In various interviews and other reflections on his career, Dominy told how he got his start in the dam-building business in Campbell County as part of the Range Improvement Program. Even before he entered the range improvement business, though, Dominy established himself and his authority, and the government’s authority, in the new system of agriculture by means of the herd reduction program. According to McPhee, “He paid the eight dollars and shot the cattle.”²⁴

But Dominy was serious, energetic, and even unstoppable when it came to range improvement and getting people to build those improvements. McPhee writes that “ranchers got up at four in the morning, and sometimes Dominy was outside honking his horn to wake them. He wanted them to come out and build dams—dams, dams, dams.” Although McPhee says “Dominy and the ranchers and farmers built a thousand dams in one year,” Marc Reisner recorded Dominy saying that they built three hundred in Campbell County.²⁵ The actual number will probably remain uncertain, but a likely possibility, given other records, is a combination of the two figures: three hundred in a year and a thousand over three years. What is more precise is how Dominy accomplished this, paying as little as he did—less than the assigned wage schedule. “The government was paying farmers fifteen cents a cubic yard to move dirt. Hell, I wasn’t going to pay fifteen cents if it cost ten. I said to those ranchers, ‘I’m going to pay you cost—nothing more.’ Naturally, they bellyached. But with my relief allotment stretched further I could build a lot more dams.”²⁶ This was a form of work relief project in the New Deal that has often been overlooked.

It was certainly noticed and appreciated at the time, at least by the ranchers who remained and grazed the land. Again, R. L. Spurlock regarding his land acquisition effort:

The people remaining in the area that have not optioned their land to the Government and who are now in the stock business are very sympathetic toward this program. This is due to the fact that it makes possible an opportunity to lease land at a nominal fee, and also by the construction of reservoirs and the development of springs on that land, it gives them an opportunity to graze this land in seasons during which they have

heretofore been unable to graze. This office has been contacted recently by numerous stockmen, stating that they were very anxious that the Government continue the purchase of submarginal land and to set up, if possible, a land use plan in that area that would benefit not only the land, but each and every individual remaining on it.²⁷

As Spurlock indicated, the landscape was changing in a fundamental way as people moved out and livestock moved in. Those changes were consistent with the larger pattern being encouraged by the federal and state governments. Both governments made their plans and the direction of this transformation clear in 1936. In that year the Wyoming State Planning Board examined the circumstances of farmers and ranchers in the state and was especially concerned with the eastern part of Wyoming where, according to the board, erosion was prevalent and where the land had been abused. The problem was not drought, the board said, making clear its own bias; instead, the problem, according to the board, was “in some of these areas, conditions are due to very small farms rather than to natural disadvantages.” The solution, it said, was to eliminate crop farming except in particular areas, and it listed additional measures, including “increase of land holdings of stockmen who are now trying to make livelihoods on areas which are too small,” and “regrouping of population.”²⁸

24. John McPhee, *Encounters with the Archdruid* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 157. Floyd Dominy died in 2010. See “F. E. Dominy, Who Harnessed Water in the American West, Is Dead at 100,” *New York Times*, April 28, 2010.

25. McPhee, *Encounters with the Archdruid*, 158; Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1986), 226.

26. Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*, 226.

27. Spurlock, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 27-H.

28. State Planning Board, Wyoming, *Land Utilization: Preliminary Studies (Revised)*, February 1936, mimeographed document widely available, including copies at Wyoming State Archives and Coe Library, University of Wyoming, 13–14.



Drought Committee inspecting stock dam in Campbell County, August 1936. Photograph by Arthur Rothstein, Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

The “regrouping of population” was a euphemism for getting rid of the small operators.

About the same time that the State Planning Board made its assessment of the troubled parts of the state and proposed to thin the farms and make the remaining ranches larger, President Roosevelt appointed a high-ranking committee to look into the drought afflicting the Great Plains, from the Dust Bowl in the Texas-Oklahoma panhandles and into Kansas, all the way north to the Dakotas, including part of eastern Wyoming, and then to recommend courses of action to deal with it. The Great

29. “Drought Committee Gives Attention to Range Crisis,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, August 26, 1936.

Plains Drought Area Committee was not an average government committee at all; it included some of the foremost planners and decision-makers in federal land policy. The chair of the committee was Morris L. Cooke, administrator of the Rural Electrification Administration, and members included Henry Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture; Hugh Bennett, chief of the Soil Conservation Service; John C. Page, acting commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation; Francis Harrington, chief engineer of the WPA; Frederick Fowler, director of the Drainage Basin Study, National Resources Committee; Colonel Richard Moore of the Corps of Engineers; and Rexford Tugwell, administrator of the Resettlement Administration. Not all of the members conducted the tour of the Great Plains, but at least Cooke, Harrington, and Tugwell, and possibly two of the others, made the trip. Lewis C. Gray, an eminent soil scientist who was head of the land utilization division of the Resettlement Administration, traveled with the group and often addressed scientific issues.

This distinguished group examined firsthand the area of the Dust Bowl and beyond, traveling by automobile through the August heat from Texas to Montana and the Dakotas. As the group wended its way north traveling “the secondary roads,” Wyomingites read news accounts about the group and followed their path and their discussions with the people whose lands they visited. Increasingly it became clear that the committee had in mind a long-term plan, not just short-run improvements and changes.

When the committee reached Gillette, it held a public meeting to discuss with local farmers and ranchers the drought situation and how to address it. The crowd at the meeting was interested especially in pressing the committee about the need for the development of water resources for livestock. News accounts reported, “Members of the committee indicated that they probably would include the construction of new water reservoirs in their recommendations to the president.” While the number of livestock on the range had been reduced by the herd reduction program and shipments out of the area, and while some in the audience wanted to restore those depleted herds, the committee balked at increasing the herds at the time and obliquely suggested that the restocking of ranches was outside “the scope of the committee’s long range aims.”²⁹ The Drought Committee, before leaving the Gillette area, examined some of the range improvements, like reservoirs, that had been recently developed with work relief

(Right) The New Deal meets Wyoming's farmers and ranchers, 1936. When the Drought Committee traveled north from Texas and made one of its last stops in Gillette, it reviewed the various range improvement programs underway and met with farmers and ranchers in the area. The somber group in this picture of the Gillette town hall meeting conducted by the Drought Committee reflects the serious discussion at hand. The committee had bad news for the farmers in the area who would be moved off the land, many of them to the city seeking jobs, or onto work relief projects, but it had good news for the ranchers who would then be able to graze cattle on the land thus opened up.

Photograph by Arthur Rothstein, 1936, files of Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information, Library of Congress.

projects, talked with local ranch operators, and then moved on to Miles City, Montana, the next stop on this momentous journey.

The recommendations of the committee were becoming clearer as the meetings were held, as discussions continued, and as questions were asked. What was needed, the committee suggested in its informal discussions with members of the public at a number of points along the way, was effective land and water conservation, state land zoning laws, an improved system of credit for farmers, and practical irrigation and reclamation projects. They were especially concerned, as Lewis Gray said, with measures “to force the return of unproductive crop lands to grass.”³⁰ The source of the problem, the committee argued, was the increase in settlement of the area, especially after World War I, but the roots of the problem reached back into the previous century, and the committee pointed an accusing finger directly at the homestead laws: “The Federal homestead policy, which kept land allotments low and required that a portion of each should be plowed, is now seen to have caused immeasurable harm. The Homestead Act of 1862, limiting an individual holding to 160 acres, was on the western plains a stimulus to over cultivation, and, for that matter, almost an obligatory vow of poverty.”³¹ In other words, the Drought Committee wound up at very much the same conclusion that the State Planning Board had reached when it stated that the problem was not so much natural conditions, like the drought, as it was too many small farms. And the solution



30. “25-Year Drought Program is Proposed by Committee,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, August 22, 1936.

31. This is from the final committee report, “Report of the Great Plains Drought Area Committee,” presented to President Roosevelt in Bismarck, North Dakota, when the committee met with him at the end of their trip. That report can be found online at <http://newdeal.feri.org/hopkins/hop27.htm>. See also Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 192–97. There are, it should be noted, serious problems with the committee’s blame of the Homestead Act, including the fact that that law appears to have been used only in a minority of homesteading claims in Wyoming (other laws having been more appropriate) and also the administration’s clear assumption that homesteaders should pursue commercially oriented, profitable (technically) agricultural structures and objectives. See Cassity, *Wyoming Will Be Your New Home*, 79–82, 267–73.

was similar: restore the land by taking it out of production except for grazing, concentrate land holdings into fewer and larger units, and develop water resources through work relief projects:

The regional agriculture must rest on the development of holdings which will actually support a family in independence and comfort. Undoubtedly these holdings must be larger than those now prevailing in many parts of the Plains. They can be made more adequate in some instances by reclamation, in others by the combination of smaller units. State and county governments may expedite this process by making available to grazing and other cooperative agencies the chronically tax delinquent lands which it is not to be expected will again be cultivated by their nominal owners. Such lands may be developed under a work relief program during the period of transition which must follow the drought and the development of new land policies.³²

32. "Report of the Great Plains Drought Area Committee."

33. Spurlock in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 27–I. See also the report in the same proceedings of E. C. Gwillin, state supervisor of the Rural Resettlement Division of the Resettlement Administration, 27–J. Evidently Elwood Mead, the commissioner of Reclamation, had proposed the location of two such resettlement communities, with individual farms ranging from 5 to 2 acres, on both the Shoshone and Riverton projects. The official history of the Bureau of Reclamation notes, "The small holdings could enable farm laborers to feed themselves, with a small surplus to market, but the major income would come from their work on neighboring farms. Mead was clearly trying to hold on to the idea of the small farm, but his efforts remained more rhetoric than action." William D. Rowley, *Origins and Growth to 1945*, vol. 1: *The Bureau of Reclamation* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, 2006), 318.

34. "Two Resettlement Projects Given Conditional Approval," *Casper Tribune-Herald*, August 7, 1936.

35. William P. Fischer, "Homesteading the Thunder Basin: Teckla, Wyoming, 1917–1938," *Annals of Wyoming* 71 (Spring 1999): 31.

The Great Plains Drought Area Committee said it with much more finesse than did the Wyoming State Planning Board, but the two shared the same view: the way of the future, at least in eastern Wyoming and perhaps elsewhere too, was going to be grazing not farming, and there would be population shifts to accomplish that, and there also would be greater development of natural resources to make them more productive. Further, there would also be greater consolidation of ownership of those farms and ranches into fewer, bigger operations. It was a general affirmation of exactly the patterns of change, official and unofficial, that were already underway.

Again, it is unclear exactly how these proposals were met by the people most affected. There did seem to be a difference in perspective from those who remained on the land and grazed it, on the one hand, and on the other, from those who had previously lived on the land and farmed it, and who did not always quantify their lives on the land in terms of return on investment and whose farmland would be turned into grazing pastures. As for those who were moved off, Spurlock was optimistic: "It is the present plan to furnish an opportunity for those people who are to be removed from that area to go on other more productive land that will be purchased by the Resettlement Administration." And he noted that there were several possible locations for those people to be resettled: a private proposal for relocation near Douglas, and three others being proposed by the Resettlement Administration for relocation near Sheridan, near Torrington, and near Riverton.³³ The exact fate of those proposals is not known, but by August 1936, those approved by the governor included only one at Lingle (clearly the one otherwise referred to as near Torrington), which would provide for homes for fifty families and one at Sheridan for eighty-four families.³⁴

On one project, the only one that has been carefully studied, historian William Fischer examined the Thunder Basin project and determined that "Wyoming's funding dwindled and the project ended with only the land purchases and subsequent reclamation work. Although several families were relocated, a large scale resettlement community for displaced farmers was never fully realized in Wyoming."³⁵ Ultimately, it may be that the plans for a resettlement community fell victim to the same calculus that beset the Farm Plans developed by the Resettlement Administration where the budget could allow for only 14 percent of the total. In fact, histo-

rian Mary W. M. Hargreaves calculates that nationally about three-fourths of the people removed from their homes received no assistance and only about 9 percent were resettled onto government land.³⁶

The result of this farm and ranch policy was one thing for the ranchers who would now graze their livestock where people had once farmed. It was something entirely different for the people who were moved out. In the Dry Creek area of Converse County, one homesteader captured the moment: “Now on account of the great depression following the World War the larger numbers of pioneers are selling their claims to the Government for a very small price and quitting our part of Converse County. The land thus sold is being enclosed in immense pastures to be leased to stockmen.”³⁷

The experience of Gladys Graves (later Gladys Hill) near Douglas was representative of many: “Sadly, we had to have our cattle killed because you couldn’t sell them. The government bought ’em for thirty dollars, something like that, and killed them. And buried them, I guess, someplace.” She further recalled, “My father had to sell off the cattle because there was not enough forage for them to graze and the crops didn’t grow. And so, yes, we were poor.” The Graves family moved to Douglas: “Mom went to work in a sewing center sponsored by [the] government to help out and Dad worked on WPA projects.”³⁸ What this suggests is that the other side of the New Deal, that associated with work relief projects, was intimately connected to the agricultural programs offered by the New Deal.

“Distinctive and Enduring Additions to our National Wealth”

In 1936 the state director of the Public Works Administration, Francis C. Williams, reflected on what had been accomplished so far in the Wyoming PWA program and what the significance of those accomplishments might be:

This result of the P.W.A. program, namely, to provide definite and lasting services which have long been recognized as social needs, will, in our opinion, be felt long after the unemployment crisis is passed, and perhaps effect [*sic*] the future of our country more than any of the emergency agen-

cies created to aid business recovery. These improvements, built in time of an emergency, will remain as distinctive and enduring additions to our National wealth.³⁹

Williams also indicated that changes were underway, changes that had begun in 1935 with a new appropriation and new conditions. Without saying so in so many words, Williams suggested that under “the old set-up,” the projects had been few and had been high profile, while after 1935 there were more of them, but many of them not so visible. In truth, the PWA had a tough act to follow in the wake of the major construction effort that was launched at the beginning of the Roosevelt administration. A huge project undertaken by the Bureau of Reclamation using PWA money, the Casper-Alcova Project moved forward with deliberate speed, with careful engineering and planning, and with great fanfare. But it was a big project and getting bigger, so it would be years before the work would be complete. The original project, the dam and reservoir at Alcova, had begun construction even before the official authorization in 1935, and in that year the Seminole dam, reservoir, and power plant were added, making for two separate units within the project. And construction took off on Seminole

36. Mary Wilma M. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains: Years of Readjustment, 1920–1990* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 124.

37. Rhue M. Lynch, C. B. Dickson, and R. L. Featherston, the Committee for Historical Facts for the Dry Creek Community, “Notes on Pioneering in Dry Creek Community, Converse County,” typescript in WPA Collections, subject file 1390. The WPA Collections are materials gathered by the WPA Writer’s Project and are located in the Wyoming State Archives in Cheyenne. They should not be confused with the WPA Project Files, which are the files for each WPA project.

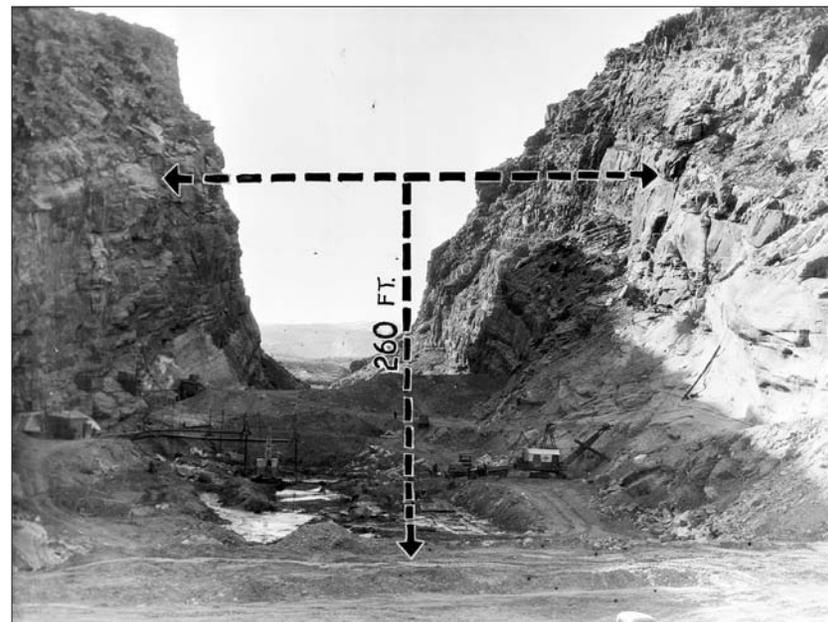
38. Oral history interview with Gladys Hill, October 29, 1999, 89–90, 112, and unpagged appendix; interview conducted by Mark Junge. A transcript for this interview is in the American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

39. Francis C. Williams, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 13B.



Site of future Seminole Dam, November 1935, shortly after bids were opened for construction.

Associated Press photograph from the collection of Michael Cassity.



Work on Alcova Dam as of February 1936. The diversion tunnel had been constructed and work was proceeding on the dam itself.

Wire service photograph from the collection of Michael Cassity

as well. In the spring of 1936 the Seminole unit employed “24 supervisory and administrative employees, 54 unskilled laborers and 108 semi-skilled and skilled laborers,” a mix probably not far off the usual number for big PWA projects; that mix showed that unskilled workers were in the minority (a minority who were most likely to be taken from the relief rolls) in the workforce of PWA projects.⁴⁰ And while employment was expected to increase in the work on these two units, the end was nowhere in sight. The contract for the Seminole unit allowed 1,150 days beginning on January 28, 1936, for completion—a period of more than three years.⁴¹ With more than two-and-a-half years before scheduled completion of the Alcova Dam, that project employed 302 employees in the spring of 1936, about the maximum anticipated. In addition, there were still more workers excavating the main canal for irrigation.

40. Klajic, “The Kendrick Project (Casper-Alcova),” 10.

With two major dams on the North Platte River, and with irrigation and power-generating capacities (at least power at the Seminole Dam), the Kendrick Project was a prime example of the way the PWA conducted its projects and saw its contribution to the public infrastructure. In the sense that the PWA contracted its work to private firms and provided economic opportunities for countless other people and businesses through the irrigation and electrical power to be made available, the PWA was making an enduring contribution. On the other hand, it was also agonizingly slow in getting going, and the project did little directly and immediately to reduce the number of people on the relief rolls. The administration was sensitive on both points. And the PWA began to change. By 1936 the state director of the PWA made explicit the importance of smaller projects:

The majority of our citizens are aware of the larger undertakings of P.W.A., having been impressed by the magnitude of such projects as Boulder Dam, Grand Coulee and Bonneville Dams, and Wyoming 's Casper Alcova project—yet I venture to assert that the significance of Boulder Dam is no greater than that of the smallest schoolhouse project in Wyoming or the least pretentious water system constructed here by P.W.A., even though the number of individuals benefited is more limited.⁴²

And the new emphasis on projects small as well as large (at least in a relative sense) was indisputable. Although it is impossible to discern a concrete, defining moment or a particular trigger for the change, possibly the approval of the Liberal Arts Building at the University of Wyoming marked the beginning of the shift. A large building, it was still small in comparison with the dams on the North Platte. And, after this one, the PWA launched more small projects in the state. But it was more than just the size of the projects that allowed the PWA to undertake more of them. In addition to a willingness to undertake smaller projects, the PWA used a new, more lenient formula for loans and grants for its projects as of 1935; previously the PWA would loan 70 percent of the total cost of the materials and labor to the sponsoring agency and grant the remaining 30 percent, but after 1935 the loan became 55 percent and the grant a maximum of 45 percent. This meant that more “non-federal” entities (states, communities, school districts) could qualify for PWA projects.

Some of this emphasis on smaller projects was already evident, but the



Liberal Arts Building, University of Wyoming. This PWA building was completed in June 1936.

Photograph from C. W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown, Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture of Projects Constructed by Federal and other Governmental Bodies Between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the Assistance of the Public Works Administration (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 319.

41. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Public Works in Wyoming* (Cheyenne: Wyoming State Planning Board, 1937), 79–80

42. Williams, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 13-B.



Gillette Post Office, constructed 1935.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

exact picture is clouded since some of the PWA funds were allocated to other agencies. For example, one official report in 1935 indicated that a large chunk of PWA funds went to the Treasury Department and much of that money (but not all) was used for construction of post offices.⁴³ Post office construction did increase in Wyoming, but it is difficult to determine which post offices traced their origins to the PWA effort, and research on individual cases is necessary. The post office built in 1935 in Gillette is a case in point. Civic and commercial leaders in Gillette evidently sought PWA funds for the new post office, and while their application ultimately proved successful, the funds were appropriated by Congress, not allocated by the PWA, and the project was scaled back in total amount. When the building was constructed it was without a hoped-for full second story, the completed building having a second story only at the front.⁴⁴ Whether the construction was financed by the Post Office and the Treasury Department in their normal construction program, or by those agencies using PWA funds, the building finally opened for business in November 1935, and the dedicatory speaker caught something of the historical significance when he talked about the symbolism of the building:

It signifies a visible link with the national capital. It stands out as a monument to remind us of our national responsibilities. The Postal Service, more perhaps than any other branch of our Federal Government, comes into close personal contact with each individual citizen, be he old or young, rich or poor, black or white.

And he underscored the duties of the government employees to the public:

It is now the work of the postmaster and his forces, and the other activities which will be located here, to carry on their work in a manner befitting servants of the public, honestly, diligently and impartially. They must give to each man and woman, rich and poor alike, the same equal courtesy and service. It is for them to so conduct themselves that the Government will be respected and looked upon as just and kindly and solely interested in the people's welfare.⁴⁵

43. Arthur D. Gayer, *Public Works in Prosperity and Depression* (Washington: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1935), 103.

44. "New Post Office Will Be Located on Gillette Ave.," *Gillette News-Record*, September 13, 1934; "Architect's Drawing of Gillette's New Post Office," *Gillette News-Record*, August 20, 1935; "New Post Office Opens Today," *Gillette News-Record*, November 16, 1935.

45. "History of Local Postoffice Given by Inspector Hansen," *Gillette News-Record*, November 16, 1935.

He might also have said, any city rich or poor, large or small, too. At the time Gillette built its beautiful new post office, the town had a population of less than two thousand. The speaker's words would be significant at any time, but in the midst of the Depression when the government was endeavoring, through public works projects, to become a more positive feature in the lives of citizens, they took on added meaning. The building, like so many others in the state, can be traced to the PWA only through diligent historical research; even the cornerstone does not identify it as a PWA project. But also, like other PWA projects, this was contracted out (this one to a private firm from Chicago), rather than relying on government-supervised workers from the relief rolls.

In the area of irrigation, by 1936 the PWA had started work on smaller projects like the Greybull Valley Irrigation District and the Bear River Irrigation District; both were substantial, with the Greybull project consisting of more than a million dollars in loans and grants, and the Bear River project approaching a half million, but they were still far smaller than the Casper-Alcova project.⁴⁶ Some of the projects were almost imperceptible except to the people in the communities who needed and used the resultant works. By 1936 the PWA had completed waterworks projects in Medicine Bow and Buffalo and had put nearly \$100,000 into the school buildings in Park County, and even built a sewer in Cody. The Medicine Bow waterworks drew upon artesian water; previously the town had had to bring "in water by railroad when the river runs dry," while at Buffalo the PWA replaced forty-year-old wooden staves with a modern steel pipeline.⁴⁷ At the same time a waterworks project was under construction in Lovell, and the PWA was pouring \$300,000 into buildings at the State Training School in Lander, the State Hospital in Evanston, and the Casper Children's Home—all operated by the State Board of Charities and Reform.

The PWA also sponsored projects to build or extend the waterworks systems in Sundance and Sheridan, build or improve the county high school in Buffalo, and construct school buildings in Riverton and Worland. One of the most visible, but not the largest, projects undertaken in the middle of the decade was the new Supreme Court and State Library Building in Cheyenne. The legislature authorized this new building since, as Governor Miller said, "the Capitol building was rapidly being outgrown," and a new building was necessary.⁴⁸ Completed in 1937 at a cost of \$363,636, this building, across from the state capitol, was both distinctive



U.S. Post Office, Kemmerer, Wyoming, constructed 1935 at the same time as the Gillette post office.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2011.

46. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Public Works in Wyoming*, 54.

47. *Ibid.*, 52.

48. Miller, "Autobiography of Leslie A. Miller, Governor of Wyoming, 1933–1939," 245.



Wyoming Supreme Court and State Library Building, a PWA project completed in 1937.

Cheyenne News Agency postcard from the collection of Michael Cassity.

in its own construction and also, in the words of the PWA description, “an important unit of a well developed plan for the State and municipal group, occupying a square which is landscaped and surrounded by streets.”⁴⁹ A three-story structure, it housed not only the Supreme Court but also the State Library and a museum. The Wyoming legislature, while supportive of the idea of a building for the Supreme Court, did not provide for a site for the building. But a city park directly south of the capitol seemed to be

49. C. W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown, *Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture of Projects Constructed by Federal and other Governmental Bodies Between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the Assistance of the Public Works Administration* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 56.

the preferred location, except that, of course, it belonged to the city, not the state. For that matter, the city had acquired the land from the Union Pacific Railroad, and the transfer to the city from the UP included a provision that “if any time in the future the ground should be used for anything other than public purposes,” the title would revert to the UP. Previous proposals for alternate uses had been disallowed, and there was no guarantee that this one would be permissible, even though one would assume that “public purposes” might conceivably include the functions of the Supreme Court of Wyoming. Public purpose, however, is always subject to debate, and Governor Miller worked secretly with the Union Pacific and the City of Cheyenne to see that the transfer to the state took place without issue, which it did.

When the Supreme Court building was dedicated, Miller arranged for something other than the traditional cornerstone to be installed. Instead, he said, “I arranged that in one of the interior walls a niche should be built wherein a steel receptacle could be placed. In the steel box which was provided a number of documents were placed, chief among the same being a history of the state to date which had been written by Jack R. Gage, state superintendent of public instruction; newspapers of the day were included, and addresses by the several state officers had been made upon a recording device and which could be reproduced at a future date which was suggested.” To guide future generations, directions were then placed on a bronze tablet inside the corridor instructing Wyoming officials half a century hence to break the seals and examine the contents of the box every fifty years starting January 1, 1987. Miller’s own comments were evidently written out and enclosed in the box, and he praised the building and its purpose: “We are proud of this building on the score that it is at once beautiful in its design and proportions and that its utilization is outstanding. It will serve its purpose as quarters for our Supreme Court and State Library for many generations, and we hope that those who follow us in places of executive control and who hear these words will feel that we of today wrought well in thus providing for the effective functioning of these essential state departments.” He also, however, told how the people of Wyoming in the 1930s “have been undergoing a period of stress and hardship, due to prolonged industrial distress, drought and plagues of grasshoppers and crickets. In the face of these devastating handicaps they have retained high courage, have found the means generally to contribute



Parco School, PWA building, completed 1936.

Photograph from C. W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown, Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture of Projects Constructed by Federal and Other Governmental Bodies Between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the Assistance of the Public Works Administration (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 174.

their representative shares to the cost of government in all its branches and have improved the state.” The building itself was an impressive structure, but to Miller its social significance was greater than its architecture: “as we are proud of the spirit of cooperation which has enabled us to progress, so do we hope for a continuation throughout the years of that same feeling of well-being and a cooperative spirit.”⁵⁰

Schools were important PWA contributions in Wyoming as well. Exactly how many and which school facilities in the state owe their existence to the PWA cannot be determined, except by investigating the documentary record of each one; there is not a master list to consult. There was a clear need, however, and there are clear examples of PWA efforts to meet that need. Fundamentally, the schools of Wyoming ranged from the very weak to the very strong. In 1935, Walter C. Reusser, a professor of education in the University of Wyoming, reported on the disparity in educational facilities in the state, noting:

Some of the children of the state, those residing in the wealthier communities, have all the opportunities that can be afforded by a modern educational system. They are housed in splendid fireproof buildings and have all the conveniences and comforts that a modern educational plant can provide. They are taught by teachers who are well trained and who are paid

sufficient salaries to hold them in their communities for a period of years, and they are furnished all the equipment and materials that an enriched school program demands. There are other groups of children, those residing in the poorer communities, who have the most meager educational opportunities conceivable. They are housed in small inadequate buildings, sometimes made of logs or sod, with practically none of the provisions for health and sanitation that should be found in a school building. They are taught by the state’s most poorly trained teachers who are paid the lowest salaries. There is almost nothing in the way of equipment and supplies with which to carry on a school program in these schools.⁵¹

50. Miller, “Autobiography of Leslie A. Miller, Governor of Wyoming, 1933–1939,” 294–96.

51. Reusser’s study, originally published by the Wyoming Education Association in 1934 as *Equalization and School Administration Units in Wyoming*, is quoted in Clayton B. Fraser, Mary M. Humstone, and Rheba Massey, *Places of Learning: Historical Context of Schools in Wyoming* ([Cheyenne:] Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, 2010), 118–19.



Washakie County Court House, Worland.
Sanborn postcard from the collection of Michael Cassity.

The construction program of the PWA, of course, could only address part of that inequity, the buildings, but there is evidence that the program did indeed attempt to assist in that regard. In 1936, the Wyoming director of the PWA commented that eleven schools had been approved, with new buildings scheduled for construction in eight different counties. At the top of the cost scale for these buildings was a grade school in Lander (at \$118,000); at the other end was a school in the hamlet of Egbert in Laramie County (at \$20,000). In addition to the schools that had been approved, there were others, schools with applications pending in 1936. These, he said, “show that more funds are needed in Wyoming to provide adequate school buildings.” He made a compelling case: “Among these I will mention one at Shoshoni in Fremont County, where the school is reported as unsafe and wholly inadequate for the number of pupils attending, and another at Greybull where a 14-room building is now housing the high school of 200 students and the intermediate grades with approximately 240 pupils.”⁵² Those schools in between were probably like the Greybull high school set at \$77,725.⁵³

The national office of the PWA included two Wyoming schools in its showcase volume of achievements prepared at the end of the decade. One of these, the elementary school at Parco, appears to have been proposed in 1935, with construction completed in December 1936. Parco, now known as Sinclair, was one of those communities that Reusser could have had in mind when he penned his discussion of the shortcomings of education in some Wyoming towns and that Francis Williams might have mentioned when discussing the condition of the schools in the state. The PWA description of the Parco school noted that the new 1936 school “replaced a leased 4-room dilapidated wooden structure and two apartments rented for classrooms in an apartment building.” The new building, by contrast had “eight classrooms and a centrally located combination playroom-auditorium with clerestory windows. The construction is semifireproof, the walls being brick and the roof wood covered with Spanish tile. The exterior walls are faced with two colors of brick, the darker shade being used for a base and trim around the entrance and certain windows.”⁵⁴ This PWA project, like the Gillette Post Office, also demonstrated how the line had been blurred between the large projects for which the program was known and the smaller projects often identified with other programs. The Parco school, in its entirety, cost around \$50,000. The Gillette Post Office

52. Williams in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 13-C, D.

53. “Sheridan and Worland PWA Work Wins Roosevelt Okeh,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, September 9, 1936.

54. Short and Stanley-Brown, *Public Buildings*, 174.

cost about \$66,000—both price tags considerably smaller than those of the more well-known PWA projects.

In addition to schools and post offices, the PWA also became associated with some other iconic public buildings in the state—the courthouses. Wyoming’s courthouses have not been studied in a systematic way and, again, there is no neat list to check to identify the programs responsible for their construction. At the middle of the decade, moreover, it appears that the PWA was just moving into that domain and the announcement in September 1936 that Worland had been approved to receive a new courthouse for Washakie County was one of the early such PWA projects.⁵⁵

The Public Works Administration in the Second New Deal demonstrated greater flexibility and agility as it responded to the social needs of Wyoming, as it endeavored to put more people to work in Wyoming communities, and as it sought to stimulate the economy through its contracts and construction projects. And it should be remembered that it had a different focus and priority in comparison to other work relief projects: making public improvements, in time of economic emergency, that would “remain as distinctive and enduring additions to our National wealth.”

More Than a Tree Army

The other ongoing activity involved in reshaping the Wyoming landscape was at the opposite pole—socially, economically, and structurally—from the PWA. The Emergency Conservation Work program, and its Civilian Conservation Corps, was one of the most popular New Deal agencies, and communities all across Wyoming had been aggressive in their quest to have CCC camps located near them. The first two years of the program had been successful by virtually any account, except perhaps from the perspective of wilderness advocates who saw the CCC as more of a development force than a conservation operation. But “conservation” in the New Deal generally meant efficient use of resources for productive gain, not preservation of those resources. Sustained yield (as in forest harvest and replenishment), increased production (as in timber and grazing), and conquest of nature (as in control of pests, predators, and waterways) could usually be discussed in the same sentence, all as appeals to a conservation spirit. And certainly given the erstwhile prevailing practice of sacrificing

long-term sustainability for short-term profits, there was much to be said for the conservation virtues of practically any alternative. And the New Deal actively sought out that alternative. The CCC continued to be a primary agent in that quest.

In the Second New Deal the Emergency Conservation Work program expanded so that it included even more enrollees and even more camps. By 1935 the CCC had established itself as a popular program and as a vital resource for land managers who needed workers. The popularity of the program transcended regional lines and party divisions; there were critics, but they generally focused on particular aspects or incidents, not the program itself, and even the Roosevelt administration’s most vigorous adversaries sang a different song when it came to the CCC. Most observers assumed that the CCC, an important, visible, and popular program, would grow in mission, in scope, and in numbers as the Second New Deal ramped up. At a minimum, it would not face the fate of the Civil Works Administration of being dismantled just as it got going. The expansion of the CCC would not be automatic, however. The president and Congress had to act to continue the CCC, and in so doing they shaped its future.

The original 1933 legislation creating the CCC, or, more correctly, the Emergency Conservation Work program, gave it a life of two years; it would expire in the spring of 1935. In his State of the Union address in January, Roosevelt called for a continuation of the work of the CCC. Hearings were held, not like the rancorous hearings to which other New Deal programs were subjected, but they provided an opportunity for all sides to weigh in, and generally all sides praised the program, especially when the camps were located in their states and districts. The resulting legislation actually expanded the program, giving it a goal of 600,000 enrollees to be reached by autumn 1935. Far from being a liability to the president’s ambitious legislative agenda that spring, the expansion of the CCC actually helped mobilize support for his other measures.⁵⁶ Few were willing to cast a negative vote on this program, and the legislation sailed to easy victory.

55. “Sheridan and Worland PWA Work Wins Roosevelt Okeh.” The Sheridan project approved was a street improvement project.

And the Civilian Conservation Corps grew “briskly,” as the main history of the CCC puts it, striving toward a goal of 2,106 Department of Agriculture camps (mainly Forest Service) and 690 Department of the Interior camps (mainly National Park Service and Division of Grazing). There were some obstacles, though, and one emerged as a result of the new 1935 legislation. Because the CCC, in its new two-year extension, was being funded from the same \$5 billion pot that funded other work relief projects, it was now part of a larger work relief system, and its projects had to be approved by the Advisory Committee on Allotments. Harry Hopkins was a key member of that committee and, with his special concern for reducing the relief rolls, he insisted (and was supported by the president) that the CCC enrollees be taken from those rolls; that meant that other youths, not on the rolls, would no longer be eligible even to fill a state’s quota of enrollees. Moreover, this limit applied not just to enrollees but to all CCC personnel—including education advisers and technicians. There were serious implications to this, but fundamentally it meant that the ECW quota of 600,000 would not be reached.⁵⁷ Deep down, this was not a new issue and it would surface time and again: What was the object of the work relief program—to undertake specific construction programs to build things or to put people to work? The Roosevelt administration often offered ambiguous answers to that question, but in the case of the CCC in 1935, the priority was clear, if carefully formulated: put people on the relief rolls to work.

56. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942*, 59.

57. *Ibid.*, 59–61.

58. *Ibid.*, 59.

59. In the spring of 1935 Roosevelt had proposed a reduction to 450,000 to the director of the CCC, but that administrator, Robert Fechner, had argued against the reduction on the basis of the program’s popularity and also the consequent abandonment of projects before they were complete. The president did not press it at the time, but in the fall he moved more vigorously and with a lower number as his target. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942*, 58.

60. *Ibid.*, 65.

That obstacle to growth, however, may have been offset by two other changes that held the potential to increase the total number in the camps. As of spring 1935, the maximum age of enrollees was raised from twenty-five to twenty-eight, and the maximum term of service in the CCC increased from a year to eighteen months.⁵⁸ The CCC remained popular, but the circumstances of its existence became more complex in the context of competing work relief programs and funding authority.

Funding itself dramatically altered the course of the CCC in the autumn of 1935. Franklin Roosevelt loved the work that the CCC did, and certainly the CCC won him many friends he would not have had otherwise. Roosevelt wanted the CCC to become a permanent institution. But in 1935 he was looking for ways to trim expenses and address the budget that was growing more and more out of balance. He concluded that, as a permanent part of the government, the CCC could be smaller and less expensive. When September 1935 came, the CCC had grown, although it was still short of its goal, but Roosevelt proposed, starting right then, to reduce the CCC to a maximum strength of 300,000 by June 1, 1936.⁵⁹ This proposal had two consequences. One was to frame the discussion for future legislation. Suddenly, reduction of the CCC was not only a viable option but in some quarters was even the preferred option. The other consequence was to initiate the process of closing camps. The high enrollment reached in autumn 1935 (502,000 men in 2,514 camps) would be the peak of CCC enrollment, a level never to be reached again.

There was a precious irony in the situation. On one level, the president who had initiated the idea of the CCC and who had brought it into being was now widely viewed as its main threat. But the irony ran deeper than that—much deeper. The president who had promoted the expansion of the federal government and who had increased the deficit to pay for vast work relief programs was now proposing to cut back this expensive work relief program to save the government and taxpayers money. At the same time, people who were ordinarily disposed to resist expanding the size of the government and who wanted to balance the budget were arguing exactly the opposite in the case of the CCC.

By January 1, 1936, 489 camps had been closed, and the president anticipated shutting down another 455 by April.⁶⁰ Many of the president’s own party in the House of Representatives viewed this course with alarm, and so did many Republicans. It was not just those in the rural areas that

feared the loss of camps, although they were important and were leading the charge, but representatives from other, more urban districts, who were also apprehensive; after all, the enrollees were coming from their districts and most of their pay was going to their families back home. In this case, the revolt in the House of Representatives prevailed and Roosevelt backed down. In one of the first major revolts against the president, and perhaps the most successful one to date, the charge had been not that the New Deal was going too far, but that it was not going far enough. So Franklin Roosevelt advised the administrator of the CCC to close camps only as their projects were completed, and he provided additional funding to maintain the program. During the election of 1936, the Republican candidate, Governor Alfred M. Landon of Kansas, praised the CCC and took credit for the provision enabling the CCC to work on state land, not just federal. The only party opposed to the CCC and calling for its abolition was the Socialist Party; that group saw the program, as historian John A. Salmond quotes the party, as “a threat to the wage and living standards of organized labor.”⁶¹ The future of the CCC seemed to be assured, although its varied supporters quibbled about the particulars.

There remained, however, the nagging problem of legislative renewal. When the Emergency Conservation Work program was extended in 1935, it was extended for two more years, meaning that it would go out of business at the end of March 1937 unless reauthorized and funded before then. What should have been an easy process became, once again, complicated and fractious. After the 1936 election, Roosevelt began charting the course for the next two years, and as he pondered the future of the CCC, he returned again to the idea of reducing the size of the program, but he also tied that prospect with making it a permanent agency, that is, not just a temporary program that provided workers during the emergency of the Depression, but an ongoing agency and administrative operation that would continue to enhance the conservation resources of the nation into the future. This time he called for a reduction of the size of the CCC to 300,000 youth and veteran enrollees, 10,000 Indians, and 5,000 enrollees in what was known as the islands and insular possessions.⁶² There was, once again, a revolt against this proposal because of the reduction it called for, but this time the revolt could not muster the strength it had previously. For that matter, the proposal to make it a permanent agency also fell short of the expected support; the most eloquent opponent, Senator William

K. Borah of Idaho, was not opposed to the CCC as such, and in fact, his state had more CCC camps and enrollees than Wyoming and Montana combined. Borah argued that making the CCC permanent would be an acknowledgement that the United States could not conquer the Depression, that the Depression, like the CCC which was mobilized to fight it, would be an enduring part of American life.

In addition, the CCC was caught up in a larger political storm surrounding widespread resistance to Roosevelt’s plan to “pack” the Supreme Court—to add justices when sitting judges declined to retire at age seventy. When the bills were debated, modified, and passed and signed by the president, the outcome was that the CCC was not made permanent, although it was extended for three years. It did become a separate, independent agency known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (replacing the Emergency Conservation Work program) and no longer would enrollment be limited to families receiving relief; it was open to all unemployed young men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-three, on relief or not. The enrollment was capped at 300,000, exactly as the president had proposed. If two years, or even one year, earlier the future of the CCC had looked rosy, its prospects were somehow less glowing in the spring of 1937.⁶³

In important ways, Wyoming’s ECW/CCC experience reflected that of the nation, but compared to the sharp declines in other states, Wyoming seemed almost exempt from the political turmoil shaping the larger CCC program between 1935 and 1937. That said, the exact numbers of camps and their locations in the state are surprisingly soft; most historical documentation has been compiled by the various land management services that sponsored CCC camps, and a reliable set of numbers that encompasses all the CCC work remains elusive. Thus the total number operating at any time in the state is subject to revision and correction. Generally, however, it appears that Wyoming had probably 32 camps in 1935, the peak year in both the nation and the state; then in 1936 Wyoming’s count

61. *Ibid.*, 69.

62. *Ibid.*, 148.

63. *Ibid.*, 154–56.



CCC Camp F-34-W near Ranchester.

Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, Stimson Collection, Stim/5060.

dropped to perhaps 18 camps and in 1937 to 15 camps.⁶⁴ Those numbers correspond closely to the upswings and downswings in the CCC in the nation. On the other hand, Wyoming, on a per capita population basis, obviously had more camps and enrollees than many other states. (It needs to be remembered that the CCC operated not only in the West but in every state of the union.)

64. These numbers come especially from James A. Hanson, "The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains," 71–74, and from an unofficial but detailed compilation maintained by the Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, a nonprofit organization, at http://www.ccclegacy.org/camps_wyoming.htm. The website tables listing CCC units, accessed on multiple dates in autumn 2011, are presumably being revised as additional information becomes available.

What is especially revealing, however, and especially significant in understanding the contours of the evolution of the CCC in Wyoming, is the pattern of agency assignment and projects undertaken. To put it differently, to consider the CCC simply as "Roosevelt's Tree Army" is to seriously misunderstand and oversimplify the history of the Emergency Conservation Work program in Wyoming. The CCC did far more than plant trees; it provided a much-needed resource for almost every federal agency in the state that was involved with natural resource protection or development, and it performed a variety of tasks within each of those agencies.

And, on the other side of the equation, the CCC provided a much-needed resource for the communities of Wyoming. As for those communities, the only problem with the CCC camps and enrollees was that there were not enough of them to go around. Communities protested and complained to their congressional representatives, and they lobbied the ECW director, the state relief director, and anybody else they could think of, asking for more enrollees and more camps. Consider the example of Bridger Valley as the Second New Deal was getting underway in 1935. After two years of trying to get a camp located on the Bear River in Uinta County, a coalition of groups there solicited help from Will Metz in securing a camp. As James Hanson writes, the group asking for help included "Fort Bridger American Legion Commander H. M. Hopkinson, Black's Fork Water Users Association President Joseph Micheli, Uinta County Farm Bureau President Starvold Steward, Evanston Chamber of Commerce President Glen Eastman, and Van Rupe, president of the Lyman Lions Club." These people, representing the valley's commercial, business, agricultural, and civic leadership, were desperate, and they asked for help with all the seriousness they could muster. If they could not secure a camp in the county, they said, they would settle for one across the state line in Utah. As Hanson describes the group's plea: "The county needed dams built on Black's Fork or Smith's Fork of the Green River to control flooding for approximately 200 family ranches. If the reservoirs could not be constructed, the families would 'not be able to continue making a living in Bridger Valley.'"⁶⁵ They, like communities all across Wyoming, knew that the CCC was more than a "tree army."

EMERGENCY CONSERVATION WORK AND THE NATIONAL FORESTS

The U.S. Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture absorbed Emergency Conservation Workers, the CCC, into its structure and put them to work on a long list of projects that could not have been undertaken previously. In the spring of 1936 one Forest Service account summed it up succinctly: “the emergency program has made possible many needed improvements within the national forests. It has given to the protection of our natural resources, an impetus that seemed hardly possible three years ago.”⁶⁶ While the forests did utilize some WPA labor in specific projects, the CCC formed the backbone of the labor force, at least seasonally and perhaps more, for the Forest Service. C. J. Olson, who reported on the status of CCC work in the national forests of Wyoming, indicated the range of CCC work:

The use of CCC labor in preventing and suppressing forest fires has materially reduced losses from fire. The tree destroying insects which are present in all timber stands and which annually destroy more timber than is destroyed by fire, have been successfully combated and if control measures can be followed up, can be kept under control. Many necessary administrative buildings for rangers and for fire and other guards have been constructed. The improvement of recreational facilities has been a major undertaking. The use of forests for recreational purposes has brought many out-of-state visitors into the State.⁶⁷

The Forest Service’s official history of the CCC notes that Wyoming projects “involved protection of the Colorado and Missouri River watersheds, recreation development, and wildlife protection, especially preservation of the country’s largest elk herds.”⁶⁸

The Forest Service was, of course, an important agency that put the CCC to work in the state. And while it is common to think of the Forest Service’s CCC camps in the western part of the state, they also held important locations elsewhere. In 1934 new camps had been located in national forests in Sublette and Teton Counties and at Dayton, Lander, Fox Park, Centennial, Cody, and Buffalo. In 1935, additional Forest Service CCC camps were located at Jackson, Albany, and Alpine.⁶⁹ Evidently

reflecting the reduction of CCC operations the following year, in 1936 camps working with the Forest Service operated near Ten Sleep, Wilson, and Douglas. The following year, the Forest Service had CCC camps at Rancheater, Chimney Park, Cody, Centennial, and Douglas (Laramie Peak). Forest Service CCC camps were just about everywhere the Forest Service was in Wyoming.

And they planted trees, hundreds of thousands of them by 1936, but they did much more than that. They also transplanted beaver populations from areas of overstocking to new (or previous, but since depleted) habitats and conducted wildlife surveys. They constructed phone lines; as noted by Hanson, sixty-two miles of phone line were put up by the Fox Park enrollees in one summer. In addition, that camp and others in Wyoming maintained thousands of miles of phone lines in the federal lands where they worked.⁷⁰ But they also built fire lookout towers, constructed ranger stations (and related buildings and structures), built and maintained trails, and performed the usual road construction and maintenance. Protecting and maintaining the timber of the forests, however, was the primary focus of the CCC in their work with the Forest Service.

65. Hanson, “The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains,” 314–315, quoting a letter from Citizens of Bridger Valley to Metz, February 1, 1935, from National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 35.

66. C. J. Olson reporting for the Forest Service in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming* (Casper: National Emergency Council, 1936), 7A-B.

67. Olson in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 7A-B.

68. Otis et al., chap. 4.

69. Hanson, “The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains,” 72.

70. *Ibid.*, 219.

The lookout towers were important projects and substantial endeavors. Now disappearing from the national forests of the state as they are replaced by other technologies and fire alert systems, the lookout towers literally towered above the forests so that they were prominent features on the landscape, and they served a valuable function. O. B. Kongsli in Weston County described a CCC-constructed "observation tower" built atop Mount Pisgah, the highest point in Weston County. The tower itself was seventy feet tall and it was situated on a point over 6,000 feet in altitude. The tower and the cabin it supported were made of solid steel and plate glass, and these structures provided an unobstructed view that stretched all the way to the Bighorn Mountains to the west and to Casper Mountain and the Laramie Range to the southwest. The tower cabin included at that time "the most modern instruments" for charting location and estimating distances of fires, while at the foot of the tower weather instruments in a small structure provided additional

71. O. B. Kongsli, "Observation Towers," WPA Collections, subject file 269. See also Kongsli's separate report, "What the Civilian Conservation Corps Has Done for our Young Men," WPA Collections, subject file 1362.

72. Hanson, "The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains," 222-23.

73. "History of Company 832, Camp F-17-W, Laramie, Wyo.," in *History of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Colorado and Wyoming District* (Pueblo, Colo.: O'Brien Printing Company, n.d.), 54-55. This document, an informal history gathered directly from the camps themselves, can be found in the archives of the St. Louis Office of the Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, formerly known as the National Association of the CCC Alumni. Lest it be assumed that this beetle eradication was all that the camp did, the same report notes that the camp also built 29 miles of telephone lines, reduced fire hazards, conducted miles of roadside cleanup, and maintained (operated?) a fire lookout as well as digging wells, improving campgrounds, building 126 camp tables for the public campgrounds, building 139 dams for erosion control, and, of course, planting 237,000 trees.

information. "The Forest Service," Kongsli observed, "claims that these towers will soon pay for themselves in saving the forest, for last summer, many fires were detected and stopped before they got under way by the alert look out rangers." Moreover, as with many other projects in the forests, the tower was the tip of the iceberg of a larger system of forest construction. "The Federal Government is now constructing good, graveled highways to each of these towers and the roads that wind up these mountains, are in many places, truly feats of Civil Engineering." In addition, another part of the observation towers was a "fine residence in rustic style" near the tower for the lookout, although this additional structure was not always a feature of CCC lookout tower projects.⁷¹

A considerable amount of the work performed by enrollees in the CCC was directed at controlling the pests and diseases that threatened commercial timber. Even in the 1930s the damage caused by the bark beetle was extensive and growing, and the CCC was a welcome resource in that battle. Pest control appears to have been a mission everywhere the Forest Service was located in Wyoming. One instance where information is clear is the CCC effort to control bark beetles in the Medicine Bow National Forest. James Hanson indicates that sometimes killing individual beetles was done (by smashing them);⁷² but cutting and removing trees was the dominant practice. One report from the camp at Chimney Park describes the practice as:

In fighting the pest the men first organize scouting crews under the direction of a technical foreman. These crews cover the area plotted by the forest supervisor and examine every tree in the area for traces of the disease. The diseased trees are then marked. Cutting crews follow, cutting and burning each diseased tree, thus killing the beetles and larvae before they spread their destruction. During the winter months the crews must wade through snow that averages two and one-half feet in depth. Most of the scouting crews are equipped with snow shoes to facilitate their work.

One hundred and thirty-five thousand acres of mountain country in the Medicine Bow National Forest have been scouted and insect control methods completed. This includes the complete frontal range from north of Centennial toward the south inside the Colorado line. It has been necessary to cut and burn 17,000 trees, some of which were 54 inches in diameter.⁷³

This practice of cutting trees infested with insects and burning them was the most common method of fighting bark beetle. In the northwest corner of the state, Robert L. Robeson, stationed in Camp Wapiti, a Forest Service camp, recalled his own experience performing that work and the challenges of it:

It took about two hours climbing to reach the place where we were to work. The work was to cut down Douglas Fir trees that had been attacked by beetles, saw them up in 9 foot lengths, pile them up over the limbs, etc., for burning by another crew. When I arrived at the work site I wondered how they expected me to work there as it took all my effort just to get enough oxygen to meet my body's requirements. Now I had been raised in a town [Lander, Wyoming] with an altitude of over 5,000 feet and was thus accustomed to "thin air", but this altitude was approaching 10,000 feet and so the air had even less oxygen. Surprisingly, however, within a couple of days I had become accustomed to this rarefied air and could do my share of the work.

The Forest Service required us to cut the trees down so as to leave a stump only 7 inches from the ground level. As the winter arrived this became increasingly difficult as the snow often was almost hip deep and we would have to clear away the snow to get down on our knees and saw the tree off at the required point. We didn't have to go to work if the temperature got below 30 degrees below zero.⁷⁴

The campaign against the bark beetle was extensive; one report indicates that as of autumn 1935 the Forest Service had controlled 180,000 acres in the forests of Wyoming east of the continental divide for insects.⁷⁵ Beetle control/eradication was a fundamental duty of the CCC in the forests.

In the battle against white pine blister rust, the system was actually and literally focused on the individual plants, getting rid of the rust one plant at a time. Because the rust—a fungus—shares its life cycle with two necessary, alternating, hosts, the white pine and the plants of the *ribes* species (currants, gooseberries), the eradication of the *ribes* was the primary tactic of CCC workers to save the white pine. The "Ribe goons" would individually work an acre of forest land, going over it systematically, inspecting each square foot and pulling out all of the *ribes*, from seedlings to bushes,

one at a time, and then moving on to the next assigned acre. The effectiveness of this method can only be speculated and possibly can never be fully documented, but the campaign against the blister rust and the methods used in that battle continued as substantial practices in the Forest Service for decades afterward.⁷⁶ The Forest Service reported that at the end of October 1935, 1,760 acres east of the continental divide had been worked to get rid of the blister rust.⁷⁷

Hanson notes the commercial emphasis of this timber maintenance and improvement work:

The CCC worked hardest to save the most valuable timber, the white pine. Since the Weyerhaeuser Company was the world's largest producer of finished white pine, some criticized the efforts as subsidization of big industry. However, the white pine was the most valuable timber, and it was natural that it received the most attention regardless of increased benefits to any finished product manufactures. The CCC also made forest improvements elsewhere in less valuable stands of ponderosa and yellow pine and tamarack.⁷⁸

While the timber industry was an explicit beneficiary of the CCC work, it was not the only economic interest to benefit. A Forest Service report notes the push also for range improvement: "the stock ranges were

74. Robert L. Robeson autobiographical statement in CCC oral history archives at James F. Justin Civilian Conservation Corps Museum, <http://www.justinmuseum.com/oralbio/robesonbio.html>. Last accessed on May 12, 2011.

75. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Public Works in Wyoming*, 47.

76. Hanson, "The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains," 366.

77. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Public Works in Wyoming*, 47.

78. Hanson, "The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains," 366.

improved through the extermination of forage-destroying rodents, the control of insect pests, the eradication of poisonous plants on hundreds of thousands of acres and the revegetation of depleted ranges.”⁷⁹ The CCC built livestock corrals, drift fences, campgrounds, bridges, and driveways for sheep and cattle operations to facilitate their use of the national forest land. In both cases—promoting commercial timber production and enhancing the grazing potential of the same forest resource—the CCC endeavored to build up the forests, to make them more productive as an economic resource.

Fires, of course, constituted the most dramatic threat to Wyoming forests and were a standing part of the mission of most Forest Service CCC workers whatever the assigned project of their camp and company. And fires happened everywhere and often, probably more often during this

79. Allen S. Peck, regional forester, Forest Service, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 7-C.

80. See, for example, the accounts in “History of Bear Lodge Forest Fire of 1936,” apparently a typescript of a newspaper account taken from *Sundance Times*, July 16, 1936, in WPA Collections, subject file 1264; “Hemmed in by a Forest Fire,” WPA Collections, subject file 1281; and “One Life Lost in Fighting Wyoming Forest Fire, Women and Children Flee Timber Camp,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, August 11, 1936.

81. The accounts of the Blackwater Fire are many, but perhaps the best account and the basic document is that provided by Allen Peck, the regional forester, immediately after the fire. That account, “The Blackwater Fire,” dated September 10, 1937, can be found online at http://www.fireleadership.gov/toolbox/staffride/downloads/l5r5/l5r5_RF_letter_sept1937.pdf. See also related discussions at http://www.fireleadership.gov/toolbox/staffride/l5r5_stand1.html and http://www.fireleadership.gov/toolbox/staffride/l5r5_stand2.html. See also the December 1937 compilation of the Forest Service, *Fire Control Notes: A Publication dedicated to the Technique of Forest Fire Control*, a 1958 document available online at http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CDEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fs.fed.us%2Ffire%2Ffmt%2Ffmt_pdfs%2F019_03.pdf&ei=elvBUOm0IZCoRQGAvYGICw&usq=AFQjCNF_aQz3f-t5iPHZRrQmB1saile86w&cad=rja (last accessed on December 6, 2012).

period than in years before and after because of the serious drought, which had turned the forests into vulnerable tinder waiting for a spark or a lightning strike. From the Black Hills to Jackson Hole, and from the Big Horn Mountains to the Medicine Bow Range, CCC enrollees found themselves pulled from their other assignments to fight fires, and not just on the particular forest where they happened to be working.⁸⁰ Where there were fires in the 1930s there were also CCC workers. In each instance, CCC enrollees would be trucked to the general location; then they would hike into the fire with their equipment; then scrape a fire line to bare dirt around the fire to contain it, a tricky proposition given that the fire would be constantly moving (subject to wind force and direction); and then move in to the burn to extinguish it in a process known as mopping up, watching also for instances where the fire managed to jump the line with hotspots outside that could undo everything accomplished with the line; they would then have to work to contain and/or extinguish the hotspots too. The hours were long, incredibly long, optimal wind conditions for containing and suppressing the fire often came during the night, and food and sleep were both sparse. This was not a job for the faint of heart.

It also carried grave danger. The most spectacular, and tragic, instance demonstrating that danger came in a fire in the Shoshone National Forest in August 1937.⁸¹ A lightning strike on August 18 along Blackwater Creek, about forty miles west of Cody and four miles south of the highway to Yellowstone, appears to have smoldered for two days before being spotted. At that point (August 20) a crew of workers from Wapiti Camp F-24 was dispatched to work the fire and additional volunteers and crews were called in to the fire as it began to spread quickly in rough terrain. CCC crews from Tensleep (F-35) and from other agencies—the National Park Service in Yellowstone (YNP-3), the Bureau of Reclamation (BR-7 in Deaver), and the Division of Grazing (DG-52 in Worland and DG-25 in Basin)—responded, delayed by the distance in reaching the fire and by available communication, but they began their assault as soon as they arrived.

Forest firefighting is something of a military maneuver in that it is necessary to launch a coordinated assault with a strategy to flank the fire, which is always moving, and construct a fire-line barrier to keep the fire from spreading, doing so with caution, and using all available tools in the firefighter’s arsenal—shovels, axes, pick-mattocks (pulaskis), backpack water pumps (piss pumps), and backfires. Ultimately around 520 work-

CCC firefighter mopping up fire on Barrett Ridge Fire, Medicine Bow National Forest.

Medicine Bow National Forest Supervisor Records, Box 21, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.



CCC forest fire duty near Esterbrook, August 1936. The fire crew is from Camp BR-9 at Guernsey Lake.

Monthly Camp Report, ECW Camp BR-9, Record Group 115, Entry 21, National Archives and Records Administration, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver.

ers, 475 of them CCC enrollees, attacked the 1,700-acre fire on Shoshone National Forest, building fire line, mopping up inside the line, and fighting hot spots that erupted outside the perimeter.

On Saturday afternoon, August 21, the crews were fighting the fire when, as the official report of the Regional Forester described the situation, “suddenly the wind came up, shortly reaching gale proportions and changing directions frequently.” This was the most dreaded of all the firefighting circumstances, and the one to which they were most vigilant. Immediately some of the crews withdrew for safety onto a rocky ridge, but one group of seven men from the Tensleep camp, including their Forest Service leaders, had gone a short distance into a canyon to fill their water backpacks, evidently unaware of the change in the fire’s movement. When the wind suddenly shifted, and with it the direction of the fire, the raging fire, a continuous wall of flame, completely blocked their exit from the

canyon. Escape was not possible in any direction and the fire moved in on them in that narrow enclosure. They were completely trapped in the inferno and the seven men died in that ravine. Another CCC enrollee was also trapped fifty feet away; he was so severely burned that he died later in a hospital.

Meanwhile, on another part of the fire, another crew attempted to seek safety:

Ranger Post, with Foreman Tyrrell, Bert Sullivan, and the other Bureau of Public Roads men, gathered in the CCC enrollees and pressed up the slope to get as far as possible toward timber line before the advancing fire. They reached a point which appeared to be relatively safe, but the fire soon swept over it, coming first from one side and then the other. All of the men, 45 in number, received burns of varying severity. It was difficult to keep

them lying down since the rocks themselves became very hot and the natural tendency was to get up and run in a panic. The efforts of the foremen were directed toward keeping the men herded together in the safest possible place and down flat under the shelter of rocks and on the ground. The heat was so intense that exposed flesh turned red and burned deeply without actual contact with flame. Clothing caught fire repeatedly and some was burned off, leaving men's skin exposed. Five men, Lea and Enrollees Allen, Seelke, Sherry, and Patzke, left the crew, preferring to take a chance on running through the fire and back into the burn. Of these 5 only one, Patzke, survived, and he was very badly burned. Of the 40 who remained with the Ranger, Foreman Tyrrell and Enrollees Whitlock and Garza, were so badly injured that they died later in the hospital.⁸²

The task then turned to conducting searches for missing men as well as fighting the fire, bringing in more workers and medical personnel (often military medics involved in CCC camp administration). By Tuesday, August 24, both tasks were complete. Fifteen men were killed and thirty-eight others were seriously injured on the Blackwater Fire. The CCC made an important contribution in fighting that fire. The CCC also paid a dear price in their efforts. Some of these CCC workers came of age in their tour of duty with the Civilian Conservation Corps. Some did not.

In addition to the regular Forest Service camps on national forest lands and assignments, two other camps worked through the Forest Service but were assigned to the Cheyenne Horticultural Field Station; these carried a different designation from the usual F prefix indicating Forest Service

82. Peck, "The Blackwater Fire," 4.

83. "Chronological History of the Cheyenne Horticultural Field Station/High Plains Grasslands Research Station (1928–2008)," U.S. Department of Agriculture–Agriculture Research Service, <http://www.ars.usda.gov/Main/docs.htm?docid=17957>, last accessed June 22, 2010.

84. This list was provided to the authors of the Forest Service's study of the CCC and that agency, Otis, Honey, Hogg, and Lakin, *The Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933–1942*, chap. 4.

(as in F-35, a Forest Service CCC camp near Tensleep). Camps NA-1 and NA-2 (National Arboretum 1 and 2) were located at Fort Francis E. Warren. Significantly, these camps were initially designated for veterans, not for the young men ordinarily associated with the CCC. These camps focused their efforts on developing the infrastructure around the station, and, according to one report, "they constructed roads, 2 miles of concrete lined ditches, irrigation system, planted thousands of trees and shrubs. They picked up hundreds of tons of stones from the experimental plots. And manure collected from nearby ranches was hauled in and spread over 100 acres."⁸³ Parts of that duty may have been less romantic and dramatic than others performed by the CCC in the nation's forests. Such was work in the tree army.

All in all, the CCC workers performed a wide variety of tasks on national forests all across the state. Perhaps typical of the rough distribution of chores, as well as of the diversity they represented, was a list of CCC accomplishments on the Bighorn National Forest prepared by Jack Booth, forest supervisor, although the date of the work is not known. Presumably these projects were over a period of several years, not one season:

- Constructed Sibley and Meadowlark Lake Dams
- Constructed Crazy Woman Canyon Road and Shell-Tensleep Road
- Constructed 80 miles of primitive fire roads
- Developed 102 acres of campgrounds
- Built 82 miles of drift fence
- Built 11 cattle guards
- Strung 88 miles of telephone line
- Constructed 25 bridges
- Built fire towers at Hunter Mesa, Tunnel Hill, and Steamboat Point
- Planted 250,000 seedlings and thinned trees on 4,500 acres
- Controlled rodents on 12,950 acres
- Fought fires (4,148 man-days)⁸⁴

Multiply these statistics times the number of national forests in Wyoming, make allowances up and down for different forest sizes, uses, components, and histories, and the work of the CCC in the national forests becomes more impressive as well as more tangible.

THE CCC, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The National Park Service is the other large agency widely identified with Civilian Conservation Corps activity during the Depression. Like the U.S. Forest Service, the NPS continued to draw upon CCC resources in the years 1935–1937, and the work of the CCC in Grand Teton, Yellowstone, and Devils Tower filled a critical need for the agency. In contrast with the national forests where development of harvestable resources was often a given, in these national park and monument resources the internal struggle within the NPS over the mission and purpose of the agency simmered, a conflict between preservation and development, both of which happily bore the banner of conservation. The conflict between “use” and preservation in the NPS mission had been there since the founding of the agency, but that tension increased in the mid-1930s—as choices were made about how to use the increased resources available. What was new in this conflict was that the CCC represented a significantly enlarged manpower for the NPS.

By 1936, three-fifths of the NPS employees in the nation were paid from CCC funds.⁸⁵ The National Park Service had, as a result, an unparalleled, and perhaps irresistible, opportunity matched by funding and manpower for development in the parks. As Richard West Sellars observes, “With funds and manpower coming from the CCC program, the Service continued its intensive protection and suppression activities, rejecting [Adolph] Murie’s concepts.”⁸⁶ (Adolph Murie, noted biologist who advocated allowing the course of natural ecological forces, including predators and pests, to run undisturbed in the national parks as much as possible, was frequently on the losing side of this struggle over the treatment of nature in the national parks.) Using CCC resources, the NPS frequently followed management policies and objectives that bore a distinct similarity to those of the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture.

Such was the pattern in Wyoming. In 1935, Yellowstone National Park increased its camps to six while Grand Teton had only three. Devils Tower National Monument received its first CCC camp in 1935, NM-1.⁸⁷ The following year, 1936, in accordance with the reduction ordered by the president, the NPS had a total of five camps in the state—one at Devils Tower, two at Grand Teton, and two at Yellowstone. Hanson does not list the

NPS camps for 1936 or 1937, but the number of camps at Yellowstone and Grand Teton increased again in 1937 with five at Yellowstone and two at Grand Teton. Neither the tabulations otherwise available nor John Daugherty’s study of Devils Tower makes clear if Devils Tower had a camp in 1937.

When Devils Tower was assigned a CCC camp in 1935, it actually raised an important policy question that had to be resolved at the highest levels. Ordinarily the CCC could not work outside the legal boundaries of the agency sponsoring the camp, but the general nature of CCC work was such that insect control, disease control, forest protection, and other work could not neatly stop at the legal boundaries of the forest, park, or monument. In 1935 the custodian of Devils Tower asked for permission for the CCC assigned to the monument to engage in forest protection work that went beyond its boundaries. CCC Director Robert Fechner agreed, but the issue had implications for and relevance to other parks and monuments, and the director of the NPS, Arno Cammerer, sought an agreement with the CCC by which the NPS itself could determine if work should go beyond NPS boundaries. Fechner agreed with the proposal and thenceforth the determination of how far to carry the work to places adjacent to but outside NPS resources was an easier process.⁸⁸

The CCC assisted the National Park Service in ways that showed the prevalence of development and protection of resources, as opposed to a wilderness or preservationist approach. That emphasis reflected both NPS administration preferences and commercial pressures in the nearby communities. Some of this is to be expected given the availability of labor and the desires for development. On the other hand, a closer examination reveals complexity and nuance that calls for further examination.

85. Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 141.

86. *Ibid.*, 100–101, 130.

87. Daugherty, *Devils Tower National Monument*, 29.

88. John C. Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, 1933–1942: An Administrative History* (published by the National Park Service, 1985), http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/ccc/index.htm.

Consider one example. According to Hanson in his study of the CCC in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, throughout the 1930s the CCC doubled the number of buildings in Yellowstone National Park; Hanson also calculated that “about 100 miles of roads were constructed in state and national parks, most of them in Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks.”⁸⁹ These figures would certainly suggest the development mission of the CCC in Yellowstone. An important qualifier to that assessment, however, is offered by Mary Shivers Culpin in her study of the development of the Yellowstone road system. Culpin notes that in 1937, “the number of CCC camps had been reduced to four over the past year and most of their road-related work was road obliteration.”⁹⁰ The road obliteration, of course, sometimes involved the replacement of narrow roads with wider roads in the name of safety. Culpin quotes documents detailing the process of obliteration, and two examples indicate what the CCC was doing in Yellowstone:

Chittenden Bridge to Artist Point - The remnant of old road scars and road grades were sloped and regraded to the original ground forms. Trees and sage were planted to eliminate the scars.

Mammoth Hot Springs area - Earth fill, sod clumps and sage were

89. Hanson, “The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains,” 235, 215.

90. Mary Shivers Culpin, *The History of the Construction of the Road System in Yellowstone National Park, 1872–1965*, 148–49.

91. Culpin, *The History of the Construction of the Road System in Yellowstone National Park*, 160n337.

92. Rydell and Culpin, *Managing the “Matchless Wonders,”* 2006, 112.

93. Rydell and Culpin, *Managing the “Matchless Wonders,”* 111–12.

94. *Ibid.*, 113–14. See also, Matthew A. Redinger, “The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Development of Glacier and Yellowstone Parks, 1933–1942,” *The Pacific Northwest Forum* 4 (Summer-Fall, 1991): 3–17.

95. Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, 1933–1942*, appendix C, table C-4.

brought in to regrade areas of the many old road scars in the complex. The old road section between buildings No. 3 and 4 was obliterated. Most of this section was resodded using sod removed from the proposed road to the Power House, and the remaining area was seeded.⁹¹

Restoring the roads to their natural setting may appear to be exactly the opposite of development, but this too requires careful scrutiny. This work was closely related to roadside cleanup work in which CCC enrollees cleared away garbage and removed dead wood from burned areas, even removing tree stumps visible from roads. Although under the supervision of landscape architects (all CCC work in Yellowstone was under their supervision), it was designated “fire suppression.” As Kiki Leigh Rydell and Mary Shivers Culpin, the closest observers of this issue, note, “Later in the decade, however, the cleanup was criticized by biologists studying ways to keep Yellowstone’s fauna both wild and available for public viewing. Later still, such cleanup efforts were actually considered ecologically harmful.”⁹²

The emphasis on development can be seen further in Yellowstone just by enumerating the various projects undertaken by the CCC in the middle of the decade. Various accounts attribute to the CCC most construction at Lamar Buffalo Ranch and the Mammoth headquarters residential area. Rydell and Culpin write, “Furthermore, the CCC built, maintained, and improved trails throughout the park.” Trail improvement was substantial work and involved, for one instance, “the 157-mile Howard Eaton Trail along the Grand Loop Road, ‘blasting out tripping hazards (rocks and logs) and grading for a more comfortable [horse] ride.’”⁹³ In addition, the CCC in Yellowstone, the same authors note, staffed entrance stations and museums, improved elk feeding, and culled the elk when they exceeded carrying capacity. As with their Forest Service counterparts, the Yellowstone CCC workers fought bark beetles, white pine blister rust, and fires. The last item included prevention as well as suppression.⁹⁴

In Grand Teton National Park the CCC camps dropped from three in 1933 and 1934 to two in 1935, 1936, and 1937.⁹⁵ The work of those camps continued the cleanup of dead and fallen trees along the shore of Jackson Lake, a project that was completed evidently in late 1936 or early in the 1937 season. They also were heavily engaged with construction projects at Beaver Creek (the park headquarters) and developing trails and campgrounds as well as park infrastructure. Daugherty examined the 1936

report of the park superintendent and found that he had listed CCC contributions that year to include “landscaping headquarters; improvement and development of a campground at Jenny Lake; construction of fireplaces; construction of barriers at Jenny Lake campground; construction of table and bench combinations at Jenny Lake; construction of permanent employees’ dwellings [at] headquarters; extension of water system; Jackson Lake shore cleanup; trail construction at Phelps Lake-Granite Canyon; maintenance and lakeshore cleanup; and general trail maintenance.”⁹⁶

THE ECW, THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION, AND STATE PARKS

The high-profile NPS sites of Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and Devils Tower may overshadow other NPS–CCC activity in the state. In fact, the NPS cooperation with state parks represented a less visible but nonetheless important contribution at an important moment. The Depression had hamstrung well-meaning efforts to develop state parks throughout the nation and in Wyoming, and the state parks lagged far behind the national parks in most regards. And the National Park Service had knowledge upon which the states could draw. As one study explains, “Because of its expertise and experience in park planning, the agency greatly expanded its consultant services and cooperative relationships with the states in recreational land-use planning and development, thereby playing a significant role in the growth of the emerging state park and recreation systems.”⁹⁷ The creation of the Emergency Conservation Work program, moreover, made available a tremendous physical resource for the development of the state parks in cooperation with the NPS. With that assistance, state park development moved quickly and forcefully, although mainly in the shadow of development in their counterpart national parks. Moreover, if sometimes the National Park Service agonized (or officials agonized with and against each other) over the question of development versus preservation, the state parks (and municipal and county parks and other units) were readily conceded the mission of recreation without compromise or complication, a mission they embraced enthusiastically.

Within the National Park Service, in response to the reductions in funding for ECW activity, the Planning Branch consolidated administra-



CCC construction of superintendent residential quarters in Grand Teton National Park.

Courtesy the Grand Teton National Park Archives.

96. John Daugherty, *A Place Called Jackson Hole*, 321–22.

97. Harlan D. Unrau and G. Frank Williss, *Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park System in the 1930s* (Denver: National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1983), chap. 4, http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/unrau-williss/adhi4b.htm.

98. On the administrative structure, see Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, 1933–1942*. On the camps, see the same volume, appendix C, table C-4. On the Guernsey camp, see especially Christine E. Pfaff, *The Bureau of Reclamation's Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, 1933–1942* (Denver: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, 2010), A-55, which classifies the Guernsey Lake project as one of two joint NPS/Bureau of Reclamation/CCC activities. I want to express my gratitude to Mary Hopkins for bringing this excellent study, an important resource for anyone concerned with the CCC and the Bureau of Reclamation, to my attention.

99. Autobiographical statement of John Lawson in CCC oral history archives at James F. Justin Civilian Conservation Corps Museum, <http://www.justinmuseum.com/oralbio/lawsonjbio.html>, last accessed December 6, 2012.

100. "History of Company 1815, Camp S-38-W, Saratoga, Wyo.," in *History of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Colorado and Wyoming District*, 120.

101. Alfred James Mokler, *Fort Caspar (Platte Bridge Station): Comprising a Description of the Killing of Lieutenant Caspar W. Collins and the Massacre of Sergeant Amos J. Custard and Twenty-four of their Comrades, July 26, 1865* (Casper: Prairie Publishing Company, 1939), 64. The buildings of the old fort, according to lore, were reconstructed on the foundation remains of the original buildings; in any case the reconstruction was clearly guided by contemporary artist renderings of the fort.

102. Hanson, "The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains," 236; "History of Company 2130, Camp SP-7-W, Casper, Wyo.," in *History of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Colorado and Wyoming District*, 114. Mokler maintains that reconstruction was complete by December of 1936, and most accounts indicate that the CCC came later, performing mainly cleanup work. The 1937 report for the Fort Caspar WPA project in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 106, OP 65-83-211, suggests that at least some construction work continued into 1937 and contains September 1937 photographs of the fort. The discussion in Charline Sackett, "Casper, Wyoming," WPA Collections, subject file 1509 is suggestive but inconclusive. A weekly series of articles that ran in the Casper newspaper, "On Casper Mountain," relates activities of the CCC camp. For example, one report focused on the progress in the construction of a latrine on the mountain; according to the account, "the masonry work on this massive structure [was] being directed by" the same foreman who directed masonry at Saratoga Hot Springs. Kurt O. Linn, "On Casper Mountain: National Park Service Activities Reviewed," *Casper Tribune-Herald*, August 12, 1936.

tive control of work in the state parks, and this agency also oversaw CCC work in municipal and county sites. The development at Lake Guernsey had initially received CCC support through the NPS as SP-1, but the work was soon transferred to the Bureau of Reclamation as BR-9 for CCC activity as part of the North Platte River Project. And Saratoga Hot Springs State Park, with a CCC camp stationed there in the autumn of 1934, continued as a year-round CCC project through the spring of 1937. This activity in Wyoming state parks increased in 1935, when new camps at Casper Mountain, Round Top (near Fort F. E. Warren), and Thermopolis Hot Springs were added.⁹⁸

The tasks varied in the state parks according to the focus of the individual park. John Lawson, from Rock Springs, joined the CCC at the age of sixteen (enrolling earlier than the legally permissible age by fudging the years was a very common practice in both the CCC and the military, and served an important purpose of providing assistance to the family back home) and was sent to Saratoga Hot Springs State Park. He recalled many years later, "We had the job of building rearing ponds for the fish hatchery, and building shelter houses for stranded travelers. We also built foot bridges over the North Platte River that ran thru Saratoga. We did this so the visitors could cross the river to the shelter house."⁹⁹ That camp also had side camps, and at one of them, one account reports that the camp commander "has some 90 men who are working on bug extermination, another one of the camp's important projects." That camp also built a ranger station in the vicinity of Cold Spring (in the Laramie Range) as well as stations and related projects at other places.¹⁰⁰

The city of Casper, and its various civic organizations, launched an effort focusing on Casper Mountain, directly south of Casper, not as a state park, although it fit administratively into that part of the NPS/CCC structure, but as a metropolitan or community park. The Casper Mountain camp shifted location seasonally, as did a number of others. While some camps moved to warmer states during the winter, this camp moved down the mountain to a location two miles west of Casper, at a location near the Izaak Walton League Recreation Area and the site of old Fort Caspar. The duties changed accordingly. While on the mountain, the CCC crews improved camping and picnic grounds, "to make Casper Mountain a heaven on earth for local picnic parties and passing tourists," and also did substantial work at Rotary Park partway up the mountain near Gar-

den Creek Falls, constructing fireplaces, picnic tables and benches, and other features. In addition, they constructed new and improved existing roads, including not just the conspicuous road snaking up the north slope of the mountain (that was started as a CWA project, although that too may have been an improvement of an existing pathway) but also roads on the top of the mountain. In their winter camp on the river, they built dikes and riprapped embankments and later performed cleanup work at the fort, after it had been reconstructed by the WPA in 1936 and 1937.¹⁰¹ One CCC activity that Hanson mentions, which warrants additional research, both to understand exactly what was accomplished in this instance and to determine how extensive that work may have been, involved “ten enrollees” who “worked three months on prehistoric Indian sites within the park.”¹⁰²

The state park program of the NPS actually took a distinctive twist at the Guernsey Lake camps where the NPS worked with another federal agency on a state park. The Bureau of Reclamation operated two CCC camps in Wyoming in 1934, both at Lake Guernsey as part of the North Platte Project. The North Platte Project was one of the first handful of projects authorized by the Reclamation Service at the turn of the century and reached from Guernsey, Wyoming, to Bridgeport, Nebraska. The Bureau of Reclamation constructed the dam and power plant at Guernsey in 1927, but the recreational facilities remained undeveloped. CWA planning had started on the road along the shore and on some of the park infrastructure, but had not progressed. Thus the work was set for the two CCC camps at Lake Guernsey.¹⁰³

The mission of these two CCC camps was to develop the recreational facilities at Lake Guernsey, and, as it turned out, those features would become a showcase for their architectural qualities. Work on the various built features around the lake had proceeded after the completion of the camp construction in late 1934, and plans were ready for the major project work in 1935. The two camps at Lake Guernsey, in fact, picked up where the CWA and FERA had left off. Work in 1935 went well, but by the end of the year, the president’s order to reduce the size of the CCC caused the elimination of Camp BR-10; at this point Camp BR-9 continued with the projects previously undertaken by both camps. By the end of 1936 most of the work on the buildings and structures was complete, and these features reflected the ascendant trend in National Park Service architectural



Casper Mountain CCC Camp, SP-3-W.
Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, Stimson Collection, Stim/5053.

103. The administrative history of this effort is sometimes confusing because of the change in name of the first camp, from SP-1, as a state park camp, and from RS-1 (for Reclamation Service) to BR-9 (for Bureau of Reclamation); in addition, this camp was operated under a cooperative agreement with the National Park Service, and the features that were produced became part of the Wyoming state park system. Camp BR-10 was also opened in 1934 at Lake Guernsey after the first camp had built facilities for the camps. Curiously, although the Bureau of Reclamation was allotted six CCC camps for drought relief in 1934, none of those camps were located in Wyoming. Pfaff, *The Bureau of Reclamation’s Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy*, 20, 21.



Museum, Guernsey State Park.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

design. For that matter, when Albert Good compiled a portfolio of distinctive “rustic” NPS creations in 1936, he used no less than nine features from Lake Guernsey State Park as models, including a drinking fountain installed in a boulder, “water fount building” (with a water fountain in a log), a comfort station, trail steps of stone, a foot bridge with two handrails, picnic tables, picnic fireplaces, a picnic shelter, and the exquisite museum.¹⁰⁴

The museum was, and remains, the centerpiece of the park and a prominent memorial to CCC labor. About the museum, Good noted, “Although in a state of incompleteness, this museum is promising for an adherence to many of the principles proclaimed for a widely appropriate park architecture—low structure, predominantly horizontal lines and coursing of masonry, and the featuring of few openings by the contrasts of plain, sweeping surfaces. The aggregate is that intangible factor—personality—present in a degree to breed impatience for a view of the building functioning and benefiting by a few years’ vegetative growth in its immediate environment.” The National Historic Landmark nomination of the park, while declining to nominate the park district for its architectural significance, nonetheless observed, “it was evident by 1936 that the museum would be an architectural highlight of the entire CCC state park effort,” and “the Guernsey museum is one of the most distinguished of its type in the country.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Christine Pfaff, in her history of the CCC and the Bureau of Reclamation, observes of the project at the end of 1936, “By then, the new museum was already being recognized as an architectural highlight of the entire CCC State park effort, and the structure was praised as one of the most beautiful small museums in the West.”¹⁰⁶ Again, it was clear that the CCC was doing far more than just planting trees.

104. Albert H. Good, *Park and Recreation Structures*, vol. 1, *Administration and Basic Service Facilities* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), 108, 118, 146–47, 166–67, 180–81; Good, *Park and Recreation Structures*, vol. 2, *Recreational and Cultural Facilities*, 12, 181. Interestingly, the other Wyoming parks that Good drew upon as exemplary included not only Yellowstone and Grand Teton, but also Saratoga Hot Springs State Park, with at least six illustrations and photographs of features from the Saratoga park. For the larger NPS context of Good’s work and the design pattern of which it was a part, see Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), especially 429–42.

105. Susan Begley and Ethan Carr, “Lake Guernsey State Park,” National Historic Landmark nomination (1997), 43, 16.

106. Pfaff, *The Bureau of Reclamation’s Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, 1933–1942*, A-57.

ON THE RANGE:
THE CCC AND THE DIVISION OF GRAZING

The CCC work with the National Park Service, both in Wyoming's two national parks and one national monument and also in the state parks, and with the Bureau of Reclamation and Forest Service, showed significant vigor and accomplishment in the Second New Deal despite the ebbs and flows of personnel levels, funding, and authorization. Perhaps the major CCC development of those years, however, came with the creation of a new agency to manage the public domain, an agency with vast responsibility and minimal manpower.

The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 represented a dramatic shift in U.S. land policy. For more than a century the dominant trend in land policy was to encourage individuals to settle the land and develop their own independent farms and ranches through varying processes defined by the homestead laws. Increasingly the terms and requirements for people settling the land became more generous so as to encourage more people to settle more land. The results of this process were clear. More and more people used the series of homestead laws to establish their homes on the public domain in Wyoming, and the number of farms and ranches increased steadily. The number of "farms" (which included both farms and ranches in the official census counts) in Wyoming climbed from 3,125 at statehood in 1890, to 6,095 in 1900, to 10,987 in 1910, to 15,748 in 1920. And despite the hard times of the 1920s the number of farms and ranches in Wyoming still increased, reaching 16,011 in 1930. Even with the despair of the Depression and the grinding circumstances of drought, the number still climbed, and in 1935 Wyoming had 17,486 farms and ranches. After that, the numbers dropped precipitately. It was not just that after 1935 a corner had been turned; a trend had been reversed.

The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 contributed to the tapering off of the number of farms and ranches by closing the public domain in most instances to homesteading. It also, however, shifted direction in land policy to one of conservation and management of lands rather than settlement. A new federal agency, the Division of Grazing in the Department of Interior, had responsibility to promote the act's mission to "stop injury to the public grazing lands by preventing overgrazing" and to stabilize the livestock industry. This was a large assignment and included vast expanses

of public lands, much of which was in poor condition because of overgrazing, and the overgrazing was intensified by drought.¹⁰⁷ A serious effort at range rehabilitation was necessary throughout the thirty-two grazing districts (and 178 million acres) established in the first year of operation of the Taylor Act, the first such district being created in March 1935 in Worland, Wyoming. The newly created Division of Grazing, however, had few resources of its own and that meant, for one thing, that for the formulation of policy and issuing grazing permits, the professional staff depended on the advice and recommendations of established ranchers in the districts. For another, however, it meant that it did not actually have the workforce necessary to make the improvements the land needed. This is where the CCC came in, and came in in a large, important way.

Philip Foss, in his study of the administration of grazing, explains the solution in words that suggest the significance of the CCC in this effort: "The range improvement program was primarily dependent on the use of the Civilian Conservation Corps. In the first year of its operation, the Division of Grazing was assigned sixty C.C.C. camps, with about 12,000 men, to carry out range improvements on the public domain." This reliance on CCC labor continued throughout the life of the CCC and, as Foss observed in 1960, "Very likely most of the range improvements constructed since the inception of the act were accomplished by the C.C.C."¹⁰⁸ In Wyoming, the Division of Grazing relied on CCC workers, but that fact should not obscure the additional point that the agency was slow in getting started with its range improvement program, even with its reliance on the CCC.

By the end of 1935 it appears that only one or two Division of Grazing CCC camps operated in Wyoming, although that number grew in subsequent years. Documentation of one of them, Camp DG-25 at Basin, is revealing of the larger pattern of work undertaken by the CCC for the

107. See the discussion of this issue in Wyoming in Cassity, *Wyoming Will Be Your New Home, 1860-1960*, 250.

108. Phillip O. Foss, *Politics and Grass: The Administration of Grazing on the Public Domain* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), 82.



Building a puddle core for a dam.

Ninth Period Narrative Report, ECW Camp DG-25, Record Group 49, Entry 19, Box 75, National Archives and Records Administration, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver.



Dam construction by CCC Camp DG-25 near Basin.

Seventh Period Narrative Report, ECW Camp DG-25, Record Group 49, Entry 19, Box 75, National Archives and Records Administration, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver.

Division of Grazing. DG-25 was located at the county fairgrounds outside Basin and was occupied in the middle of August 1935. The camp launched its work on projects in early September, and by the end of the sixth enrollment period (through the winter), the camp had completed construction of seven stock-watering reservoirs, cut and creosoted 3,125 fence posts for use in drift fences, and started construction of five miles of truck trail between Hyattville and Laddie Creek.¹⁰⁹

The reservoirs constructed by DG-25 were no small feat. Each was sizeable and each meant a great deal to the private livestock operators who used the range. For example, Reservoir No. 2, Project No. 2 for this camp, was estimated to benefit “75 stockmen, controlling 75,000 sheep and 5,000 cattle.”¹¹⁰ A substantial structure, this reservoir was made by constructing an earth dam 325 feet long across a dry draw; the dam itself was ten feet

109. Sixth Period Narrative Report, Camp DG-25, Company 2554, Basin, Wyoming, U.S. Department of the Interior, Division of Grazing, ECW, located in Record Group 49, National Archives and Records Administration, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver.

110. *Ibid.*

wide on the top, and the slopes on the front and back of the dam were protected with hand-placed riprap. The CCC workers excavated the spillway bottom and paved both the bottom and the sides with more hand-placed rock. Ordinarily these substantial dams used a method of construction that, while not of the same category as that evident at Alcova and Seminole, did represent much more than just the massing of earth or rock as a barrier to hold the water. The prevailing practice involved the use of a “puddle core” or hydraulic fill. In this system, a trench was constructed at the site of the dam, starting with digging into the rock or other embankments flanking the to-be-constructed dam. Then the trench would be dug between the two points and the entire trench would be filled with wet clay, usually taken from the bed of the reservoir, and this clay would make the “puddle core.” As the clay hardened it provided increased stability for the dam. The other DG-25 dam and reservoir projects were similar in construction, some larger, some smaller, but all designed to provide vital water for the livestock operators in the area.

Other projects likewise endeavored to help the sheep operations on the public domain. For example, the beneficiaries of the truck trail between Laddie Creek and Hyattville were the same as those who gained from the stock-watering reservoirs. A report for the camp indicated that the road “will provide 50 stockmen, controlling 10,000 sheep and 4,000 cattle with a convenient means of moving supplies to and from the winter range in the bad lands to the summer range in the mountains.”¹¹¹ The working relationship with the ranchers was evidently close and cordial, and the report for the enrollment period indicated that “the ECW Personnel at this Camp have been guided by the wishes of members of the Advisory Board, Grazing District Number One, in selection and prosecution of work on various projects.” When the camp established a side camp forty miles away to work on the truck trail, the small crew there was able to use “a small ranch dwelling that has been temporarily loaned for the purpose.” DG-25 appears to have been a welcome force in reshaping the Wyoming landscape from the perspective of those who benefited most directly from their work.

In addition, DG-25 workers also began a range classification survey, and one of their key tasks for this project was checking information regarding commensurate property. In order to be eligible for grazing permits on public land, operators had to have their own land (the commen-

surate property) on which their livestock would graze the portion of the year they were not on the public land. While this had the effect of blocking out the roaming herds of sheep (the “tramp” herders) that had no actual physical base, it also placed an increasing burden on the smaller operators as the amount of land necessary to meet the requirement became larger.¹¹² The CCC workers of DG-25 were checking to make sure that grazers had the required property to sustain their sheep in the seasons that they were not on the public domain.

Within the next two years, Division of Grazing camps opened at Farson (DG-51), Worland (DG-52), Split Rock (DG-74), Big Piney (DG-75), and Frontier (DG-78), and perhaps at other locations also, as well as the associated side camps to which the main camps of two hundred young men temporarily sent smaller work crews. The Division of Grazing CCC was a new force on the public domain, on the public lands outside the national forests and parks, and in Wyoming.

EL FUEGO EN LAS MINAS

There was one other notable federal agency that used CCC workers in Wyoming. The General Land Office (GLO) in the Department of the Interior operated two or three ECW camps in Wyoming; in fact, there were only a handful of GLO camps in the nation, perhaps five. One of these camps, GLO-1, had been assigned originally in 1933 to Campbell County with the mission of working to extinguish coal fires, and evidently a second camp, GLO-2, was placed alongside the first in 1935 or 1936. This effectively doubled the strength of the crews as they fought coal fires. The camps were located on the outskirts of Gillette, close enough that enrollees could walk to the town’s movie theaters and other attractions. The two camps functioned only in the summer until 1937 when the joint camp started to operate year-round.

111. Ibid.

112. Cassity, *Wyoming Will Be Your New Home*, 259–60.

General Land Office CCC camp near Gillette, September 1935.

Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, Stimson Collection, Stim/5075.



Camp newspapers from some of the CCC camps have been preserved, and sometimes they reveal aspects of CCC life not always spelled out in official documents. At the Gillette GLO camp, one important feature of the camp revealed by the newspaper is on a page titled “La Voz de las Minas,” a page provided for (and by) Spanish-speaking members of the camp. That page carried upbeat, but culturally different and distinct, articles about home (“A Sus Casas,”) and about different individuals and activities (“Pasando Buen Tiempo,” “Se Acuerdan,” “Vamos a Jugar,”) in the camp.¹¹³ The members of the camp were from Texas and their baseball team was known as the Texans. The suggestive reporting in this newspaper just touches the surface of an important issue in CCC history and much remains to be learned about this camp—and others like it in the state.

113. *The Blue Blaze* 1 (September 23, 1936). A copy of this camp newspaper is located in the Wyoming State Archives, H97-10.

114. “History of Company 886, Camp GLO-1-W, Gillette, Wyo.,” in *History of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Colorado and Wyoming District*, 56–57.

115. Steve McManamen, “Underground Coal Seam Concerns Wyoming Rancher,” *Casper Star-Tribune*, April 19, 2010.

116. “History of Company 886, Camp GLO-1-W, Gillette, Wyo.,” 56–57.

At some point during this time techniques for fighting fires in the coal mines became more sophisticated and involved a growing assortment of methods. The direct method on trench fires consisted of removing the burning material to a separate place where it could be extinguished. The indirect method attempted to suffocate fire deep in the earth by filling with fine earth all the chimneys (cracks in the earth) that led to the fissures of burning open seams and packing each crevice tightly to a depth of several feet, a chore that could extend over ten acres or more. The third method involved digging a trench around discrete areas of burning coal to separate them from adjacent coal, filling the trenches with dirt (a fire line of a different kind from that in forests) and letting the coal burn itself out.¹¹⁴ At least one account reports that the CCC also dug out a burning coal mine and then diverted a stream to drown it.¹¹⁵

In addition to the fire itself, a camp history noted other dangers: “In the first place there are the poisonous gasses and fumes; and perhaps even more perilous is the working against huge walls of earth, rocks and coal with heavy powered machinery. Extreme care is constantly taken for the safety of the men. Safety devices, gas masks, hose masks and oxygen inhalators are in readiness and use when called for.”¹¹⁶ In 1936 the camp newspaper, *The Blue Blaze*, reported extraordinary activity when one of the underground coal mine entries opened and exposed the smoldering coal inside to ventilation; the CCC workers operated in shifts around the

clock to suppress the fire and keep it from exploding into flame.¹¹⁷ There may have been easy duty in Wyoming's CCC camps, but this was not it.

In Wyoming, the CCC was busy during 1935–1938, the years of the Second New Deal. The ECW workers provided crucial labor resources for the National Park Service, for the Forest Service, for the Bureau of Reclamation, for the General Land Office, for the Division of Grazing, and for the state parks. They left marks on the land in ways that were sometimes small and sometimes large. They built dams. They dug wells. They installed drift fence. They built bridges. They launched campaigns to eradicate rodents and predators by spreading poison. They constructed or improved existing roadways and truck trails. They built everything at state parks from fireplaces and drinking fountains to at least one museum in the state. They searched for missing people in times of emergency. They fought fires in the forests, in abandoned coal mines, and in coal seams.

Finally, it needs to be noted that whatever agency the CCC happened to be assisting, the local communities were also beneficiaries of CCC activities. In 1936 one CCC administrator attempted to sum up the economic gains for those Wyoming communities with CCC camps nearby:

The employment given civilians in the construction of camps aided large numbers of families in many communities. The monthly payroll of officers, enrollees and civilians connected with the CCC work has increased the purchasing power in the towns adjacent to CCC camps. The purchase of food supplies, including dairy products, products of packing plants, fruits, vegetables and dry rations has given considerable aid to people engaged in agricultural pursuits. During the years 1933, 1934 and 1935 a total of 32 CCC camps were located in what is known as the Casper District, which includes all of Wyoming east of the Continental Divide and Yellowstone National Park. This means that at least 32 communities were benefited to an extent of approximately \$5,000 monthly during the occupancy of the camps. The cost of construction of these camps ranged from \$5,000 to \$8,000 for labor and material for summer camps, of which there are 17 in this district; and from \$15,000 to \$25,000 for winter camps, comprising a total of 15. While a portion of the building materials were purchased outside of the state of Wyoming, only Wyoming labor was used on construction.¹¹⁸

In the middle years of the New Deal, in the years of the Second New Deal, the CCC left its mark on Wyoming, a mark that remains visible, notable, and exceptional. It also left its mark on the communities nearby. And it left a mark on the young people who enrolled in the CCC seeking a path out of despair.

Building Up Wyoming the WPA Way

The landmark work relief program of the Second New Deal was clearly the Works Progress Administration. Launched in Washington in the spring of 1935, the WPA put people to work in Wyoming by August of that year. The WPA included a variety of projects, and, it is important to note, those projects were tailored to local needs. Local projects were formulated and applied for by sponsoring entities, such as the town or city or county government, but the overarching requirement that they had to consider in developing their application was the available labor supply—that is, the skills and numbers of local people on the relief rolls who would be put to work in the projects. The usual requirement for WPA projects was that 90 percent of the people put to work be taken from the relief rolls (relief workers) and a maximum of 10 percent not from the rolls (nonrelief workers). This did not always work out neatly, and sometimes exceptions were made for a particular project and sometimes projects were lumped together so that they met the requirement in the total, but generally this policy guided the job creation process. It should also be noted that unemployed workers and workers on the relief rolls are not exactly the same; many workers were unemployed and seeking jobs but did not apply for or receive relief. The WPA was directed especially at employing those people on the relief rolls who were capable of working. These people would not only gain jobs, but they would in the process contribute to society by helping build up Wyoming's infrastructure.

117. "Triple Shift on Black Diamond," *The Blue Blaze*, 1 (September 23, 1936): 4.

118. Captain J. H. Ancrum, district commander, Civilian Conservation Corps, Emergency Conservation Work, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 10-A.

WPA sign.

Courtesy the National Archives and Records Administration.



Generally, in the nation, about 80 percent of the unemployed workers were manual laborers other than farmers and another 10 percent were farmers. These included “unskilled laborers in both industry and agriculture, semiskilled workers, skilled workers and foremen, and domestic and personal service workers.”¹¹⁹ Not surprisingly, then, most of the work undertaken with WPA funding would involve construction work where these people could be advantageously and productively employed, and they would be employed in projects sought and needed by the community. This reflected the fundamental goal of the program:

to give people who have been on relief real work, to pay them a security wage which is not based on their budget deficiency, to drop them from the relief rolls; and by this means to give them once more a normal place in community life on a self-supporting basis. Through work the employable person can maintain and perhaps enhance his skill. He remains a valuable

119. Harry L. Hopkins, *Report on the Works Program* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), 4.

120. *Ibid.*, 9.

121. *Ibid.*, 85.

asset to the national economy and stands ready to resume his role in private industry despite a period of unemployment. Even more important is the maintenance of morale, forestalling the degeneration that may develop during enforced idleness. The work habits of the individual are maintained and respect of self within the family group and among fellowmen is retained. In short, the family is maintained as an effective unit in the economic and social structure.¹²⁰

Even though this was the primary goal of the work relief program, there was more to be gained. The same report continued, noting that besides helping the workers and their families, this program would also add “the large increment to the national wealth in the form of public improvements created by the employment of more than 3,500,000 persons in every community throughout the country.”

By a point (February 29, 1936) six months after the start of the WPA as a functioning agency in the state, Wyoming had put 5,720 people to work on WPA projects throughout the state. (This compared with 1,504 at work on CCC projects at the same date, a point at which the reductions in the CCC were being felt.¹²¹) The kinds of work WPA enrollees were doing can be seen in the following table. The table shows more projects approved than were actually implemented; the WPA project authorization process intentionally approved the additional projects so as to allow flexibility at the state and local level to accommodate a shifting available labor supply, weather conditions, or other factors.

In the WPA projects actually undertaken in Wyoming at this early point, almost half the funds went toward construction of roads, streets, and highways or public buildings, and of that the lion’s share went to roads and streets. Generally that category included a multitude of projects for working on federal-aid highways (including constructing, improving, and maintaining them), farm-to-market roads, city streets, country byways, eliminating grade-crossings (railroad-highway intersections), and constructing culverts, as well as work on roadside improvements. Some of this roadway construction work was done statewide by the Wyoming Highway Department and some was performed locally, in towns and counties, under the appropriate authorities there. The state Highway Department increased its expenditures and its work during the Depression, but most of that work was performed on statewide highways and, by the same token,

Value of WPA Projects in Wyoming as of December 31, 1935

	Value of Projects Approved	Percent	Value of Projects Actually Operated	Percent
Highways, Roads, and Streets	\$1,656,681	30.5	\$1,086,495	37.1
Public Buildings	\$486,952	9.0	\$316,446	10.8
Housing	—		—	
Parks and Playgrounds	\$315,183	5.8	\$317,669	10.9
Flood Control and Other Conservation	\$545,497	10.0	\$337,773	11.5
Water Supply and Sewer Systems/Public Utilities	\$627,708	11.6	\$250,546	8.6
Electric Utilities	—		—	
Airports and Other Transportation	\$225,124	4.1	\$46,539	1.6
Educational, Professional, and Clerical	\$621,286	11.4	\$171,209	5.8
Sewing and Other Goods Projects	\$583,722	10.7	\$218,315	7.5
Sanitation and Health	\$221,040	4.1	\$74,176	2.5
Miscellaneous	\$151,423	2.8	\$107,820	3.7
Total	\$5,434,616	100	\$2,926,988	100

SOURCE: Harry L. Hopkins, *Report on the Works Program* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), 98–101.

most of the funding was received from the federal government. Prior to the operation of the WPA in Wyoming, beginning in August 1935, all of its federal funding had come from sources other than the WPA (such as from Federal Aid Highway appropriations, Hayden-Cartwright Highway funds, National Industrial Recovery Act provisions, Emergency Relief Act funds), much of which did not require state matching funds. Between 1933 and 1936, federal money for highways amounted to 64.4 per cent of the Highway Department funds. While this was generally not WPA money, that funding was consistent with the work relief program, and in 1936 the Highway Commission reported that employment by the Highway Department had “increased from 1700 to 3461 during the biennium, the Department carrying more than its share of the relief load.”¹²² Larry Joseph Krysl observes that in the period 1934–1936, the Highway Department “not only gave Wyoming a fine road system, but employed as high as 25.7 per cent of the total unemployed relief recipients in the state, providing work for more relief men than any other one agency operating with Federal money.”¹²³

Moreover, the work these people performed resulted in substantial improvements to the highway system. During the 1934–1936 biennium,

122. *Tenth Biennial Report of the State Highway Commission of the State of Wyoming for the Period Beginning October 1, 1934 and Ending September 30, 1936* (Cheyenne: State Highway Commission, 1936), 3.

123. Larry Joseph Krysl, “The Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1935–1940” (master’s thesis, University of Wyoming, 1960), 59.

124. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Public Works in Wyoming, 190–192*. Krysl broadens the context slightly and notes, “In 1931 there were only 351 miles of oiled and paved highways in the state, but at the end of 1938 there were 3,117 miles of hard-surfaced roads.” It is unclear if he is referring to roads in the state or actual state highways, part of the official system. Krysl, “The Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1935–1940,” 60.

125. *Tenth Biennial Report of the State Highway Commission of the State of Wyoming*, 34.

126. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 104, Project O-1, Document #66.

142 miles were added to the state highway system, and the number of miles of oiled roadway increased by 761 miles, in addition to the upgrading of previously constructed roads to approved widths, grades, and alignments. To put this into context, that meant that between January 1933 and January 1936, the Wyoming Highway Department had almost doubled the mileage of oiled highways in the state, from 1,352 to 2,509. Some counties, like Teton, Sublette, and Lincoln, had no oiled state highways in 1933, but by 1936 each of those counties had about a third of their state highways oiled.¹²⁴ This was significant, but it was not due directly to the WPA, although considerable federal money came from the \$5 billion pot of money authorized for relief that set up the WPA. Some WPA projects were undertaken by the Highway Department, but these were slow to take off. The biennial report for 1934–1936 (which included just a few months where the WPA was in operation) noted, “Several railroad grade separations have been completed or initiated with the U.S. Works Progress Administration funds.”¹²⁵ While the WPA may have developed some additional projects in coordination with the state Highway Commission, they appear to have been the small projects like the grade separations and related work; the major federal funding continued to come from other sources.

On the other hand, the records of the WPA projects indicate a great many individual projects for roads in all the counties, especially for farm-to-market roads. Sponsored largely by county commissioners, these projects involved graveling, oiling, straightening, or even building roadways, and that included all aspects of the work. Even before the WPA had officially launched its work in the state in August, applications poured into the state office seeking funds. Consider one of those early requests, from the Hot Springs County commissioners, for a project to install and replace sixty-one culverts on county roads. Submitted in July, the justification for this was graphic: “Due to flood conditions from cloud burst & heavy rains, culverts on county roads are badly in need of repairs and replacements.” The project would require 139 man-months of work, using twenty-five people from local relief rolls to be paid with federal funds. One person would be paid by the sponsor (the county commissioners), and it appears that this person would be the supervisor for the project, someone already on the payroll of the county. In typical fashion, the county would supply the materials and equipment.¹²⁶

Such road improvement projects, as the budget numbers indicate, were everywhere, were a prominent part of the WPA program in each county, and constituted desperately needed work that was simply otherwise impossible/unaffordable to undertake. They included the construction of new roads, or reasonably new roads, such as the portion of the road to Seminoe Dam in Natrona County. This project proposed “straightening, widening, draining, grading, and graveling, and surfacing present road to Seminoe Dam from end of present new construction to south county line—Approximately 5½ miles.”¹²⁷ Others involved reworking roads throughout the county on an as-needed basis. Weston County Commissioners, for example, launched a blanket project to “construct and reconstruct and gravel market roads. Cut and saw timbers for bridges on said roads.”¹²⁸ Likewise, Fremont County proposed to “repair roads & bridges on farm to market routes.”¹²⁹

These road projects were ubiquitous, much needed—and finally within reach. The proposal presented by the Albany County Planning Board sought to use 576 workers on the relief rolls with the goal of improving the county road system. In their application the members of the board observed that if this road work were done as part of the normal activity of the county, “it would require a number of years.” They were ready to proceed with the project immediately and saw the work as “in the nature of an addition or betterment having an investment value and decreasing the cost of transportation from farm to market, and furnishes employment for residents in respective locations nearby. The rural delivery of mail will be facilitated by the construction herein.”¹³⁰ If the language and projects sound familiar, that is understandable. Many of these projects, especially in the beginning of the WPA, not only picked up where the Civil Works Administration left off, but even resumed some of the CWA projects (and also FERA projects in the interim) that were either unfinished a year and a half before or were ongoing. Where the CWA was pulling Wyoming motorists out of the mud, the WPA was putting them onto more and better roads, sometimes the same roads, sometimes extensions of those roads—all over Wyoming.

City streets also benefited from the continuation of CWA projects, and the improvement of those streets was high on the list of priorities for Wyoming communities. Evanston promptly asked for funds to “surface 15 [16?] miles of streets with gravel.”¹³¹ Similarly, South Superior secured WPA

funds to widen, grade, and gravel the streets of Superior. The justification for the project was familiar:

Nothing need be said about the necessity for street work in these coal camps because the lack of surfaced streets is so painfully obvious. According to the press, this project has received Washington approval and when official notice is received in this office work will be started immediately.

A new road is needed to the school house, as the school house sits on top of a hill and in the winter time the present road becomes blocked with snow and made dangerous with ice to the extent that it is impossible to drive to within a reasonable walking distance from the building. Mr. McClellan, the engineer, will this week run a survey of the possible routes for a road up this hill and the best and most economical route will then be selected.¹³²

The streets of Wyoming’s towns were already in bad shape, the local governments were unable to afford the necessary improvements, and the Wyoming winters made them even worse. As it happened, however, the drought that had crippled the state’s farms and ranches in the 1930s also caused the dirt roads and streets to bake or powder, generating clouds of dust when used, especially by the growing number of automobiles and trucks. But in the spring of 1936 when rains came, the floods also came and just made the streets and roads that much worse. They desperately needed grading and graveling. The WPA provided a way to get that work

127. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 104, Project 0-4, Documents #216, 219.

128. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 104, Project 1 (for Weston County), Document #270.

129. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 104, Project C-1, Document #128.

130. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 104, Unnumbered Project, July 5, 1935, Documents #708, 710.

131. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 104, Project E-1, Document #290.

132. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 104, Unnumbered project for Superior, July 13, 1935, Document #351.

done. The lament of Hartville was echoed in a multitude of other applications to a greater or lesser extent: “Due to severe floods, streets are in deplorable condition. Unable to get to cemetery as bridges washed out.”¹³³ At Chugwater the town devised a WPA project to improve its streets and gutters: “We had drought for last two years and gravel washed out. Four floods through this town this spring washed out streets. Badly in need of this needed repairs and graveling.”¹³⁴

Platte County was obviously hard hit, but the serious conditions were not restricted to that county; the same circumstances were evident north to Niobrara County, and north from there to Crook County, and west across the Big Horn Mountains to Washakie County. Sheridan’s streets were in the same situation but had a slightly different problem. In 1911 that community had paved seventeen blocks of streets in the town with wood blocks. As the city explained in its WPA proposal, that wood block pavement “has become entirely worn out, broken down and has for several years past required continual repair at a heavy expense to the City and has for several years past continued each season to become more hazardous to the public safety and after each rain storm blocks have buckled, humped and broken and have from time to time been washed out by heavy summer rain showers,” and each time it rained the pavement became worse for travel and more dangerous. On top of that, a sudden storm, on August 16, 1936, brought more than a half inch of rain in ten minutes, “which has now washed out completely large areas of the wood blocks and large number of said wood blocks have been washed down through the storm sewers into the streams making it impossible to recover them and the general condition of said streets is now such it is imperative that the remaining blocks in these areas be immediately removed for the protection and the safety of the public using said streets and for the general safety and welfare

133. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 105, OP 05-83-82, Documents #2227, 2229, 2235, 2240.

134. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 105, OP 65-83-89, Document #2473.

135. The city’s resolution spelling out the needs can be found at Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 105, OP 65-83-49, Document #1250.

of the City.”¹³⁵ Of course, Sheridan could not afford those repairs. Hence the WPA application to improve its streets.

Meanwhile, in Riverton, the progressive and continuing deterioration of its streets led that community to propose a WPA project to grade and gravel all the streets except Main and Federal Boulevard, improvements otherwise impossible to make since “Town of Riverton is financially unable to undertake this work.” So too Newcastle, with a project to improve the streets and alleys there. One after another, the communities of Wyoming turned to the WPA for funds and workers to make essential improvements in their city streets. The Wyoming State Planning Board, formed by the legislature in 1935, examined the various work relief programs in the state and reported that four months after the WPA had started in Wyoming, WPA workers had paved, graded, repaired, or improved seventy-five miles of streets and built and improved eighty bridges. The board also reported that by the end of December 1935, WPA workers had constructed and improved 9.32 miles of sewer, dug twenty miles of drainage ditches, and improved or constructed five septic tanks, while installing and improving three waterworks systems, laid ten miles of water mains, and drilled eight wells. These numbers, of course, are quite modest. It needs to be remembered, however, that (1) this was just a few months after the projects had been submitted and in that time they were reviewed, approved, and set into operation, and (2) this was Wyoming, and the months of November and December are not always conducive to ditch digging, roadwork, and water system improvement. Given those factors, the numbers are perhaps more impressive; moreover, while those numbers would climb substantially over the next two years, the course and direction had been set in the initial months of the WPA in Wyoming.

Two additional points can be made about this statewide effort to build up the streets and roads of the counties and towns. One is that the needs of each county and community were different from each other in the particulars, just because of different histories of development and of economic activity, as well as of topography and climate. Even so, by the 1930s a general pattern of deterioration of roadways that had once been new, that had been perfectly acceptable and usable in earlier times—in times when they carried less traffic, with lesser impact on the roads, when they lacked the cumulative wear and tear of decades of use, and where even had they remained in good condition, they would not suf-

fice for the demands that demographic, commercial, and technological growth placed on them—left the people and communities and citizens of Wyoming in need of improving the transportation routes close to home. And those needs increased and intensified at the precise moment that local resources to accommodate improvements dwindled and even vanished because of the circumstances of the Depression.

This leads to the second observation. During the Depression, as local governments cut back on their expenditures because of reduced revenues and the statutory requirement to balance budgets and as they faced growing debt burdens and impaired borrowing powers, those reductions and contractions only intensified local needs. Just as the needs operated on several levels, so too did the WPA solution work on more than one level: it was not just that the WPA made it possible to improve local roadways and streets; the WPA also put unemployed people to work; and that in turn meant that they could pay their bills; and that, further, meant that the WPA street projects also generated local economic activity. This was an economic and social and public stimulus, building up Wyoming in ways both seen and unseen.

Although the WPA officially and administratively separated water and sewer systems from streets and roads, as a practical matter the work involved in the two areas often overlapped, and when a community proposed one kind of project the other often accompanied it. Multiple communities developed, extended, and/or improved their storm sewer systems and their sanitary sewer systems using WPA workers, those workers being hired from the local relief rolls. Ranchester linked the sewers and the streets explicitly in its application, and Cheyenne noted that the extension of the sewer system was necessary in order for the city to grow—and it was indeed growing. In fact, the improvement and extension of streets and sewer systems were also frequently linked to a third element of infrastructure—improving and extending municipal water systems.

Ubiquitous, essential, but undramatic, this work is often easy to overlook or take as a given. But it is sobering to realize that the combination of streets, highways, sewer systems, and water systems improved and extended by WPA workers in the first six months of the program's existence in Wyoming accounted for 45.7 percent of the funds spent on WPA workers. If one adds to this the related projects for sidewalks and borderline "conservation" projects (such as those to develop reservoirs for water

systems and riprap stream embankments for better storm-water runoff), probably a majority of the WPA funds was expended in this very utilitarian, practical, and all-but-invisible set of developments and improvements. This was a profound public investment in public infrastructure to stimulate and enhance the broad contours of Wyoming social and economic development.

Parks and playgrounds formed an important element of the WPA program in the middle of the 1930s, and probably every community in the state sponsored such projects, often in multiple parks around town. In fact, the parks and recreational construction (and improvement) undertaken by the WPA in Wyoming represents one of the most visible and enduring contributions of the work relief projects in the state. The George Washington memorial parks around the state received an additional impetus with major work, such as the installation of a concrete core through the spillway at Washington Park in Sundance and the erection of bandshells in Washington parks in multiple communities from Powell to Laramie. In Douglas the community used a WPA project to build not only a band shell in its George Washington Memorial Park, but also multiple tennis courts and a fence around the swimming pool, to complete the "amusement and recreational center" for the community. In Casper, the application included the construction of a swimming pool, driveways, and tennis courts, and the planting of trees and shrubs that had begun under the CWA. Under this project, "the work performed will complete a 2.5 acre recreational and restful park accessible to the public in Casper and Natrona County."¹³⁶

Wyoming communities also developed a multitude of parks beyond the centerpiece George Washington memorial parks. Pinedale had recently acquired land for a park and began work by cleaning up the area that was covered by brush and trees to ready it for development. They also constructed a small fish-rearing facility at the park.¹³⁷ Casper used a WPA

136. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 105, OP 65-83-80, Document #2209 (Powell); Reel 106, OP 65-83-118, Document #3785 (Sundance); OP 65-83-210, Document #5495 (Casper); OP 65-83-148, #4422 (Douglas).

137. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 106, OP 65-83-173, Document #4814.



Fort Caspar buildings constructed as a WPA project. The WPA sign is on the building on right.

Seymour Bernfeld Papers, Box 2, Folder 81, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

project to develop the site of Fort Caspar, including the erection and assembly of museum buildings, memorial tablet, and foliage and water system. This would, the city said, serve “as a historical monument to old Fort Caspar and will provide a site for picnics, pageants, celebrations and recreational pursuits.”¹³⁹ Lander completed a swimming pool and landscaped the city park, repairing and constructing tennis courts also.¹³⁹

138. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 106, OP 65-83-211, Document #5578.

139. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 106, OP 65-83-120, Document #3837.

140. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 107, OP 65-83-297, Document #7844.

Sometimes the parks received elaborate improvements, including those swimming pools, but also sometimes buildings as well; often they received landscaping, in which case the investment was more modest. Sometimes the project applications simply and broadly indicated the “improvement” of all parks in the community, even when the community was large—like Cheyenne. Municipal parks were high on the list for just about every town since those projects were eminently available, required skills that almost everyone on the relief rolls possessed, helped a broad segment of the community, and often required only minimal materials and equipment. In other words, they were ideal for putting people to work on an economical basis. Finally, those parks enhanced the quality of life in small towns and large, not just improving the productivity of the area or facilitating the flow of commerce. Clearly, other values were at work. There may have been some city parks in the state that did not receive improvement at the hands of WPA workers, but those parks had to be few in number.

The public buildings erected in Wyoming by the WPA ordinarily were not the kind of architecturally grand buildings associated with the PWA, a distinction almost guaranteed by the \$25,000 limit separating WPA and PWA projects. Many times they were actually quite small. Generally they were constructed of locally available materials (if they were not simple frame buildings), and often they were log. Sometimes they were modest to the extreme and simply utilitarian. While built on a different scale, they were, nonetheless attractive and reflective of community pride, and especially they responded to local needs as communities attempted to build a bridge from the conditions of despair to a brighter future. Consider the log building constructed in Dayton as a community hall. The explanation of the need for this project was simple but clear: “Need for a building for community gatherings. Gymnasium for the school children. Stage for community plays. Meeting place for the town council.”¹⁴⁰ With a stated population of 346 and an additional population of 300 in the surrounding area that would use the facility, the need was plain. In a contrasting, and unsettling, vein, another building project held a very different prospect, though it also reflected local social structure in an area that had come to be dominated by the economics and social dynamics of the sugar beet industry, including its migrant labor force. Instead of bringing people together, at least one project would separate them. School District No. 6 in the town of Worland proposed building a one-story, four-room grade school. The

justification for this project was, “School facilities are inadequate. Grade school is needed to relieve congestion and to segregate white and Mexican children.”¹⁴¹

The WPA was also responsible for other, more specialized, and sometimes less conspicuous, buildings. Armories had always been problematic, at least in the sense of which level of government should fund them, and the armories in Wyoming had been constructed by combinations of funds from various sources. The Wyoming military historic context study identifies construction or improvement of at least five different armories or annexes in the 1930s, and some of these were undertaken as WPA projects. For example, in 1912 the state had constructed an armory at Newcastle for the machine gun unit there, but it lacked stables and riding facilities—critical omissions for cavalry. And those omissions were acutely felt over the next two decades, even though in the larger scheme of things horse-mounted cavalry was proving to be increasingly anachronistic. Vital to the mission of the cavalry unit a stable was, though, and the CWA and FERA spelled out plans for construction. Finally, in 1935–1936, the WPA constructed a stable at a site removed from the original armory. The project manager for the armory construction, as usual an individual with responsibility in the sponsoring agency, was R. Andersen, the adjutant general for the state of Wyoming. This was the same R. Andersen who, as a captain and company commander, had been building manager for the Newcastle armory in 1912. Other armory facilities constructed in the middle of the 1930s included a riding hall at Laramie and a stone warehouse addition and stone garage in Cheyenne.¹⁴²

One other kind of building constructed by the WPA throughout the state is almost unseen today, yet at the time it represented a significant social change. What was known as the Community Sanitation Project addressed a fundamental fact of life in Wyoming everywhere that sewer systems using water to carry away sewage were not available, in other words especially rural Wyoming. The State Department of Public Health sponsored the project, and by the spring of 1936 it was active in sixteen of Wyoming’s twenty-three counties and planned to move into the remainder shortly. “The old insanitary outdoor toilet is one of the major items in sanitation that has never been successfully attacked in the past,” lamented the state health officer, referring to the outhouses of the state as “prolific sources of filth born diseases.” The object was to replace them. One part



Cavalry unit stable in Newcastle, now Anna Miller Museum, constructed by the WPA.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

of the effort was simply to show people how to build alternatives that were sanitary: “It has been demonstrated the reason people not served by sanitary sewage have not had proper sanitary facilities before is because they have not understood how to properly construct them.” So the Community Sanitation Project placed in every community “actual demonstrations of what constitutes a sanitary outdoor toilet. When a number of these are

141. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 107, OP 65-83-272, Document #7382.

142. Kurt Schweigert and Carrie Schomig, of TEC Inc., *Historical Context Study of Military Sites in Wyoming from 1920 to the End of the Cold War* (Maumee, Ohio: Toltest, 2009), 146. See also, O. B. Kongslie, “The Newcastle Armory,” and Kongslie, “History of Newcastle National Guard Record is Creditable,” WPA Collections, subject file 495.

placed in a community the demand for this type immediately becomes apparent.” Another part of the project that reached beyond demonstration facilities was actually building them, and this proved to be one of the few public works programs that also operated on private property. The owner (public or private) of the property furnished the materials, the WPA furnished the labor, and the State Department of Health provided supervision. As of spring 1936 about 125 men were at work building these sanitary outdoor toilets—facilities that had reinforced concrete floors and bowls with wood buildings bolted to the slab. Although heavy, they were nonetheless portable. The facilities “should last as long as the house in which the owner of the toilet lives. These toilets are so constructed and designed that they are absolutely fly-proof and practically odorless.”¹⁴³ Surely some of these “new” toilets still exist in the state.

Schools, park clubhouses and lodges, utility buildings for town and county governments, community halls, armories, sanitary toilets—these were the WPA buildings. These were the buildings that reflected (and shaped) day-to-day life in Wyoming’s towns. While one approach to considering these remnants of the past is to examine them solely for their architectural qualities, it is easy to lose sight of their historical significance. The historic significance of these buildings ultimately is tied to the needs

143. The information regarding this project is taken especially from the report of Dr. G. M. Anderson, State Health Officer, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 31 A, B.

144. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 105, OP 65-83-53, Document #1942.

145. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 105, OP 65-83-11, Document #2140.

146. OP 65-83-60, Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 105, Documents #1652–1661. Because riprapping Bitter Creek was an ongoing project over a period of about six years, it is difficult to determine exactly which parts were constructed, repaired, or replaced at which time. See the 2008 analysis by David Johnson of a 1941 segment of Bitter Creek riprapping at Western Archaeological Services in Rock Springs. I wish to express my gratitude to Mary Hopkins and Jana Pastor for bringing this archaeological study to my attention.

that they were intended to fulfill in Wyoming during the Depression and the specific programs that were used to bring them into being. It also has to do with the pattern of change undertaken in the broader set of federal programs.

The various flood control projects in the state carried out by WPA workers formed a budget category separate from buildings and roads, but it was just as important in the state’s communities. During the years of intensive drought, measures to prevent flooding were understandably not a high priority on anyone’s list of emergency measures, but by the middle of the decade the rains, seldom evenly spread out, had started to return, at least in some parts of the state, and the floods that had intermittently plagued the state also began to return. Now, however, WPA resources were available, if not to prevent them, at least to channel the sudden, heavy flows. In the town of Fort Laramie, not far from the banks of the North Platte River, the storm runoff in town presented serious problems. So the town proposed the building of dikes at the river and the widening of drainage ditches because, “flood control ditches are not large enough to carry floodwaters.”¹⁴⁴ In Cheyenne, the work to control the floodwaters of Crow Creek included not just widening the ditches, and not just riprapping the banks, but substantial “development of the Crow Creek Valley through Cheyenne as a permanent recreational area and wild life sanctuary. Flood control of Crow Creek will be provided for with all the pertinent structures.” This project, clearly an exception to the prevailing dollar boundary separating WPA and PWA projects, required over \$50,000 in federal money and constituted major work on about three miles of Crow Creek, including the development of a parkway.¹⁴⁵

A similar project developed along Bitter Creek in Rock Springs. There, work had begun under the CWA and was continued by the FERA after the termination of CWA projects, and, in the autumn of 1935, the WPA took up the task. The project involved quarrying and installing rock riprap along both banks of the creek “to prevent bad washing from flood waters and resultant erosion which would otherwise eat away valuable city and private property.” In some parts on the north bank extending about 1,700 feet, however, old rock wall had to be completely removed before the new could be installed, thus involving an entire reconstruction and reinforcement project that was as challenging as building new wall where none had existed.¹⁴⁶ Riprap was becoming important to Wyoming, and Wyoming



Riprap on Bitter Creek, Rock Springs.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

WPA workers frequently developed considerable skill in laying the rocks in exactly the correct engineering way to bolster the creek beds to keep them from washing away. As extensive and ubiquitous as the WPA parks and playground projects were, the flood control and soil erosion projects involved with streambed reinforcement actually consumed even more money and worker hours.

Airports, having been boosted substantially by CWA projects, remained a priority for the WPA. Like other means of transportation, airports even carried a dynamic that assured the need for continuing improvement. As Lewis Mumford postulated about highways, the more they are improved and the easier they are to use, the more traffic they attract; conversely, the more traffic they attract, the more repairs, enlargement, and enhancement they need. In a self-feeding dynamic, in a continuing spiral of growth, change becomes inexorable.¹⁴⁷ And that is exactly what Wyoming's airports were facing in the 1930s. The CWA had already started or improved a number of these airports, but the job remained unfinished. This was true nationally as well, and a national report's discussion of WPA airport improvement echoed exactly the circumstances described in project appli-

cations in Wyoming: "The rapid increase of traffic and of airplane speed, size weight, and efficiency makes it imperative that ground facilities be brought up to date—work which local communities at present are unable to carry on without Federal funds."¹⁴⁸

Thus communities across the state sought funds and WPA workers to improve their airports. At Casper's Wardwell Field, a project graded and leveled landing strips and constructed two new runways with oil surface. This airport had been brought to completion in 1934 with CWA help. The justification now for the improvements and expansion? Natrona County commissioners were explicit: "Due to the increased traffic on the field and the use of heavier and faster transport planes it is necessary to grade the landing strips and construct runways thereon eliminating all hazards which might be encountered on landing and takeoff."¹⁴⁹ The Cheyenne airport, like others, was undergoing constant improvement, and one report in the WPA files simply notes that "in the last four years, oiled runways have been installed; other up-to-date improvements made."¹⁵⁰

147. See Lewis Mumford, *The Highway and the City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964).

148. Hopkins, *Report on the Works Program*, 31.

149. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 106, OP 65-83-128, Document #3990, approved August 28, 1935.

150. Burton Thompson, "Nearly \$1,000,000 Spent to Make Airport among Best in Nation," typescript report in WPA Collections, subject file 1375.

Cheyenne airport, under constant change and expansion during the 1930s with WPA assistance.

Sanborn postcard from the Michael Cassity collection.



At Lander, the WPA constructed a new hangar. At Worland, the airport project begun under the CWA and continued as a FERA project still was not complete, so it was continued under WPA. Across the state, WPA workers drained, filled in, and leveled runways, added new ones, paved old ones, built hangars and administrative buildings, added beacons, and made other improvements. Again, the national WPA report articulated the priorities and goals of this effort: “This program, involving the creation of permanent national values through the work of persons formerly on relief, is seeking to place the airway and airport facilities of the Nation on a par with flying equipment now in use, coordinating, as far as is consistent, the aeronautical needs with the relief labor requirements.”¹⁵¹ Writing shortly after this, Agnes Wright Spring commented on the airports, “There has been statewide development of emergency landing fields for airplanes, and two airlines operate east to west and north to south across the State.”¹⁵²

151. Hopkins, *Report on the Works Program*, 30.

152. Workers of the Writers’ Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Wyoming, *Wyoming: A Guide to Its History, Highways, and People* (1941; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 76.

So it went for WPA projects, all across Wyoming, in town after town. And the justifications for each project echoed the standard refrain, though using words specific to their own situations, that without WPA assistance the project would not be possible and that local people needed to be put to work, for their sake and for the community's sake. Thanks to the various projects developed for Wyoming's counties and communities—building, repairing, and maintaining roads and bridges, installing sewer lines and water mains, building and developing municipal parks, improving airports, and protecting the communities from floods—the WPA was changing the physical landscape of Wyoming in the mid-1930s. At the same time, as WPA officials made clear, their first priority was to put to work people who wanted jobs, who needed jobs, and who could not find jobs.

Not everybody who was unemployed, however, was suited for construction work, but their needs were as great as the manual laborers and artisans. There was the possibility that other kinds of projects could more appropriately draw upon their different skills. Some of these people actually had significant skills that could be put to creative and valuable use to help communities and the state, and the WPA developed projects for them as well. One part of the population that possessed ability, skill, and motivation was everywhere but was often overlooked; that segment included roughly half the adult population. Women had been largely excluded from work projects, and, as one official reported in 1936 on the omission, “Wyoming had no definite program for women during the Civil Works Administration. A few women were employed for clerical work and a survey of undernourished school children, employing seven nurses, was carried on under the direction of the State Health Department.”¹⁵³ Actually, there had been some projects for women, but these were exceptions, were generally isolated, and paled in comparison to the others.

The women's projects had grown under the FERA in the state in 1934 and 1935, and when the Works Progress Administration was launched in the fall of 1935, it had a separate division focusing on unemployed women in Wyoming. That new division, under the direction of Margaret Sowers, who had administered the Women's Work Program in the FERA, took the program from the FERA to the WPA, using the leftover material from those FERA projects to provide material for women workers of the WPA. Under the WPA, Wyoming women would receive some work relief employment, although that assistance carried with it limitations on

size and extent of the program as well as the kinds of work and training offered.¹⁵⁴

One of the main WPA projects was the establishment of sewing rooms around the state. In those sewing rooms women would make clothes of various kinds for families in need and also uniforms for the penitentiary and some other institutions in the state. Once the project took off in the autumn of 1935, the WPA put to work up to 1,229 women, who were creating literally thousands of garments of all kinds for needy families. Much of this work was done with cotton cloth, but each establishment in the state also included a group that specialized in working with wool. Through coordination with other agencies, a comprehensive production system emerged. The tannery at Casper sent wool to the prison at Rawlins and there prisoners scoured and carded the wool; then it was distributed to the eighteen sewing rooms in the state where women would spin the wool into yarn, and then the yarn was woven into wool fabric that was then turned into clothes.

An additional objective of this program, after putting the women to work and improving their skills, was providing clothes for people on relief. The larger (urban) operations produced men's and boys' jackets and women's and children's clothes from tanned sheep hides, as well as wool and cotton clothing, while the smaller and more remote sewing rooms around the state produced bedding and underwear. In these sewing rooms, the emphasis was on women's development of skills as seamstresses so that they would be able to find employment in that line, with the further benefit that each woman would acquire the skills involved in sewing complete projects from start to finish—in contrast to performing just one part of the item to be added to other parts that other women would be sewing. As Margaret Sowers reported, “I have always instructed our seamstresses that they should make these clothes with as much pains as though they were sewing for themselves.”¹⁵⁵ And they made them with pride. In August

153. Margaret Sowers in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 38-F.

154. *Ibid.*, 38-F, G.

155. *Ibid.*, 38-I.



WPA sewing room, Wheatland.
Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections, #24056.



Toys made as WPA project in Casper with local sponsor Casper Business & Professional Women's Club, presumably at the sewing room.
Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections, P88-36/10.

1936, the Casper sewing room presented an exhibit at the gymnasium of the local junior high school to display samples of the various items the WPA seamstresses had produced.¹⁵⁶

They took pride in the quality of the clothes they made, but they also wanted them to be individually made and unidentifiable as sewing-room products. In order to avoid any stigma attached to receiving those clothes, which would result from a uniform method of sewing-room production, the WPA ordered material in small quantities. The director of the women's program explained how this worked: "No two bolts of the same kind are ordered. The children cannot be picked out in the communities by their clothing. In fact the teachers told me the children are better dressed than before and that they cannot be picked out."¹⁵⁷

A related WPA initiative was the establishment of canneries in the state. Evidently canning plants were established in Cheyenne and Sheridan, but there was also an Arapaho cannery on the reservation, and others were

156. "Exhibit of Products Made under WPA Scheduled Here," *Casper Tribune-Herald*, August 19, 1936.

157. Sowers, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 38-1.

WPA hot lunch program, Corlett School, Cheyenne. The hot lunches were intended to benefit not just the children who received them but also the women who prepared and served them.

Photograph by E. N. Schuler, WPA photographer; courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections #21441.

spread around the state; a 1936 survey of WPA activities noted the existence of thirty canning centers in the state. Most of these canneries were vegetable-processing operations. The canneries at Cheyenne and Sheridan also (or instead) canned beef that was processed from some of the cattle slaughtered by the Bureau of Animal Industry and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. One survey of WPA activities as of December 1936 indicated that beef canneries included two buildings constructed or repaired and the canning of 1,070,279 cans of beef. It also reported 139,561 cans of soup produced. Meanwhile, WPA canneries also canned 518,272 cans of vegetables and brined 4,439 gallons of vegetables.¹⁵⁸

As yet one more step in the women's program, these foods were then made available for the hot lunch program that the WPA provided, putting to work additional women in the preparation of those lunches in schools. This was identified as one of the women's service (as opposed to production) projects of the WPA. In the project's first winter of operation, these lunches were provided to more than six hundred children, and some reports indicate that one of the components of those lunches was the output of the canning plants.¹⁵⁹ The other service projects for women included a nursery school program and a visiting nurse program. In the first winter of its operation, the visiting nurse program put to work fifteen registered nurses, who assisted "ERA clients and border-line cases." The nursing project especially emphasized prenatal, natal, and postnatal and child care and nutrition. The justification was blunt: "There are no agencies in the State carrying a Public Health Program. As this state is very sparsely populated, many people do not have access to medical, dental or nursing care."¹⁶⁰ Another seventy-four women worked as "visiting housekeepers" to "homes where the mother was ill, and in motherless homes."¹⁶¹



158. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Public Works in Wyoming*, 67–68.

159. See Sowers, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 38-G-H. The State Planning Board offered different statistics that, as frequently happens, cannot be reconciled because of variations of time referents and definitions used in the gathering of the data. The State Planning Board reported that as of about December 31, 1935, there were three school lunch projects feeding an average of 340 children weekly. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Public Works in Wyoming*, 67.

160. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 105, OP 65-83-92, Document #2909.

161. Sowers, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 38-H.



WPA nursery school project, Thermopolis; children at lunch.
Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections, #25128.

162. *Ibid.*, 38-H.

163. Sowers noted of the FERA women's projects, "Over 90 percent of all these workers received their first experience in working in group relationship." Sowers, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 38-F-G.

The women's program of the WPA had serious limitations. It was small in the number of projects it sponsored and also in the number of people it put to work. And it generally restricted the work to traditional conceptions of women's roles. Those facts notwithstanding, Margaret Sowers made clear that this program was a considerable improvement over previous efforts where opportunities simply did not exist for women on work relief projects or existed in only isolated instances.

It should be noted also that changes were in the offing. One important but subtle change was hinted at in Sowers's comment about the sewing rooms: "Emphasis is now being placed on systematizing work rooms for increased production in bedding and regular garments of wearing apparel, aiming primarily at increasing the worker's skill."¹⁶² This statement is sufficiently ambiguous that it is by no means conclusive, but one meaning, given the context in which it emerges, has to do with the process of systematization. At this time, many programs of the federal government (and state government too) aspired to greater systematization, or modernization, that is, adopting the language, organization, relationships, methods, and machinery of industry. At a rudimentary level on the work floor, this often implied the specialization of tasks and the development of systematic, coordinated work processes. To put it another way, this systematization could, though not necessarily would, mean the development of something approaching an assembly line in production of sewn items. The notion of "working in a group relationship," at any rate, takes on a new meaning once the work process has been systematized.¹⁶³ Whatever the merits of that system for increasing production, on another level it generally meant the decline of a communal workplace where traditional skills were nurtured, communicated, and preserved even if within a gendered domain.

Women represented one group previously neglected in work relief projects, but there were others too. In fact, Harry Hopkins pointed to the demographics of the relief rolls as an indication that not everybody out of work was a manual laborer. Those additional people also needed jobs. White-collar workers constituted a smaller part of the workers on relief than they did in proportion to the general population, but they were an important group and they had valuable skills to offer. These included generally "persons in the professions—engineers, teachers, musicians, artists, clergymen, nurses, etc.—as well as proprietors, managers and officials, and

office and salesworkers.”¹⁶⁴ So the WPA devised projects for these people. Some of them, such as nurses, were accommodated in the Women’s Program, and in the spring of 1936 this program was united with the Professional Program to form a closer working relationship between the two overlapping groups. One of the primary undertakings in the effort to put professional and clerical people, or others with office, instructional, and administrative skills, to work in Wyoming consisted of surveys. These surveys were often sponsored by state and federal government offices as they sought to perform tasks and gather information, endeavors for which they did not have sufficient personnel even during normal times, not to mention during the Depression. For instance, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, in conjunction with the University of Wyoming Agricultural Extension Service, put together two groups of workers to gather and tabulate information about farming and ranching practices in the state, one group to work in the field with farmers, gathering information (on crop and livestock yields, production costs, income levels, and so forth) from the farm account books given them when they signed up with a government program, and another group to work in the office to tabulate and summarize the data. Once again, a familiar refrain peppered the WPA proposals: “It cannot be financed from any other source.”¹⁶⁵

As an example of a state project, the Wyoming Department of Commerce and Industry used the WPA to research physical and legal (landowner) boundaries of what was known as the Medicine Bow Petrified Forest “with the view of possible later development as a national monument, state park or outdoor attraction of educational value and geological interest to scientists, tourists and visitors.” To this was subsequently added related research to determine land ownership and extent of the “dinosaur graveyard” at Como Bluff for similar development as an attraction.¹⁶⁶ Other applications included a University of Wyoming project to survey wildlife in the state and a project by the Wyoming State Planning Board, a new state agency established in 1935 to coordinate public works programs, for “a fact finding project in which is compiled a research requiring statistical and other information concerning the natural resources of the state for use by the Governor of Wyoming, and all state departments in classifying submitted projects.”¹⁶⁷ One common denominator of these research and survey projects was their emphasis on planning, a feature common, in fact, to the approach of government at all levels in dealing with the oppor-



WPA worker tabulating wool data, Albany County.

Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections, P894/148.

164. Hopkins, *Report on the Works Program*, 23.

165. Wyoming WPA Projects Files, Reel 106, OP 65-83-137, Document #4279.

166. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 106, OP 65-83-229, Documents #6141-6149.

167. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 106, OP 65-83-216, Document #5774. This appears to have been proposed as one of the first projects in the summer of 1935 and then reviewed in the autumn.

tunities and responsibilities it was facing. As one proposal from Campbell County articulated it, the work in the project that county proposed “is very necessary in order to prepare intelligent planning for future development in this County.” The research was necessary, it emphasized, “for the necessary planning and development of any County.” As with the systematization of work in the sewing rooms, the planning that characterized modern business practices was also becoming a regular feature of public institutions.¹⁶⁸

It is not altogether clear that each and every one of these survey projects was funded and/or initiated, but it is clear that some surveys were and that the program was endeavoring to put to work, and also draw from, people with skills that were distinct from those required in the construction industry. The number was not negligible either. By the spring of 1936, the Wyoming WPA projects employed a total of 336 professional and technical workers (including architects, draftsmen, technical engineers, teachers, and others), 357 office workers (including bookkeepers, accountants, auditors, clerks, stenographers, typists, and others), and 364 project supervisors and foremen.¹⁶⁹

Some projects put to work individuals with distinct and special skills, or, more correctly in some instances, talents and abilities. Harry Hopkins made the recognition and usage of these skills a national priority. “Employable persons on the emergency relief rolls for whom appropriate jobs must be provided under the Works Program include representatives of every group in the general population— artists, actors, musicians, and writers,

as well as factory hands, farm laborers, and others more frequently alluded to.” Moreover, these people needed jobs through which they could make a meaningful contribution to what was called the national wealth and the community wealth, which was more than a dollar and cents matter. It was one thing to call upon architects, engineers, and other professionals who meshed well with construction and related work, but quite another to find projects for “artists, actors, musicians, and writers.” So the WPA launched programs to put them to work and to draw upon their talent: “To handle the complexity of problems involved in providing employment for the former group, a nation-wide cultural program employing artists, musicians, theatre workers, and writers has been made an essential part of the Works Program.”¹⁷⁰ The cultural program was identified as Federal Project No. 1, and was begun in August 1935.

In Wyoming the emphasis, at least in terms of budget and projects, of Federal Project No. 1 was putting writers to work. The state librarian, Alice Lyman, according to Gordon Olaf Hendrickson, “conceived of a program whereby researchers and writers could be utilized to collect and preserve the state’s unique historical heritage.” The program she had in mind would be a Statewide Historical Project and would operate within the WPA, and in particular within the Federal Writers’ Project in the WPA. The statewide project was approved early in 1936 and “workers in all Wyoming counties interviewed pioneers, collected historical materials such as diaries, journals, and letters, and wrote up the results of their research.”¹⁷¹ On the national level a separate project begun within the Federal Writers’ Project proposed the collection of information at the state and local levels to be contributed to what was going to be known as *The American Guide*, an anticipated five-volume compilation of information about the attractions and cultures of the states. While work began on this project in Wyoming in late 1935, how separate it was from the “State Wide Historical Project” is unclear; there was obvious overlap in the two projects. By the end of 1936 the Statewide Historical Project had gathered about 1,900 manuscripts, but soon the Statewide Historical Project would terminate, and its work would be taken over by the American Guide project.

Another project in the Wyoming Writers’ Project, the Historical Records Survey, undertook to identify and list in a comprehensive inventory the public records, and some private records (such as those of churches), existing in the state, and this work began in 1935 on a county-

168. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 106, OP 65-83-233, Document #6269.

169. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Coordination Survey* (Cheyenne: Wyoming State Planning Board, 1938), 91.

170. Hopkins, *Report on the Works Program*, 33.

171. Gordon Olaf Hendrickson, *Wyoming Works Projects Administration Federal Writers’ Project Collection Inventory* (Cheyenne: Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department, 1977) [unpaginated 2]; Hendrickson, “The WPA Writers’ Project in Wyoming: History and Collections,” *Annals of Wyoming* 49 (Fall 1977): 181.

by-county basis. A small group—precisely four people—had undertaken an archival survey as part of the CWA, but this WPA project was a more ambitious effort. Progress was uneven in the Historical Records Survey, which was located initially in the WPA headquarters in the basement of the Governor’s Mansion.¹⁷²

Thus the Writers’ Project in Wyoming in 1935 and 1936 consisted especially of individuals poring over records in courthouses and elsewhere in the state, making extensive lists of what was located there and sometimes annotating those lists or even copying materials in longhand to assure their preservation, and, at the same time, researchers in local WPA offices writing reports, interviewing pioneers, gathering information about the economy, culture, history, physical features, and attractions of the different parts of the state. By March 1936, the WPA had at least thirty-one writers and editors at work on these projects.¹⁷³ Doubtless there were more workers than that since supervisors and clerical assistants were not enumerated separately. By late 1936, however, the Historical Records Survey had been made independent of the Federal Writers’ Project.¹⁷⁴ Although in small numbers, writers and researchers were being put to work in Cheyenne and in every county.

As for a music project and a theater project, the effort and result was not so substantial, and these programs never really took off in Wyoming. There seems to be no record of a theater project in the state at all and the music project, as it turned out, was inchoate and pieced together using general WPA funds rather than a separate Federal Music Project comparable to that for other cultural activities. A letter from an unemployed man in Baggs related that person’s discouragement in finding employment, even with the WPA, as a musician. In 1938, he described his efforts over the previous two years, saying he had

signed up with local county WPA as a “Pipe Organist”. Said WPA officials did not know anything about the Federal Music Project, but, put me to work with pick and shovel; after some months of disheartening labor I contacted the Wyoming State WPA, convinced them I was a Musician, and they started this Better Music Program and me its Musician.

For over two years I have been teaching organ, piano, and violin in this river valley in SW Wyoming. Some of my students now play 5th grade music.¹⁷⁵

In fact, there may have been others in precisely the same situation, teaching music around the state, but they were not part of a coherent program. In 1936 the State Planning Board counted sixteen “Musicians and Teachers of Music” as part of the WPA workforce.¹⁷⁶

The visual artists of Wyoming received more WPA attention and more WPA projects. A gesture in the direction of putting artists to work had taken place with the Public Works of Art Project, funded by the CWA and administered by the Treasury Department in 1933–1934, but this was neither substantial nor genuinely visible.¹⁷⁷ The PWAP vanished along with the CWA, but the spirit of the project was resurrected with the WPA Federal Art Project (FAP) in 1935. Wyoming’s FAP began in the autumn of 1935 with a staff of six artists and teachers, transferred, as historian Herbert Dieterich observes, “from the state’s white-collar relief projects to the new organization.” The supervisor, photographer Ellis Dagley, lived and worked in Riverton while the others worked in their own communities, “teaching weaving, woodcarving, arts and crafts, with several actually doing easel and mural work.” By June 1936 the project employed nineteen

172. James Hanson, “The Historical Records Survey in Wyoming, 1936–1942,” *Annals of Wyoming* 45 (Spring 1973): 78–82.

173. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Coordination Survey*, 91.

174. Hanson, “The Historical Records Survey in Wyoming, 1936–1942,” 79–80.

175. Letter from Edgar L. Requa to Music Project, Federal Works Project Administration in Washington, November 3, 1938. The author of this letter wrote to the Washington offices of the WPA seeking a position in the Federal Music Project, a program about which Wyoming officials appeared completely unaware. A copy of the letter can be found in the Herbert R. Dieterich papers, Wyoming State Archives. Dieterich mentions this document in his article “The New Deal Cultural Projects in Wyoming: A Survey and Appraisal,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 52 (Fall 1980): 34.

176. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Coordination Survey*, 91.

177. Petravage, “A Study of Three New Deal Art Projects in Wyoming,” 25–26; Dieterich, “The New Deal Cultural Projects in Wyoming,” 32.

people, but it was not much more organized or focused than the music project; essentially, WPA workers were teaching art in various communities, although a few were creating art. By autumn of that year the Wyoming project, and the national projects too, had been reorganized so that teaching was now part of the recreation/education programs of WPA, and the remaining organization and half-dozen workers were more directly focused on creating and encouraging art.¹⁷⁸ The new director, UW Art Department head E. E. Lowry, focused the program on creating a system of community art centers and galleries. In addition to hosting traveling exhibitions of art (and later exhibitions of local artists), the centers would provide instruction in both art and art appreciation. Beginning in 1936 and into 1937 such art centers were established in Laramie, which was the hub of the system, and in Riverton, Rock Springs, Casper, and Cheyenne.¹⁷⁹ It appears that some or all of the gallery/art center directors were themselves artists, and from that fact would emerge some of the future artistic creations of the WPA in Wyoming. As of the middle of the decade, however, the project was just taking shape, finding an identity, and establishing itself in Wyoming's communities.

In addition to the artists and writers and white-collar professionals and clerical workers put to work by the WPA, there was one other group that often escaped notice but needed jobs. The relief rolls generally defined workers by their previous experience, but there were people in Wyoming and the nation who actually had no such previous work experience. What kind of work would be appropriate for them? One part of that population, the WPA headquarters determined, included women, especially "housewives who have been forced upon the labor market by economic necessity." For those people, the projects of the Women's Program would provide jobs and training. But there were others too. These were "mainly young per-

sons who have reached working age during the depression years and who have never found employment."¹⁸⁰ The National Youth Administration was thus created by executive order in June 1935 as an independent agency but operating within the WPA.

The task was not just to put young people to work. The circumstances of the Depression actually had a complex, and even unending, impact on youth. Many were not able to continue their education because of the need to earn a living for themselves and their families. But once they dropped out of school they were not able to find jobs, and thus were even more frustrated in their lives and aspirations, a frustration that would shadow all their endeavors for years and years. So the task was how to help them stay in school, whether high school or college, and once out of school, if unemployed, how to help them gain skills so that they would be more employable. Thus the NYA was structured in a decentralized way with two general programs to help achieve these diverse objectives. It had an in-school program and an out-of-school program, both directed at the state's youth, both based on "learn by doing," and both working with existing institutions in the communities such as schools, local governments, and civic organizations.

The Student Aid Program grew from roots planted firmly in previous measures. Some assistance for young people had been provided already in the state, and the University of Wyoming was the center of that assistance. Based on the experience of providing assistance to students at the university, Wilson Clough reported, the university president, Arthur Crane, helped persuade "the government to apportion some of the federal relief funds to keeping youth in schools and colleges." Clough says that Crane mobilized data for presentation to various officials so that in 1934 some FERA funds were set aside for a student aid program and "this program was continued in the fall of 1935 under separate administration as N.Y.A. (National Youth Administration), in which college aid was a part."¹⁸¹

High school youths in the Student Aid Program had to come from relief, resettlement, or low-income families, they had to be doing satisfactory schoolwork, and they had to work for their assistance. The development of work projects directed at high school youths may seem a marginal or even trivial aspect of work relief, and the Wyoming State Planning Board complained that there were too few of these workers in a given community to develop substantial construction projects,¹⁸² but the program met a

178. Dieterich, "The New Deal Cultural Projects in Wyoming," 35–36.

179. *Ibid.*, 36–37.

180. Hopkins, *Report on the Works Program*, 23.

181. Clough, *A History of the University of Wyoming, 1887–1937*, 163.

182. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Coordination Survey*, 116.

crying need for many young people—and their families. Consider the case of Susan Archuleta, who grew up in Rock Springs, where her father had taken the family so he could work in the mines. When he died and left a widow and eight children, the family was destitute, with no agencies, programs, or projects to turn to for assistance. Her mother took in washing to support the family and this was a job that the children helped with too, picking up laundry from people, helping with the ironing and folding, and delivering the clean clothes. When the Roosevelt administration created the NYA, Susan Archuleta joined that program. Her new NYA job was in addition to her schoolwork (and perhaps in addition to helping her mother with the laundry):

The boys and young men who'd been laid off at the mines went to the CCC camps, and the girls joined the NYA. When school was over, we'd go and work right there in the school building. We'd help out in the office, do filing and other things. Actually, we didn't do much work—it was our first job. But we learned a lot. It was a good experience.

They paid us about twenty-one dollars a month. Out of that we got five and the other sixteen was directly issued to our parents.¹⁸³

There are several elements of this description that bear attention. One is that most people in the NYA program were in fact female in 1936. The State Planning Board calculated that young women comprised a consistent 75 percent of the people served by the NYA.¹⁸⁴ It also appears that the pay carried a differential based on gender; the twenty-one dollars was less than that received by the CCC workers. Also, the program was work relief, not a loan and not a grant. The students *earned* the assistance they received by working, so that they were not on relief. From Archuleta's description, it appears that the work may not have been onerous, but it seems to have been such to provide some basic work skills and prepare her and other young women for the world of work outside of school. It is also instructive to note that, as with the pay for the CCC, pay for NYA work went only in small part to the student, the greater portion going to the family. Finally, it needs to be emphasized that in 1936 these were not construction jobs.

The assistance provided to college students by the NYA, according to Arthur G. Crane at the University of Wyoming, paid them for work that preferably “has some educational value in it, such as that of laboratory



NYA student workers binding and sorting books, Natrona County.
Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections, A-3044.

assistant in research, or clerical work,” although freshmen without college academic experience were assigned general campus work. Crane maintained that all the jobs paid for by NYA funds were of a sort that “the University itself would perform . . . with its own money, if it had money.”¹⁸⁵ As for the money put into the program, Crane suggested that it be considered an investment:

183. Nan Elsasser, Kyle MacKenzie, and Yvonne Tixier y Vigil, *Las Mujeres: Conversations from a Hispanic Community* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1993), 36–37.

184. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Coordination Survey*, 116.

185. A. G. Crane comments in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 25-D.

NYA worker serving as stenographer in WPA office in Torrington, 1937. Photograph by E. R. Schuler, WPA photographer, Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections.

Contrast these young people at work on the campus in the wholesome, happy, hopeful occupation of getting an education with what they would be at home—discouraged, distressed, a burden on the labor market, hunting for jobs, competitors in the labor market for any kind of work—and I think you will have to agree that an expenditure of \$10.51 per student [per month] from the Federal Government is a profitable investment in the education of these future leaders.¹⁸⁶

The NYA program was popular in Wyoming, growing from 2,766 students receiving aid in the 1935–1936 school year to 4,126 in the 1936–1937 school year, according to an NYA report.¹⁸⁷ An additional number had attended classes or activities sponsored by the NYA, increasing the number benefited directly by a large measure. And, as with other programs, but especially those involving young people, the NYA report added, “the indirect benefits cannot be estimated.”¹⁸⁸

186. Ibid.

187. Wyoming State Planning Board, *Coordination Survey*, 118.

188. Ernest P. Marschall, state director, NYA, comments in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 25-C.

189. C. B. Lund, *Final Report, National Youth Administration for the State of Wyoming* (Denver: War Man-Power Commission, Bureau of Training, 1943), [31]. This report is available both in the University of Wyoming Library and in the Wyoming State Archives, and perhaps in other collections as well. It is also internally titled “The National Youth Administration of Wyoming.” The pages are not numbered, but I have made page references based on my own count of pages, so page numbers may be only approximate.



The NYA also provided a work program for young people who had completed or discontinued their education and who were “in need of employment or work experience.” The Work Project Program fulfilled a need that was substantially different for this group of young people, according to the NYA in the state:

For a number of years young persons had been unable to secure employment through the usual channels and had been congregating on farms and in small towns. School officials and community leaders were very much aware of the dangers to youth morale and the inevitable future social costs. . . . A way was opened to provide youth with constructive work activities as well as to enable them to earn a minimum wage to care for their immediate needs.¹⁸⁹

This program began by enabling youths between sixteen and twenty-five from families on relief to sign up for WPA projects at reduced wages and reduced hours, and so they were put to work doing the full range of WPA jobs. The apprehensions that there would be problems putting

young people to work on adult crews proved well founded, and from the beginning NYA administrators sought to create separate projects “planned specifically in terms of the needs of youth in each locality.”¹⁹⁰ Although the initial mandate had been to create projects that were defined as either (1) community development and recreational leadership, (2) rural youth development, (3) public services, or (4) research, by the summer of 1936 those requirements had been loosened so that the state director could “develop and approve any type of useful and socially desirable work project for which there was sufficient demand,” a latitude that allowed for more decentralized tailoring of projects to local needs.¹⁹¹ As a result, the projects increasingly were designed to offer skill-development as an explicit priority, and this was because of the continuing depopulation of the countryside by a variety of forces. An important objective therefore emerged: to train the youths leaving the farms for city work, especially in construction and metal trades. Thus “machine shop, sheet metal and welding, carpentry, woodworking, hospital aid and similar work shops were opened in several localities” in the state.¹⁹² Construction skills were gaining hold in the NYA program. As with mainstream WPA projects, 90 percent of NYA youth employees had to be from families on relief, and the remainder could include nonrelief youth.

Throughout the history of the WPA in Wyoming, including the NYA, there was always a tension between the two objectives of the program, putting people to work and building (or otherwise creating) things that served the public well. This was perhaps also evident in other programs, although some adroitly finessed the issue or ignored it until some kind of problem emerged. Within the WPA, more than in most agencies, the commitment was first to helping the unemployed and second to the specific projects, and that aspect needs to be remembered in assessing the significance of the projects that were completed and that endure. In 1936, Albert Park, the state assistant director of the WPA, made that crystal clear: “We promise to not become so interested in projects that we overlook the prime purpose of the program, namely, to put destitute people to work. This, of course, is counter to the tendency of people with engineering training and experience, but realizing the seriousness of the present relief situation, we promise to hew to the line.”¹⁹³



NYA (note sign at street) young women served as recreation organizers and directors of activities for the Girl Scouts at the “Little House” in Casper in 1937. The building itself was completed in 1935 using FERA funds.

Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections, #A-3046. This photograph is dated September 28, 1937.

190. Lund, *Final Report, National Youth Administration for the State of Wyoming* [32].

191. *Ibid.*, [38].

192. *Ibid.*, [42].

193. Albert Park in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 38-F.

On the Reservation

Life at the Shoshone Agency had been bleak and impoverished for years and years, and the privation had been intensified by the agricultural depression of the 1920s and by the Great Depression even more. Government programs to provide help seemed always to come slower to the reservation, if at all, when compared to other parts of the state.

In the early 1930s despair and deprivation existed on the reservation on a scale hardly to be found elsewhere in the state. Forrest Stone, superintendent at the agency, minced no words on this point a few years later: “The fact remains, that in 1933 the Indians represented a segregated group of impoverished people such as was not to be found anywhere else in the State of Wyoming, as a result of the present depression.” He continued, “I feel as if they have been surviving a continual and desperate depression, both social and economic, over a period of two generations. There is no doubt, however, but that the same crushing effects of the years of drouth and general depression affected the Indians just as seriously as it did their white neighbors.”¹⁹⁴

Given the enforced agricultural economy on the reservation, improvement of the irrigation system was a priority. By 1933 the Wind River Irrigation Project had been generally limited to the construction of canals and

laterals for distribution of water, but a pressing need was for storage. One report articulated exactly the doleful implications of that stunted development: “For the past several years, prior to 1933, acute water shortages had developed on the [irrigation] project and unless storage and additional supply could be secured, in the future it would be necessary to considerably reduce the number of acres to which a canal and lateral had been supplied.”¹⁹⁵ Expansion was needed, but contraction was more likely, and that combination amounted to a dire situation that obtained throughout life on the reservation. After 1933 and the coming of the Roosevelt administration, the development of storage was still slow, but some work started. In particular, the Wind River Irrigation Project on the reservation received funds to construct the Washakie Reservoir and also to dig a canal (Dinwoody Canal) diverting water from Dinwoody Creek to remote farmlands. While the dam was the major contribution and the additional canal was much needed, the project was also able to build an additional lateral opening up 3,300 acres and to repair and upgrade previously constructed irrigation features. The project engineer declared that these actions placed “the project for the first time in its history on an economic operation and maintenance basis.”¹⁹⁶ As important as the development that took place in this project, however, was the employment of locals with over 120,000 man-days of work:

This labor spread over the greater portion of the reservation and made available in a large measure to the Indian population, has been the means of extending relief to some 2,000 Indian people who have had little except hardship and whose condition has been made considerably worse due to the general depression throughout the whole of the United States. The expenditure of this money has also resulted in considerable benefit directly to Fremont County and the State in supplying work for needy people, who are not connected with the reservation. A considerable volume of business has resulted in the manufacture of machinery and equipment and the production of materials and supplies.¹⁹⁷

Superintendent Stone maintained in 1936, “we have practically every feature of the Works Relief Program, Indian Emergency Conservation Work.” The Indian Emergency Conservation Work, or Indian CCC, appears to have focused on the same kinds of improvements on the range

194. Forrest Stone in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 20-C.

195. E. L. Decker, project engineer for the Wind River Indian Irrigation Project in the Department of Interior, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 20-A.

196. Decker, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 20 A, B. At least one source indicates that the Washakie Dam was constructed by the PWA, but that is by no means certain. See “Irrigation on Wind River Reservation,” WPA Collections, subject file 297.

197. Decker, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 20 B.

and in forests that the general CCC was undertaking elsewhere in the state, but the Indian ECW was especially involved in irrigation work and road construction and maintenance. This program continued into 1936 with about 130 men employed, and by the spring of 1937 the plan was for a continuation of that work which would be “located in many different points but will cover pretty much all parts of the reservation. During the summer months, work will be devoted mostly to those projects in the higher country. The projects in the lower country will be deferred until fall or winter work on the next program.”¹⁹⁸

One of the important differences between the Indian ECW and the ECW elsewhere emerged in living arrangements. The Indian ECW was designed as an employment program for Indians on the reservation rather than for people who traveled from other parts of the state or even from out of state. The expectation was sometimes that CCC workers would live at home and then travel a short distance to work, and while that may have been the intention, transportation limits generally meant that camps were necessary. But there were two different kinds of camps on the Wind River Reservation. One was the familiar “single men’s camps,” where young unmarried men lived and worked. The other was the “family camps,” and these were, according to historian Brian Hosmer, “designed to adapt work relief programs to reservation social conditions (accepting, in other words, the fundamental importance of extended families) and thus to adjust work relief to reservation conditions.”¹⁹⁹ The conditions were still meager, and sometimes worse than that, but were remembered later with positive associations of warm interaction.²⁰⁰

The Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was a new federal agency in the Department of Agriculture in the spring of 1935, and it began to work in Wyoming on the Shoshone Agency almost immediately to try to rehabilitate crop and grazing land. The Wyoming director explained that the work, using WPA work relief, “has been primarily that of developing stock water by means of springs, seeps and rock reservoirs in favorable locations as an objective in soil conservation work and range management.” In addition, the reservation developed projects for water spreading and erosion control. Within a period of six months, the SCS, again using WPA work relief crews made up of local Indians, charted the following accomplishments:

- 27 miles of road improvement
- 21 permanent earth dams
- 6 permanent springs developed
- 18 miles contour furrowing
- 7,739 linear feet of diversion ditches
- 11,152 earth check dams
- 344 wire check dams
- 2,341 rock dams
- 251 acres seeded
- 6,179 pounds of seed harvested
- 4,474 rods of fence built
- 13,578 fence posts cut
- 6,011 cedar stakes cut

Those WPA crews put to work 519 separate people on projects anticipated to take 311 man-years and appear to have employed both white and Indian and both relief and nonrelief personnel.²⁰¹

The WPA was active on the reservation in ways that went beyond range improvement. In 1935 one project was for the construction of a community and recreation hall as well as the hot spring at the Shoshone Agency; while this project was approved, the records are unclear as to whether

198. “Work Program of the Indian Bureau on the Reservation Planned,” *Riverton Review and Riverton Chronicle*, April 8, 1937.

199. Brian Hosmer, “‘Dollar a Day and Glad to Have It’: Work Relief on the Wind River Indian Reservation as Memory,” in Brian Hosmer and Colleen O’Neill, eds., *Native Pathways: American Indian Culture and Economic Development in the Twentieth Century* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2004), 291.

200. Hosmer, “‘Dollar a Day and Glad to Have It,’” 291.

201. Thomas Doughty, acting project manager, Soil Conservation Service, in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 8 A, B.

the work was actually performed and the project completed.²⁰² There is evidence that some other projects were undertaken on the reservation. One women's sewing room, or factory, operated at Ethete on the Wind River Indian Reservation, and a hide-tanning project was located at Fort Washakie. Older women on the reservation were hired to tan the hides and then add beadwork. Hides would be turned into buckskin dresses and gloves, and in the process traditional skills were transferred from old to young and income provided for people who needed it. The mattress factory on the reservation was similarly structured, and there both Arapaho and Shoshone women worked together. It even seemed to provide a communal environment for the women of the reservation. Brian Hosmer cites his interviews with workers who remembered the experience as young women, saying they "had a lot of fun" and "expressing satisfaction at contributing to the welfare of older people who, [one woman] said, received the beds free of charge."²⁰³ A canning plant on the reservation, however, contrasted with the communal environment of the sewing room. Hosmer's account notes how the canning factory was, in fact, much more industrial in organization, and he cites oral accounts that emphasize hard work and low pay for the schoolgirls who worked there. They would harvest vegetables from the field, carry them to the processing plant, and then wash and prepare them for canning at the machines.²⁰⁴

As of 1936, any assessment of the role of the New Deal on the reservation has to include the physical construction of the work relief projects and also the infusion of much-needed funds into a deeply distressed part

of the state. Forrest Stone, whose accounts should not be considered final and whose role should not be taken as objective and impartial, probably came close to the mark, however, when he reported, "The most impressive results of government expenditures during the past three years is [*sic*] to be observed in the Indian people, themselves. Unquestionably, they are better dressed, better fed and are gradually stepping forward and aspiring to a higher and more wholesome standard of living."²⁰⁵

On the other hand, Stone's perspective was very much that of someone who sought to encourage the Indians on a path of acculturation and social change. The precise contours of that social change underway are subtle, but there are indications. Hosmer, citing anthropologist Loretta Fowler, noted one element of that social change and also how the work relief programs fit into it: "Opportunity to earn wages not only appealed to those seeking means to care for their families but tended to encourage the development of individualistic behaviors that, in turn, contributed to social distinctions and fragmentation."²⁰⁶ He is quick, however, to caution that the transformation was by no means complete, that there remained fundamental tensions between the traditional and the modern. Of course, that was exactly the case in the rest of Wyoming as well.

"The Wind Whispers Their Names"

From one corner of the state to another, in the mountains and in the valleys, on the range, on the deserts, in the forests, in the cities and towns, the various work projects of the Second New Deal in the mid-1930s took to the field, transforming people's lives and transforming the state. It is easy to romanticize those projects and it is easy just to focus on the glamorous aspects or on the impressive buildings that sometimes resulted. It is also easy to focus on the challenges to traditional values that these government projects sometimes represented. It is more difficult to put each project into perspective, to see each one as part of a larger transformative process that was by no means neat and tidy, that was filled with contradictions and tensions, but that nonetheless powerfully reshaped the Wyoming social, natural, economic, and political landscape.

There is, however, one other element in this transformation that needs to be taken into account, difficult as that may be. The people involved in

202. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 106, OP 65-83-186, Document #3338.

203. Hosmer, "Dollar a Day and Glad to Have It," 293-94.

204. *Ibid.*, 294.

205. Forrest Stone in *Report of the Proceedings of the Statewide Coordination Meeting of Federal Agencies Operating in Wyoming*, 20 C, D.

206. Hosmer, "Dollar a Day and Glad to Have It," 298

these projects—by the CCC, by the WPA, by the PWA, by the NYA—the people digging ditches, fighting fires, sewing clothes and blankets, graveling roads and streets, operating community art centers, controlling bark beetles and blister rust, were, each of them, individual people. They had names. They had histories. They often had families, for whom they were trying to make a living. They were sometimes new to Wyoming, but often they were working alongside longtime neighbors and friends. We know too little about these people as people, but they were not the nameless, faceless mass that some would have them. What we do know is that their experiences generally brought them, usually through a process marked by adversity and calamity, to the work projects funded by the federal government.

When they went to work on those projects, they were not just showing up for work, doing a job, drawing a paycheck, although those functions were important. They were providing for their families, they were improving their communities, they were residents (if some of them temporarily) of Wyoming, building the future of the state and building the futures of their own families. They were, with each road oiled or graveled, with each acre of forest or range scoured and developed, with each building built, with each dam constructed, leaving their own mark on the land at the same time they were building up Wyoming. And sometimes Wyoming left a mark on them.

Every person's story is different, and people passed in and out of projects depending on their own circumstances. But their experiences often became central to their identities and at some point those identities mixed with the identity of the state. To read the accounts of those people who worked on the projects and participated in the construction of much that we take for granted in Wyoming is to pause at an important intersection of social, political, and personal history. Consider the account of the daughter of a CCC enrollee posted on one of the various Internet sites where CCC participants share their stories. A writer identifying herself as Linda explains, "My dad Ralph Wilcox joined the CCC when he was 16 from a starving existence in Wellington, Kansas." She says about him, as was true of many:

He had to lie about his age to get into CCC . . . probably the only lie he ever told in his life. He looks like a full grown man in his CCC pictures, when in fact he was only 15. If not for the CCC he would have starved. The

CCC in the west during the dust bowl was not a means of getting a job, it was a means of survival. Because he joined up, he was able to send money home to my grandmother. It's hard to believe today how much money a dollar a day was back then.

She relates his story further:

He was assigned to Company 849. This Company was assigned to Camp P [F?]-35-WY near Ten Sleep Wyoming in the Big Horn Mountains, which he called Tent City. There he earned a dollar a day and room and board while building Meadowlark Lake Dam.

With much pride he took me to Ten Sleep when I was 17 yrs old to see what they had created. Dad died in 1977. With much pride, in 1997 I took my daughter and grandchildren and stood on the dam at Meadowlark Lake. The wind whispers their names.²⁰⁷

207. This was posted in a collection of biographical statements from and about CCC enrollees (and other CCC personnel) at the James F. Justin Civilian Conservation Corps Museum, An Online Museum of Histories, Biographies, and Photographs Regarding the CCCs, <http://www.justinmuseum.com/famjustin/Wilcoxbio.html>; most of the account, drawn upon at multiple dates in 2011 and last accessed December 6, 2012, is quoted verbatim above.

The End of the New Deal

1937–1943

THE “END” OF ANYTHING POLITICAL, as Theodore Lowi once demonstrated in his study of modern liberalism, is precious in its ambiguity and carries at least two meanings—a conclusion and a purpose or objective.¹ That seems to be true of the New Deal in Wyoming. First, the question of when the New Deal came to an actual end, if it ever did, can be infinitely, and reasonably, argued, for while individual New Deal programs and policies came and went, the essential structural elements that the Roosevelt administration promoted and encouraged in the nation’s and state’s political economy have endured well beyond the 1930s and 1940s. They may even have flourished more successfully and prominently in the circumstances of war than they did in the 1930s. Second, the end—or ends—of the New Deal, in the sense of its character, priorities, and objectives, needs to be considered as an evolving entity, not something unchanging, fixed, and constant regardless of time and circumstance. In the years between 1937 and 1943, those circumstances were changing dramatically, and so were the programs, the projects, and the people associated with the New Deal. In the process, the purpose of the projects, the nature of the work, and the organization of work shifted away from the original neighbors-helping-neighbors to build up the community and the state. The question remains, however, whether the New Deal itself actually

changed or just became clearer in what it was about. The Wyoming experience may provide some clues.

The Man Who Came to Casper—and What He Said

By 1937 there were signs that, after four years of the New Deal, after the shift in direction signified by the programmatic changes of 1935, after a widespread and systematic effort to put people to work and improve the nation’s infrastructure, and after the re-election of Franklin Roosevelt in 1936 by landslide proportions that on the surface ratified the changes made by the New Deal, the tide seemed to be turning in the struggle against the forces of economic adversity.

In Wyoming those signs were widespread and welcome. At the University of Wyoming, Wilson Clough was writing the history of the institution as it was happening in the 1930s. Writing in 1937, Clough could celebrate the dedication of the new Liberal Arts building on campus in June 1936 and also take measure of the reversals in the university’s internal economy. In June 1935 half of the faculty salary cuts that had been imposed were restored, enrollments had recovered and were exceeding previous records, and in March 1936 faculty salaries were completely restored. With these measures, he wrote, “it was obvious that the university had survived the depression in excellent shape.” And to reiterate that point, he elsewhere in the same volume observed, “In short, the fact that the state’s University emerged from the depression era in good shape and without serious injury

1. Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy, and the Crisis of Public Authority* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1969), ix.

may be attributed in no small part to the essential soundness of the foundation structure.”² There seemed to be a consensus, at least in the university, that the Depression was in the past, if only barely so.

In fairness, others in Wyoming believed the same thing and they were able to point to ample evidence to justify their view. The Wyoming State Planning Board in 1937 gathered statistics to determine where Wyoming was in the business of economic recovery. Using the categories appearing in a *Business Week* study of the national economy, the Planning Board charted several indicators using 1933 as the starting point. One was agricultural income, an obvious and vital feature of the Wyoming economy. Farm income, the study concluded, had shown a steady annual increase since 1933, growing by 1 percent in 1934, 7 percent in 1935, 18 percent in 1936, and 54 percent as of March 1937 but with “prospects of double the 1936 income on July 1, 1937.”³ Actually, given the powerful forces of nature and market ravaging the countryside, that growth was substantial; how widely and evenly it was distributed, of course, was another matter and the Planning Board did not address that.

The other measures showed greater growth either as simple indicators of larger trends or as actual forces generating growth. For example, passenger car sales was one category the Planning Board used. Those sales were important because they indicated a greater amount of consumption of fairly expensive items, and each purchase injected more money into circulation as well as implied additional purchases—gasoline, maintenance, and other travel-related purchases dependent upon the automobile. And passenger car sales in Wyoming had been hefty. Sales in 1934 were 54 percent greater than 1933, 143 percent greater in 1935, 228 percent greater in 1936, and 326 percent greater as of March 31, 1937. Moreover, compared with national averages, Wyoming’s percentage increases were consistently higher each year than the rest of the country.

2. Clough, *A History of the University of Wyoming*, 165, 155.

3. The data in the following paragraphs are taken from Wyoming State Planning Board, *Coordination Survey* (Cheyenne: State of Wyoming, 1938), 222–30.

Life insurance sales, like automobile sales, constituted a level of discretionary spending; while not exactly a luxury, purchases of life insurance and automobiles would generally slip in priority during hard times until a family’s income could be more safely allocated to these items. Again, the trend was upward with purchases of life insurance, with sales indicating growth rates of 25 percent in 1934, 35 percent in 1935, and 48 percent in 1936, although sales grew only by 37 percent by the end of March 1937. Again, in comparison with the national figures, Wyoming was consistently higher.

Wyoming’s production of electric power offered a revealing slice of Wyoming reality; in the middle of the decade the vast majority of Wyoming’s rural citizens were still not connected to an electric grid, and power-generating companies had little interest in expanding power lines. And by this point, the rural electric cooperatives, which had the potential to extend lines and electric power to new areas, were just beginning to construct those lines. Even so, the State Planning Board calculated, electric power output increased by 4 percent in 1934, 19 percent in 1935, 44 percent in 1936, and 65 percent as of March 31, 1937. While Wyoming’s growth rate for electric power production was below that of the nation in 1934, it was 3, 13, and 20 percent higher in the subsequent years.

Volume of business is always difficult to calculate, but the State Planning Board attempted to find a “partial” indicator by looking at the volume of checks drawn through Wyoming’s banks. Again, using 1933 as the starting point, the board found an increase in 1934 of 21 percent, in 1935 of 44 percent, in 1936 of 64 percent, and of 85 percent as of the end of March 1937.

The one part of the economy “wherein Wyoming is not so favorable,” according to the State Planning Board, was that of heavy construction. The growth rate in that sector was 21 percent in 1934, 153 percent in 1935, 66 percent in 1936, and 13 percent in 1937 (again, March 31). That poor showing, the board commented, “can be explained by the lack of large industries within the state whose surplus funds could be used for the construction of additional plant space.”

The State Planning Board put all the indicators together and concluded, “With the trend lines of these separate business indications pointing generally upward, Wyoming in this phase is in a very healthy financial condition.” Improved crop conditions and business improvement would

both help the total picture, it said. The economy *was* getting better, and some were even beginning to think that the Depression was receding to the point that it was pretty much in the past. Of course, the economy was getting better, more people had jobs than four years earlier, and people and governments were spending more money, which meant demand was up and so were incomes. That is not the same as saying the Depression was over, as some were inclined toward, since “trend lines” did not provide a comparison to pre-Depression levels of activity. But many people believed that a corner had been turned and that the economy was on a self-sustaining basis such that if the government withdrew some of its supports, the economy would continue to grow on its own.

One of the people who believed this was the president of the United States. As the summer of 1937 came to an end and autumn began, Franklin Roosevelt concluded that the economy was growing sufficiently that he could change his programs, especially those providing work relief. Roosevelt suggested these changes were in the offing when he visited Wyoming in September 1937. On a quick tour of western states, Roosevelt gave a brief address from the train when it stopped in Cheyenne. There, according to news accounts, he explained to the crowd how “the government had spent a great deal of money putting people to work and at the same time the administration had tried its utmost to accomplish useful things.” He pointed to the schools that had been built through creative combinations of federal, state, and local funds and he noted the airports, thousands of them across the country, that had been built in the last several years with work projects so that “today the United States is checker-boarded with airports in every state.” And he told his audience, “There [are] very few communities that have not benefited.” But then he hinted at moving in a different direction: “We have to come to an end of that program sometime and just the other day we allocated the last of the money for public works projects.”⁴ How the crowd responded to that last statement went unrecorded.

Roosevelt did not get off the train in Cheyenne, but he was just getting warmed up. From Cheyenne the train headed toward Casper, stopping in Wheatland (a stop that had not been planned) to congratulate the citizens there on the new Wheatland reservoir. That reservoir, which cost \$400,000, was paid for by \$325,000 of federal funds and \$75,000 from the local irrigation district. Moreover, the reservoir would store water

sufficient for 50,000 acres of farm land: “In other words,” Roosevelt told the crowd, “4,000 families are going to be benefited by the work which is being done jointly by the Irrigation District and the Federal Government. It seems to me that this is a pretty good illustration of what we have been trying to do in the last four years—trying to improve the condition of the average citizen.”⁵

Roosevelt’s main stop in Wyoming was Casper. The reception on this cold day was warm and enthusiastic and grateful. Downtown merchants closed their doors, declaring “an informal city-wide holiday” while the president was in town. A full-page ad in the local newspaper greeted Roosevelt as seventy-two local businesses, merchants, and civic leaders expressed “the gratitude and hearty good wishes the occasion inspires” to the president and they summoned one of Roosevelt’s own observations as their own: “The power of good example is the strongest force in the world. It surpasses preachments; it excels good resolutions; it is better than agreements unfulfilled.”⁶ The hope was that Roosevelt would tour the Alcova Dam site where the earth-fill portion of the dam had just been completed, but, important as the dam project was both actually and symbolically, time did not permit a journey to the site.

4. D. Harold Oliver, “Not to Coast Rest Term, Says Executive,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, September 25, 1937. See also the transcript of Roosevelt’s comments in Casper, “Informal, Extemporaneous Remarks of the President, Casper, Wyoming, September 24, 1937,” Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, in National Archives and Records Administration, Collection FDR-PPF: Papers as President, President’s Personal File, 1933–1945.

5. “Informal, Extemporaneous Remarks of the President, Wheatland, Wyoming, September 24, 1937,” Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, in National Archives and Records Administration, Collection FDR-PPF: Papers as President, President’s Personal File, 1933–1945.

6. “Casper Stores to Close for Hour of Visit,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, September 23, 1937.



Instead, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Wyoming's two U.S. senators, Joseph C. O'Mahoney and Harry Schwartz, Congressman Paul Greever, and Governor Leslie Miller went on a tour of the business, recreational, and residential parts of the city of Casper. The presidential motorcade left the Burlington station and went to the "handsome CWA-ERA high school stadium, built in 1934," where Casper students were assembled, bands played, and the president autographed a football to be displayed in the trophy case at the high school. The president and the others then drove out to "the 1937 model of old Fort Caspar, recently completed by WPA workers." On the way to the fort, the newspaper report noted that "he will see the

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt in Wheatland, September 24, 1937. Roosevelt is addressing the crowd from a special car on the train just as he did in Cheyenne previously. With the Roosevelts were both U.S. senators from Wyoming and Governor Leslie Miller. The train's main stop was in Casper, but no known photographs of that visit exist.

Photo courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, negative # 7507.

beginnings of a new permanent CCC camp where pre-fabricated buildings are being erected," and beyond the fort he could "view the rustic cabin of the Izaak Walton league, another WPA project." At the reconstructed fort, the National Youth Administration's Fort Caspar "girl guides" gave the president a letter-box "on which was painted a picture of the historic fort," and someone else gave Eleanor Roosevelt "a beautiful pastel picture of the Wyoming state flower, the Indian paintbrush, done especially for the occasion by Mrs. M. Dayton, Casper WPA art teacher," complete with a small bouquet of the last of the season's paintbrush from the top of Casper Mountain.

The tour continued. Leaving Fort Caspar, the group went up the hill "to the Alcova highway, chief artery of travel to the Kendrick project." While the president was not able to inspect the dam construction, Casperites were contented that he would be able to see the land to be reclaimed by the waters of the Kendrick project. For that matter, construction was continuing on the highway itself, and one comment was that "this project is evidence of the federal program for improving highways which has received fresh impetus under the New Deal." Back in Casper, the motorcade was routed so that it would "pass the armory of the national guard completed before and improved after the New Deal." From there the group traveled to "Washington Memorial Park, topped by the CWA brick dressing rooms surrounding the swimming pool and WPA concrete tennis courts." Once the presidential party left Casper on the train, it was not lost that "F.D.R. can also observe a nearly completed highway overpass a short distance from the city. Elimination of railroad crossings has been an important goal of the chief executive." The only disappointment expressed concerned another project that had gone unrealized, at least as of yet: "Casper would have liked to show him a new PWA city-county building instead of the

courthouse and city hall which still serve local government. But while the PWA survives, there is still hope.”⁷

Several of the accounts of this presidential visit referred to it as “triumphal,” and it is unclear whose triumph the writers had in mind—Casper’s, Roosevelt’s, the people hired on the work relief projects; the list of possibilities is a long one—but it may not matter; there were obviously a number of people who felt triumphant at this point. In his address to the approximately ten thousand people who gathered at the Burlington station to hear him, Roosevelt touched on several prominent themes that defined where the New Deal was in the nation and in Wyoming. He praised the work being done on the Kendrick Project, of course, and that extended to the local businesspeople who had pushed hard to make it possible. And he applauded the other projects undertaken locally. But he reached more broadly when he explained that in his administration the federal government had spent \$60 million in the state with the result that unemployment had been reduced substantially. In the previous year, he said, the number of people on relief in Wyoming had declined from 11,000 to under 6,000. The people of Wyoming and the nation, he said, were thinking nationally about the problems faced by the nation, not just locally, and they were supportive of the changes his administration had brought about. He was pleased with the conduct of public affairs where the government servants are “more concerned with the public good and more unselfish in the work they do than ever before.” This was due, he said, “to the fact that the public as a whole—the rank and file of American citizenship, men and women, are taking more interest in their Government than ever before.”

There were two other points that he made that seemed especially salient. One was his commitment to a broad form of democracy, despite opposition from some quarters: “Constitutional democracy in this country is succeeding despite the obstacles thrown in its way by a few people who, in their hearts, do not want to see democracy work. You and I, my friends, are making it work and we are going to keep on making it work.” This was probably received well enough, since he did not specify who those people were who did not want to see democracy work. The second point, however, may have caused greater concern if people noticed it and if they thought how it might apply to their community. After taking stock of the products of the work relief projects around the community, and after congratulating the citizens for their accomplishments, and after noting the

millions of dollars that had been spent in the state by the federal government, Roosevelt then said that that kind of money “is not going to be spent nearly as fast as that in the next four years because there isn’t anything like the unemployment today that existed when I first came into office.” Put that together with his brief allusion in Cheyenne to cutting public works expenditures, and there could easily have been some nervous people in the crowd.

The president had long hoped to balance the federal budget, and he had even made gestures in that direction on several occasions. His programs, however, carried a substantial price tag that soon overwhelmed any reductions in expenditures he was making. While deficits may have made it appear that the government was unable to maintain discipline at a time when fiscal rectitude was all the more urgent, the deficits actually contributed to the economy’s improvement. Roosevelt’s first administration unfolded in the years before John Maynard Keynes published his *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* that established the purposeful and calculated use of deficits as an element in fiscal policy to stimulate economic growth. Fundamentally, this book argued for the increase of government spending (without also increased government revenues, since taxes would offset gains from spending) so as to increase demand (demand in the aggregate) in the economy when demand had dried up—as in a recession or depression. Even without the guidance of Keynesian theory and principles, however, the nugget of the idea had been around. In 1928 William Trufant Foster and Waddill Catchings, popular economists, had published their discussion of a similar approach in *The Road to Plenty*. Specifically, their admonition was: “It is sound policy in periods of rapid expansion of business to curtail or postpone Government construction, as far as practicable, and to increase Government expenditures for

7. This account is pieced together from several reports: “Roosevelt’s Visit to Casper Will Emphasize Projects,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, September 25, 1937; “Highlights of President Roosevelt’s Visit Here,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, September 26, 1937; “Ten Thousand People Greet Executive, Hear Address on National Objectives,” *Casper Tribune-Herald*, September 26, 1937.

public works when business is falling off.”⁸ This was then popularized to the more succinct: “When business begins to look rotten, more public spending.” Such advice seemed to guide, consciously or not, the policies and programs coming out of Washington in the 1930s.

With that context in mind, Roosevelt’s pronouncements in Casper and Cheyenne take on a larger meaning. What Roosevelt said in Casper, after reviewing the accomplishments of the work relief projects, was that the community had done well, that the city and the federal government together had built up the community significantly and also helped out the people who were unemployed, and that the battle against the forces of Depression was going well. He also, however, said that he was going to cut spending on exactly those programs that had made such a difference. What he did not tell the people of Casper was that with those cuts in spending, the projects would be cut back, that people on those work projects would be laid off, that the businesses that depended on the wages paid to the relief workers would have less business, and that the economy would contract instead of expand.

Whether he understood himself that this would be the consequence of the cuts in spending, Roosevelt’s dominant economic concern in 1937 was to restore a balanced budget. That autumn, as he hinted he would in Casper and Cheyenne, Roosevelt cut government spending on public works projects. This contraction was compounded by other forces. Some other spending programs stopped (like veterans bonuses) and revenues increased (as for the regressive Social Security taxes paid by workers and

employers alike), and at the same time that these fiscal restraints impacted the economy, monetary policy also took its toll with greater reserve requirements contracting money and credit. All together, this substantial removal of the fiscal stimulus obviously reduced consumption, consumption that had been the engine of a substantial portion of the recovery. In addition, and to some policy makers, just as importantly, prices were climbing because of a lack of competition—the very absence of competition that the New Deal itself had encouraged in some of its programs. That meant that consumption suffered an additional blow, and that the gains of recovery were being held by monopolistic businesses that could arbitrarily raise prices.⁹ The economy was being choked off from at least two sources—reduction of fiscal stimulus and lack of competition—and the recovery that just a few months before seemed so promising was now in trouble—again. As a result, the growing, expanding economy, built on an increasing demand that awakened and stimulated productive potential, declined once again and the nation entered a recession *within* a depression.

The Recession of 1937–1938 had several dimensions. In the first place, it was novel in that it was an economic slowdown within a depression, something that caught some people off guard. Second, this downturn was related to both business actions and government fiscal policy, which meant that it could also be addressed through focused attention to business behavior and fiscal policy. But that focus did not come easily or quickly. Meanwhile, the economy dampened down. Economist Herbert Stein calls the beginning of the recession in August 1937 “the sharpest decline of industrial production on record,” and historian Patrick Reagan summarized the period between September 1937 and June 1938 as follows: “Industrial production declined by 33 percent, durable goods production by over 50 percent, national income by 13 percent, profits by 78 percent, payrolls by 35 percent, industrial stock averages by over 50 percent, and manufacturing employment by 23 percent.”¹⁰

The recession continued and deepened over the winter, and the debate among Roosevelt’s advisors reached vigorous, even caustic, proportions. It was only in the spring of 1938 that resolution appeared. By that time there was also an outcry from communities and businesses around the state and nation that either witnessed in their own neighborhoods the setbacks caused by removing this government stimulus or feared the impending

8. William Trufant Foster and Waddill Catchings, *The Road to Plenty* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928), 158.

9. See the debate within the Roosevelt administration on this issue in Ellis Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 387–92.

10. Herbert Stein, *The Fiscal Revolution in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 100; Patrick Reagan, “Recession of 1937–1938,” in James S. Olson, ed., *Historical Dictionary of the New Deal: From Inauguration to Preparation for War* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 409.

cuts and their consequences. For example, the North Platte Valley Associated Chambers of Commerce, an alliance of chambers of commerce in communities along the North Platte in eastern Wyoming and western Nebraska, wrote Senator O'Mahoney (as well as the president and the other Wyoming and Nebraska representatives in Congress) to express their fears in January 1938: "It has come to the attention of the members of the Associated Chambers of Commerce that there is a possibility that all C.C.C. Camps located on Bureau of Reclamation Projects will be abandoned by the end of the present fiscal year." The group listed the impressive accomplishments of the CCC on the irrigation projects in that area, from lining the laterals with concrete to planting trees to prevent wind erosion and conserve moisture, to eradicating gophers from the canals and laterals. The group expressed support for the president's economy program but also declared that "time will prove the most valuable and lasting service performed for the general public benefit by the C.C.C. has been done by the Bureau of Reclamation camps," which were already too few in that area: "We respectfully request and urge President Roosevelt to take the steps necessary to return to the Bureau of Reclamation its just and equitable portion of the C.C.C. camps allotted under the appropriation for C.C.C. camp work."¹¹

When FDR finally acted, by sending legislation to Congress and scheduling a fireside chat to explain his move to the American people, he called for additional appropriations for work relief projects—that is, he would keep the Works Progress Administration, National Youth Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps, and Farm Security Administration (which had absorbed the Resettlement Administration) at their current rates (totaling \$1.55 billion) instead of engaging in the scheduled cuts and turning people out when the fiscal year ended—plus, he announced that he would include "definite additions to the purchasing power of the Nation by providing new work," increasing the appropriations for work relief projects by \$1.16 billion dollars. This new spending translated into a sudden increase in projects and expenditures. On June 16, 1938, the headline of the *Wyoming State Tribune* in Cheyenne read: "PWA Preparing for Billion Dollar Program." Six days later a headline in the same newspaper announced some of the projects initiated: "PWA Starts Pump-Priming." An additional front-page story indicated the local impact, announcing a new program to undertake major work relief projects including

a large program to remodel Fort F. E. Warren.¹² At Casper, the national context ("Spending Bill Signed by Roosevelt") took second billing to the local consequence; the newspaper headline blazed across the front page: "Courthouse Grant Okehed," indicating that the long-awaited city-county building would at last become a reality.¹³ In addition a surge of new (and revitalized) WPA projects also began to appear in the newspapers of the state.

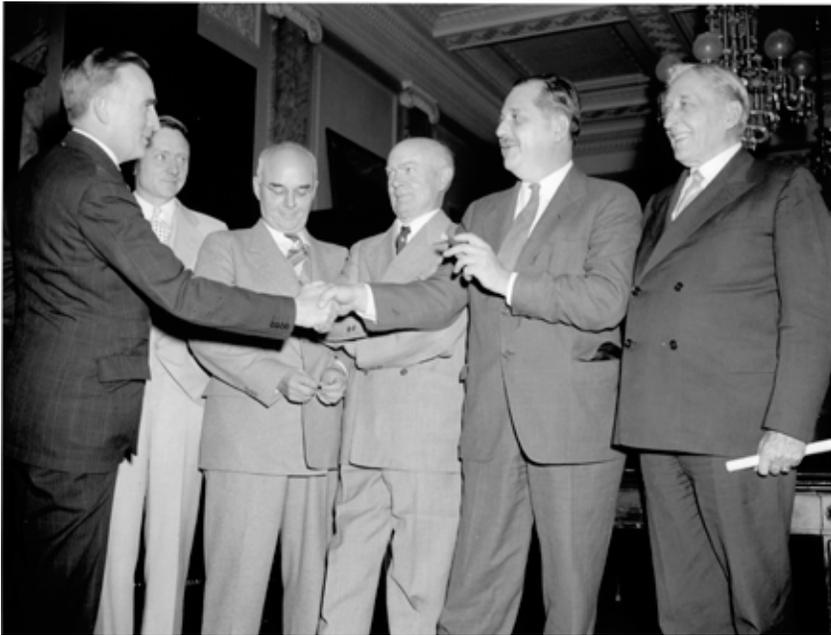
The increase in fiscal stimulus through a return to work projects took place alongside another shift too. While some had argued for deficit spending to increase purchasing power and others had argued for renewed antitrust enforcement to bring prices down—apparently an either/or decision—the president actually adopted both proposals as his own. Roosevelt showed his support for the resurrection of antitrust laws and their serious enforcement in several ways. One was the delivery on April 29 of an address to Congress that attacked the concentrations of private power in the nation, concentrations that were dominating the economy, suppressing competition and distorting free markets, and denying opportunity to new businesses and competitive prices to the public. He called not for regulation of big business but for a program of restoring markets: "the enforcement of free competition," he said, "is the least regulation business can expect."¹⁴ Second, he called upon some of the top experts in the field to assist him in this. In fact, one of the two people who helped him draft his messages on antitrust had only recently been named assistant attorney general in charge of the Antitrust Division. That person brought a genuine

11. A copy of this resolution, dated January 29, 1938, and related correspondence, can be found in the Joseph C. O'Mahoney Papers, Box 193, ECW Camps, 1938, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

12. *Wyoming State Tribune*, June 16, 22, 23, 1938.

13. *Casper Tribune-Herald*, June 23, 1938.

14. Franklin D. Roosevelt and J. B. S. Hardman, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Addresses and Opinions of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (New York: Dryden Press, 1944), 120.



Wyoming, Antitrust, and Washington: Wyoming U.S. Senator Joseph C. O'Mahoney (left) being congratulated by Assistant Attorney General Thurman Arnold (head of the Antitrust Division, Department of Justice) upon the naming of O'Mahoney as chair of the Temporary National Economic Committee to investigate concentrations of economic power. The others are also members of what was known as the Congressional Monopoly Committee. From left, Senator O'Mahoney, William O. Douglas, S.E.C. chairman; Rep. Edward C. Eicher, Rep. Hatton W. Sumners, vice chairman; Assistant Attorney General Thurman Arnold, and Senator William H. King.

Wire service photograph, July 1, 1938, from the collection of Michael Cassity.

commitment to the task based on his experience as a Yale law professor, a law school dean, and a mayor and state legislator in Wyoming with practical experience dealing with those issues—Thurman Arnold. Arnold became the key figure for antitrust matters in the Roosevelt administration, and his words could be applied as much to his own work as to the president's when he wrote later, "Franklin Roosevelt was responsible for the first sustained program of antitrust enforcement on a nationwide scale that this country had ever had."¹⁵

In addition, in his address to Congress, Roosevelt called for an investigation of the concentrations of economic power, and a new committee was formed consisting of senators and congressmen alike; the chair of the Temporary National Economic Committee (TNEC) was Senator Joseph C. O'Mahoney of Wyoming. The appointment of an effective enforcer of the antitrust laws and the launching of an investigation of the concentrations of economic power may appear far removed from the return to a vigorous program of building public works, but in reality they were just different sides of the same coin; they were both intended to make the economy operate better in the interests of the broad masses of citizens who made up the public.

As important as was the return to antitrust enforcement in promoting recovery and encouraging consumption, in the short run it was the resumption and acceleration of the work relief programs that turned the corner for the economy. As Ellis Hawley writes, giving due credit to O'Mahoney and the TNEC and to Thurman Arnold and his division in the Justice Department, both of whom faced enormous obstacles as they proceeded, "Any real stimulus to expansion, it seemed, would come from government spending, not from any major effort at structural reform or enforced competition."¹⁶

Work Relief and the Recession of 1937–1938

It is customary to view the New Deal as coming to an end around 1937. There were no, or few, major initiatives undertaken after that point, at least not in comparison to the dramatic legislative surges of 1933 and 1935. Moreover, the Roosevelt administration suffered a major setback with its proposal in 1937 to alter the composition of the United States Supreme Court—the

15. Arnold, *Fair Fights and Foul*, 139.

16. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly*, 419.

infamous “court packing” plan that would have allowed the president to add a new justice to the court for each one over age seventy (with ten years of service). As a consequence of this proposal, he lost support even within his own party. Even Wyoming senator O’Mahoney, otherwise an ally of the president, proved to be a crucial voice *against* Roosevelt in that episode. Plus, the Recession of 1937—1938 marked a shift in the fortunes of the Roosevelt administration, a shift linked in important ways to the economic downturn as well. And the elections of 1938 saw a decline in the strength of the president’s party in Congress, and, despite Roosevelt’s efforts, the persistence of his opponents within his own party too.

Valuable as those indicators may be in charting the course of the New Deal, at least in a narrow political framework, the politics of the situation did not exactly mirror the reality of the programs then operating. The New Deal was still alive, construction and other public works projects and programs were still underway, and new projects continued to be proposed, approved, and undertaken. In Wyoming the PWA and the CCC continued on their course, much of it directed at completing projects previously outlined and launched, and the WPA moved aggressively to embark upon new projects and even to expand its signature as a critical public works program. The New Deal work relief programs were strong, powerful, and effective, but there were also changes in the air, some of them administrative and procedural, and some of them of major importance in the way the programs conceived and approached the missions they espoused. The New Deal was not dead, but it was changing in the wake of the recession.

The Public Works Administration’s central project in Wyoming remained the huge Kendrick Irrigation Project. By autumn 1937 the earthen portion of the dam had been completed and by February 1938 Alcova Reservoir was ready to be tested and the waters began to fill the canyon behind the dam. Dam construction was completed on May 8, 1938, and by June the reservoir had about two-thirds of its capacity of water.¹⁷

At the same time construction on the related Seminole Dam, forty-five miles to the south, was proceeding after its beginning in 1936, although construction was plagued by injuries, including at least two accidental deaths. By 1938 initial concrete was poured for the dam, additional setbacks (having to do with geologic faults) had been addressed with further stabilization work, but, as the official history records, “despite this, by December 21, 1938, the Dam was completed and enough water was

allowed to rise to a sufficient height behind the Dam to test the outlet works.” The test and related work proved successful so that “on April 2, 1939, the outlet works were closed and first storage began in the Reservoir.” The turbines and generators were then brought to completion and, after trials and reconfigurations, “on August 3, 1939, the Seminole Powerplant was put into active operation and Casper received its first delivery of power.”¹⁸

The dams, reservoirs, and power plant were but one element of the larger system, and the rest extended far from the construction sites. The Casper Canal began construction in 1935 and was fifty-nine miles long, carrying water to irrigate fields for a long distance from Alcova, taking it through six concrete-lined tunnels that themselves extended for about three-and-a-half miles total.¹⁹ This canal was substantial, designed to be large enough actually to store additional water. Earle Hollis’s account of it notes, “A cross-section of the ditch about ten miles below Alcova lake discloses a water depth of seven feet, bottom width twenty-four feet and surface width of thirty-five feet.” With a gradual slope, the water retention capabilities of the canal were maximized and the erosion of the walls minimized. From the main canal, additional laterals reached out to the surrounding countryside. Hollis suggested the immensity of the project and its extent across the countryside thus:

It is impracticable either to describe here, or indicate on an ordinary map, the great many laterals that will be constructed to distribute the water over this project. There are hundreds of them, varying from a few hundred feet to several miles in length. All are to be equipped with weirs for measuring out the water to the farmers. In many of them, where the slope of the land is too steep, concrete drops or ramps are to be built to let the water down without washing out the sides of the ditch.²⁰

17. Klajic, “The Kendrick Project (Casper-Alcova),” 11–12.

18. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

19. *Ibid.*, 14.

20. Earle L. Hollis, “Kendrick Irrigation Project,” 8, WPA Collections, subject file 282.



Alcova Dam, spring 1938.

Wire service photograph from the Michael Cassity collection.

In addition, check gates shut off the water at various points along the ditches, and takeouts released water from the canals into the laterals, all of them built with reinforced concrete. The project also included the construction of roads along the canal for its full length and the grading of dirt roads on the section lines of the area to be irrigated. Moreover, the construction of the power plant at Seminoe implied further the construction of telephone lines and power lines for the project, with power lines reaching not only from Seminoe to Alcova but also from Casper to Thermopolis as part of “a power loop, that takes in Guernsey, Seminoe and the Sho-

21. Hollis, “Kendrick Irrigation Project,” 10.

22. *Ibid.*, 10.

23. *Ibid.*, 8.

24. Klajic, “The Kendrick Project (Casper-Alcova),” 14–15.

shone project at Cody and extends into Colorado and Nebraska. In fact, it is planned to include all power distribution systems and all government-owned power plants in the Rocky Mountain states in one great loop.”²¹

Further, there was the clearing away that had to be done—perhaps a lesson of the dam construction at Jackson Lake—in the location of the reservoirs themselves. During the winter of 1937–1938, a hundred men were put to work for three and a half months clearing the site of Alcova Lake, cutting and burning timber, sagebrush, greasewood, and other features (like old fence posts) that would be on the floor of the new lake.²² Everywhere one looked, the Kendrick Project was taking in more and more territory and touching the lives of more and more people.

One feature of the Kendrick Project grew in importance as the project itself grew, was noticed acutely at the time, but has been less noticed in retrospect. It had to do with the effort not just to build an important and enduring infrastructure for the economic growth of the region, but to combat the problem of unemployment. The PWA had been sensitive to that issue and with the Kendrick Project seemed to take steps to broaden the economic and social benefits of construction itself, in addition to building worthwhile facilities. A 1941 account of this construction spelled out the difference, noting that the major construction elements of the project—the two dams, eight tunnels and two siphons—“comprise all the work that has been done on this project by contract. All the remaining work has been on ‘force account’; that is, by labor hired and supervised by the Bureau of Reclamation direct.”²³

The benefits of the project were calculated especially in terms of the irrigation that the impounded water would provide (and the electric power that would be produced), but clearly there were other benefits too. The official history of the Kendrick Project notes one of these when it records, “When Alcova Dam was completed in 1938, the residents of Alcova had the best summer ever. The new reservoir was like a new toy. Reclamation’s offices in Casper were jammed with recreational use requests.”²⁴ As is the nature of such infrastructure development, this then unleashed new forces

Seminoe Dam, June 1, 1938.

Postcard from the collection of Michael Cassity.

for construction to develop the recreational possibilities of the lake and its environs, and some of that work would be done by other government work relief agencies.

The Kendrick Project was an example of a “Federal Project,” one of two categories of PWA activity, indicating that the work was done for and with another federal agency, in this instance the Bureau of Reclamation. Other projects were “Non-Federal” projects, projects that the PWA entered into with communities, the state, and other public entities such as school districts. One of those “Non-Federal” projects, and an important one, was the construction of the Liberal Arts Building at the University of Wyoming. That was followed by yet another project at UW. The original conception of the Liberal Arts Building had included facilities for some kind of a student union—or “quarters,”—but the building as it came to completion was, with the important exception of the auditorium and related features, almost completely academic.²⁵ The student union remained a project for the future, and that future came just a few years later. In late 1937 and early 1938 plans for constructing a new student union with PWA funds were finalized and bids opened, and construction began immediately.²⁶ In the autumn of 1938 construction of the building situated at the opposite end of what was becoming an actual university quadrangle from the Liberal Arts building was moving forward and the cornerstone was laid at homecoming.

The ceremony brought together students and faculty, alumni, state officials, administrators, and community representatives and was filled with pomp and ceremony that seemed to celebrate not just the addition of a new building to the campus but the completion of a stage of growth.



25. Wilson Clough cites the 1930 university bulletin that itemized construction needs for the university, including the Liberal Arts building, which would be “the largest building projected, with auditorium and student union quarters.” Clough, *A History of the University of Wyoming, 1887–1937*, 156.

26. See the discussions of the agreement with the PWA in the University of Wyoming Board of Trustee minutes for December 9, 1937, February 18, 1938, and November 26, 1938; copies of the minutes can be found online at http://www.uwyo.edu/trusteessupport/Meetings/1930%20-%201939/1937/1937_Dec%209_BOT%20Minutes.pdf; http://www.uwyo.edu/trusteessupport/Meetings/1930%20-%201939/1938/1938_Feb%2018_BOT%20Minutes.pdf; and http://www.uwyo.edu/trusteessupport/Meetings/1930%20-%201939/1938/1938_Nov%2026_BOT%20Minutes.pdf.



University of Wyoming Union, a PWA project, March 5, 1939.

Wire service photo from the collection of Michael Cassity.

(Left) Wyoming Union cornerstone, 1938.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2011.



It acknowledged the range of circumstances shaping the university from the depths of the Depression, the reconfiguration of the campus design, and the maturing of the university as an institution. To honor the occasion, time was set aside during homecoming festivities for a solemn but celebratory program. It started in the auditorium of the Liberal Arts building with university president Arthur Crane presiding over music and speeches by dignitaries including U.S. Senator Harry Schwartz substituting for Governor Leslie Miller. Additional speeches were offered from the Board of Trustees, the faculty, the Associated Students of the University of Wyoming, and the entire group then marched in a procession across Prexy's Pasture to the partially completed Wyoming Union where the Wyoming Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons laid a cornerstone inscribed with words from the cornerstone of New College, Oxford University, a cornerstone that had been laid in 1380. Connecting ancient purpose and modern curriculum, a copper box was placed in the cornerstone with University of Wyoming bulletins, campus magazines and newspapers, agricultural experiment station bulletins, and other current items, including the pamphlet, "How Shall I Finance My Education at the University of Wyoming?"²⁷ Thus the university's aspirations and

27. "The Union Cornerstone is Laid," *The WYO Magazine* (Fall Quarter, 1938), 12–13.



accomplishments as an institution of higher learning in a complex modern society both came into view.

The Wyoming Union celebration may have attracted the most attention, but PWA work in a number of communities in the state likewise demonstrated expansion and improvement of the state's education system. In Lander the PWA started a school project that replaced the old grade school and the junior high school, which had been condemned. In February 1938 the new building was completed, one of the major Wyoming school construction projects undertaken by the PWA at least as measured in physical size, design, and dollars expended. At the end of the decade the Lander Grade School, the future Southside Elementary School, was one of the projects the PWA would point to as an example of its construction in the nation. A modern brick building with terra cotta sheep's heads (symbolic of the importance of the local sheep industry) and elaborate brick ornamentation, the school had twelve classrooms, an auditorium/gymnasium, a library, and basement lunchrooms.²⁸ While important for its architectural qualities, it was especially significant for its contribution to the enhancement of education opportunities in the community during the Depression.

(Top) Lander Grade School, a PWA project completed in 1938.

Photograph by C. W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown, Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture of Projects Constructed by Federal and other Governmental Bodies Between the Years 1933 and 1939 with the Assistance of the Public Works Administration (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 260.

(Above right) Lander Grade School, brick ornamentation.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2011.

(Below right) Ornamentation at Laramie High School (also known and used later as Civic Center) indicating work (by PWA) in 1939.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2011.

28. Short and Stanley-Brown, *Public Buildings*, 260.

Carbon County Courthouse, Rawlins, March 2, 1940. Note PWA sign above men at corner and name of contractor on other sign.

From the Frank J. Meyers papers, Box 8C, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.



Exactly how many schools the PWA constructed in the state is unclear, and there are examples of other schools that the PWA did not build but did expand or improve, a factor that obviously increases the number of PWA schools in Wyoming. It appears that the PWA sponsored at this time the construction of a grade school in Lingle, the high school at Huntley, and the high school at Hawk Springs.²⁹ Records of these and other construction projects exist although they require research to unearth them. For example, the Wyoming State Archives has records for Albany County School District Number 1, and in those records is a set of documents

29. Clayton B. Fraser, Mary M. Humstone, and Rheba Massey, *Places of Learning: Historic Context of Schools in Wyoming* (n.p.: Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, 2010), 121.

30. Albany County School District Number 1, Public Works Administration Construction Projects 1938–1941, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne.

pertaining to “Public Works Administration Construction Projects 1938–1941.” Those records demonstrate the PWA role in building additions to the Laramie High School, Nellie Iles School, Lincoln School, and Stanton School in Laramie.³⁰ It is probable that records of other school districts likewise document PWA activity within those jurisdictions. At any rate, given the budget line separating PWA from WPA projects, with those over \$25,000 going to PWA and those under being taken up by the WPA, it is clear that just as the WPA could divide large projects into multiple smaller ones to meet the requirements, so too could the PWA combine multiple smaller projects into bundles to meet the other side of that requirement.

The PWA had compiled an impressive record in Wyoming by 1939. In March of that year, a major PWA report on its accomplishments indicated that the agency had undertaken a total of 58 “Non-Federal” projects in the state, 33 of which had been completed. Another 25 were under construction. That ratio itself, however, suggested how slow the PWA was in developing its projects, even when they were not the size of the Kendrick Project. There is no official list of projects, but included in that number were twenty-seven schools, four hospitals (or hospital buildings), four

sewage-disposal projects, and six waterworks projects.³¹ How many other projects were funded by the PWA but went through other agencies (such as the Treasury Department in the construction of post offices) is not known. And the size of the different projects is uneven, with the Lander Elementary School (dismantled in 2011) counting the same as the much smaller Egbert school (apparently later used as a residence). One thing is clear and that is that the PWA made its mark on a number of Wyoming communities and on almost every county in the state.

In fact, that mark was still being made while that report was being written. The PWA post office at Mammoth in Yellowstone National Park had just been dedicated. Other projects under construction included major buildings in Rawlins and Casper, and probably elsewhere too. In 1940 the Carbon County courthouse was under construction, nearing completion in the spring. A large building with distinctive architecture that combined references to local culture and economy (the ramsheads punctuating the façade above each window) with streamlined and Art Deco aspects, the building also reflected the essentials of PWA construction. A photograph of the building in April 1940 shows not only the proud imprimatur of the PWA on a sign posted on the building but also shows the sign of the Laramie-based construction company responsible for the erection of the building. In Casper, the citizens of the area finally received their long-awaited city-county building to house the government functions of both entities, and the new building resembled, in fundamentals, that of Rawlins. In this case, however, the building's local references were to westward migration (wagons on the Oregon–California Trail, soldiers and Native Americans from the nineteenth century, and the development of the petroleum industry), but the building was very much modern—Streamlined Classical—in design.

There is another aspect of this construction that bears notice too. By the late 1930s the federal buildings were taking on a new appearance. In the early and middle years of the decade, the post offices, courthouses, and federal buildings constructed by New Deal work projects presented an essential continuity with those built under the Hoover administration. And those buildings tended in their architecture to hark back to the early days of the republic with Classical (or Neoclassical) lines evocative of democracy and tradition.³² But by the end of the decade the new buildings exhibited a distinctly modern aura with exteriors that were stripped



City/County Building (Casper and Natrona County).

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

down of much of their ornamentation and moldings, substituting simplified, clean lines, smooth walls, and “punched holes” for windows. Often, as in the Casper and Rawlins courthouses, they would retain some locally rooted iconography, but the buildings otherwise tended to the streamlined but massive and monumental.

31. These numbers are taken from maps indicating projects and also summary tables in *America Builds: The Record of PWA* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), appendix. The dots on the maps, while indicating general locations of projects, also appear to indicate counties rather than cities, so it is not always clear exactly where the projects were located and also whether a particular project included multiple buildings and other structures.

32. See the discussion in Craig and Staff of the Federal Architecture Project, *The Federal Presence*, 282.



Signs of the times, reflecting 1939 reorganization and renaming of the WPA as the Work Projects Administration. From left, Lingle bandshell, Teton County (Huff Memorial) Library, Laramie bandshell.

Photographs by Michael Cassity, 2010 and 2011.

And in that lies another element of their significance. Architectural historian Mark Gelernter, among others, has made much of the symbolism of large, massive buildings, noting as early as the Olmec constructions in Mesoamerica that “massive public works . . . suggest a centralized authority.”³³ That centralization certainly is relevant in discussions of social, economic, and political change during the Depression years in Wyoming. Moreover, when it comes to the federal buildings of the Roosevelt

years that included both massive size and stripped Classicism in style, Gelernter adds further context when he makes a suggestive connection to the use of stripped Classicism in Europe at the same time: “Roosevelt’s New Deal America also continued to use the style for its public buildings throughout the country, including post offices and courthouses. Even if they did not reach such grandiose scales as the designs of [Albert] Speer, the American federal buildings were often stripped so severely that they expressed a similar feeling of power and authority.”³⁴

The Reorganization of Work Relief

Despite the continued PWA work, the agency had reached a crossroads in 1939. In fact, a series of changes in the administration in Washington impacted work relief in Wyoming. In early 1939 Roosevelt named Harry Hopkins to be his Secretary of Commerce.³⁵ Ordinarily a change in program administrators would not make a large difference, except in the details, but Harry Hopkins had generally dominated the work relief effort of the Roosevelt administration since 1933, giving the FERA, the CWA, and the WPA a priority of putting people to work, and that priority was all the more noticeable because it contrasted with that of his main competitor, Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, who was more interested in building the nation’s infrastructure through the PWA. The two programs, and their different approaches to the nation’s problems and needs, had

33. Mark Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 9.

34. *Ibid.*, 248.

35. While this shift in personnel removed Hopkins from the WPA, this was not entirely a way of easing Hopkins out of a position of prominence and influence, though he certainly had become a controversial figure in the Roosevelt administration. In fact, Hopkins would soon move to the White House and become Roosevelt’s key special advisor on all issues, foreign and domestic. The award-winning study by Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), devotes only a small portion to Hopkins’s pre-World War II service in the Roosevelt administration.

been in intense and unconcealed competition from the very beginning. Thus the departure of Harry Hopkins from New Deal relief operations held major implications for, and raised questions about, the programs that he had administered and also those that he had not controlled.

Instead of this becoming an opportunity for Ickes to move into the vacuum created by the departure of Hopkins, however, Roosevelt launched a major reorganization of the entire public works operation. This entailed several moves. The Reorganization Act of 1939 authorized the president to reconfigure some of the programs under the executive branch, and Roosevelt thereupon created a Federal Security Agency and a Federal Works Agency as well as two other new agencies. The Federal Security Agency brought into a single administrative structure a variety of federal programs, including Social Security, the National Youth Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps. The Federal Works Agency consolidated into one administrative apparatus the Bureau of Public Roads, the Public Works Administration, and the Works Progress Administration (now renamed the Work Projects Administration). Roosevelt also named new administrators for the agencies, notably replacing Harry Hopkins at the WPA with Colonel Francis Harrington, who had been chief engineer for the WPA and then assistant administrator. Harrington, an army officer, was outside the political establishment and thus defused some of the criticism of the agency as a political arm of the administration; moreover, his appointment meant that Hopkins's protégé at the WPA, NYA director Aubrey Williams, would not receive the position. At the same time, Roosevelt also removed the PWA from Harold Ickes and put that program under the new director of the Federal Works Agency, John Carmody. A quiet revolution (except for Ickes's furious protests) had taken place at the highest levels in the whole operation of work relief. The question remained, however, as to what impact this revolution would have on the work in the field. The changes, it turned out, were powerful but subtle.

The Public Works Administration did not die with this reorganization, but it did fade from view insofar as launching major new projects in Wyoming. One source indicates that in Wyoming "the PWA depression program came to an end in 1939,"³⁶ and while that is an obvious overstatement, given the continuing projects, it does accurately suggest that the PWA was no longer the powerful force in initiating public works projects

that it had once been. On the other hand, other work relief programs seemed to experience a resurgence, perhaps even an expansion.

The CCC projects with the various federal agencies climbed once again in the final years of the decade, at least in terms of the number of individual camps operating in the state. In 1938 Wyoming had twenty CCC camps in operation, a number reflecting cutbacks from the previous years, but in 1939 the number of Wyoming camps jumped to twenty-seven. The General Land Office still operated one camp near Gillette, which worked on the coal fires in the Little Thunder Basin. By 1939 12 of the 29 fires scheduled for suppression had been extinguished or at least controlled, and work was underway on another seven. And while 10 more fires had not been attacked and those required years of effort, there remained just the one camp.³⁷ Plus there was the one camp assigned to the Division of Plant Industry within the Department of Agriculture at Fort F. E. Warren, the camp at the High Plains Horticultural Center. By 1939 there was only one state park camp in the state, this one apparently at Casper.³⁸ The Forest Service remained at the same CCC strength, with eight camps assigned to it in 1938, 1939, and 1940.

By contrast, the Bureau of Reclamation camps doubled, although just from two to four, between 1938 and 1939, but the increase was greater than the statistics suggest since they included entirely new projects, not just a

36. Morgan, "The New Deal in Wyoming, 1933–1938," 969, 44. See also Larry Joseph Krysl's comments that "from the mid-year 1937 to the end of 1938, Wyoming did not receive any PWA loans—forcing project sponsors to contribute their own funds." Krysl, "The Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1935–1940," 64.

37. The numbers of camps are taken from the appendixes of the *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1938* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), 87, and *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1939* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 114.

38. "Recreational Values Up: Work Being Done by CCC Labor Here and at Alcova Serves Fine Purpose," *Casper Tribune-Herald*, March 12, 1939.



Concrete construction work on Shoshone Project at CCC Camp BR-7 near Deaver.

Seventh Period Narrative Report, ECW Camp DG-25, Record Group 115, Entry 21, National Archives and Records Administration, Rocky Mountain Region, Denver.

continuation of previous camp projects. Camp BR-7 at Deaver continued its work on the Shoshone Project, but CCC work at Lake Guernsey generally terminated in August 1938 and that camp relocated to Veteran as BR-83 to work on irrigation improvements on the North Platte Project.³⁹ In addition, a new camp at Powell opened in the summer of 1938 and new camps also opened at Alcova (October 1938) to build roads and recreational facilities around the new lake and at Cody (April 1939) to work on the Heart Mountain Division of the Shoshone Project. The overlap of camps by date makes it clear that at some points there were even five camps

operating.⁴⁰ This represented a significant expansion of Bureau of Reclamation CCC activity.

Another dimension of that expansion needs to be noted too—the nature of the work being done. On the Shoshone Project this was clear. One report noted that the original wooden structures for irrigation were being replaced by concrete since “during the past eight years almost every available homestead on the Shoshone project has been taken up.” The Deaver camp spent its time constructing “concrete drops, weirs, and checks in the canals, graveling of the ditch riders roads, riprapping canal banks, rubble lining of canals, flood control structures, and cutting willows along the main canals.” The report also noted that the concrete work had taken place during the winter when the canals were dry.⁴¹

39. For the small amount of work remaining, the CCC left a side camp at Guernsey.

40. Pfaff, *The Bureau of Reclamation's Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, 1933–1942*, E-7. Moreover, this count does not include side camps where detachments were assigned to work projects at some remove from the base camp. For example, in the summer of 1939 a side camp from BR-83 worked at Fort Laramie following the transfer of the site from state ownership to federal control.

41. “History of Company 2133, Camp BR-7-W, Deaver, Wyo.,” in *History of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Colorado and Wyoming District* (Pueblo, Colo.: O’Brien Printing Company, n.d.), 96.

The concrete work itself was a major element in the irrigation projects and represented a different class of work. In some ways, and importantly, the CCC work was starting to resemble the major construction projects of the WPA and even the PWA. It was even becoming industrial in character. In 1940 the national director's annual report for the CCC observed that the work on the Shoshone Project went well beyond the sometime image of happy CCC tree planters:

Several heavy construction jobs were completed by the enrollees during the year, such as construction of the Alkali Creek inclined drop on the Shoshone project in Wyoming, involving production of 1,800 cubic yards of concrete aggregate and placing of 95,000 pounds of reinforcing steel, 1,100 cubic yards of 6-inch concrete lining, and 1,900 linear feet of 6-inch vitrified tile. On the Heart Mountain Canal on this same project four large timber bridges were completed on the new operating road, consisting of rock masonry abutments and piers, log stringers, and 3-inch by 12-inch flooring.⁴²

In addition to the expansion of the CCC at the end of the decade in Bureau of Reclamation work in Wyoming, the same enlarged effort could be seen in the other Department of the Interior agency active on federal lands in the state since 1935, the Division of Grazing (or, as it was reorganized and renamed in 1939, the Grazing Service). In 1938 there were only three Division of Grazing camps in the state; a year later there were eight, and in 1940 there were nine.⁴³ Representative of the projects undertaken by the CCC grazing camps were those reported by DG-52 at Worland. Organized at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1938, the company was immediately assigned to the Division of Grazing near Worland. The group reported:

Among the first of its projects will be the building of adequate reservoirs for stock-watering purposes on the famed Worland-Big Horn Mountain stock trail. The economic objective of this enterprise is the lessening and eventual elimination of sheep losses sustained along this stock trail in severe drouth years. Such losses have aggregated five per cent. of flock totals. Permanent stock watering places are to be built to replace the old range practice of hauling water to the distant herds.



Brush Creek Work Center, constructed at an unknown date between 1937 and 1940 by the CCC as an administrative facility for the Forest Service in the Medicine Bow Mountains in Carbon County.

Photograph by Richard Collier, Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.

42. *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1940* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940), 44.

43. See the CCC annual reports for 1938, 1939, 1940 cited above.



One of the 464 “signs, markers, and monuments” constructed in Wyoming in 1940 was this monument to the CCC and other firefighters killed at the Blackwater Fire west of Cody in 1937. Forest Service medallion is at left, CCC medallion is at right.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2010.

Thus, one of the newer CCC companies will be serving to the utmost the principles for which the first companies were organized more than five years ago. The construction of adequate public stock trails is a task that the stockmen have been unable to undertake on their own account, the cost being prohibitive and the work of a community wide character.⁴⁴

Moreover, the Worland camp, and others like it, constructed drift fences and cut and creosoted poles for the fences. Plus, the group reported, “additional work to be accomplished includes trail blazing, road repair and construction, reservoir and dam construction, rip-rapping, the development and servicing of spring water, land conservation, construction of

‘cutting’ corrals, and the policing of stock driveways and fire lanes in forested areas.”⁴⁵ The CCC had its work cut out.

There is one more point that should not be neglected in the Grazing Service work. The projects were small, if taken one by one in the context of the large expanses where they worked. But those projects themselves fit together in a larger plan and network of management. The Grazing Service in 1940 acknowledged and even emphasized this when it noted of its CCC projects that they “are beginning to give a fairly comprehensive picture of a planned program for management and use of the lands, each project taking its rightful place in a pattern designed to afford maximum use with the least abuse of the natural resources.”⁴⁶ Considered separately and isolated from each other, they may appear insignificant; considered together, the whole was more than the sum of the parts.

Moreover the CCC workers were not just cleaning up and clearing out and making modest improvements; the CCC was being called upon more and more for major construction. Even the work with the Forest Service reflected the tendency toward heavy construction in the projects. Forest Service Camp F-3-W at Ranchester shifted back and forth from a summer tent camp on the Dayton-Kane highway to a winter camp at Dayton (where it was Camp F-34-W). A major project of that camp in the summer of 1938 was “construction of three ranger stations, completion of Sibley

44. “History of Company 2132, Camp DG-52-W, Worland, Wyo.,” in *History of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Colorado and Wyoming District*, 90–91.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1940*, 48.

Dam, which, like the Tensleep Dam [a 1937 project], is a recreational lake dam about 450 feet long and 30 feet high.” Then the enrollees constructed campgrounds around the shoreline and built a road to access them.⁴⁷ The same general story was repeated at other Forest Service CCC camps, like those at Centennial (F-36-W), Saratoga (F-38-W), and Fox Park (F-17-W), with construction, not just of campgrounds, but also of ranger stations, dams, and other major structures becoming increasingly the order of the day for the CCC. The work of the CCC had often been hard and heavy, and even dangerous; now it was becoming industrialized.

In truth, CCC work was varied—by agency, by camp, and by season—and it included a wide range of missions, some of them intensely challenging and some less so, but the work was endless and also left major physical improvements or additions to the land and its resources. To consider just the year 1940, the CCC in Wyoming (in all its camps with the various agencies) reported constructing (not including work at the CCC camps themselves) 9 vehicle bridges, 3 barns, 7 dwellings, 3 garages, 49 latrines and toilets, 1 lookout house, 3 lookout towers, 15 other buildings, 2,235 cubic yards of cribbing, 29 impounding and large diversion dams, 44,335.9 rods of fences, 165 rods of guard rails, 2 miles of power lines, 3 incinerators, 54 sewage and waste-disposal systems, 158 miles of telephone lines, 3 wells, 464 signs, markers, and monuments, 14 springs, 4 small reservoirs, 201 miles of truck trails or minor roads, clearing and cleaning 12,360 square yards of channels and levees, lining 4,206 square yards of waterways, 76,126 cubic yards excavating earth for channels, canals, and ditches and another 239 cubic yards of rock for those canals, more than a mile of pipe and tile lines and conduits, 144,893 square yards of rock or concrete riprap or paving, 225 water control structures other than dams, 140.3 miles of stock driveways, revegetating 60 acres of range, building 4 fish rearing ponds, marking 143 miles of boundaries, rodent control on 14,392 acres. And this was the new work; the maintenance of previous construction was often measured as multiples of the new work undertaken, such as the maintenance of 750 miles of telephone lines and 759.6 miles of truck trails and minor roads. All this, it should be added, was in addition to tree planting, campground construction and improvement, insect control, coal fires, forest fire suppression and prevention, building cattle guards and corrals, landscaping, and a multitude of other projects immediately recognizable as CCC efforts.⁴⁸

It would be possible to point to these statistics to demonstrate how enormously productive CCC work was in Wyoming, and that observation would be accurate. It might be just as accurate, however, to observe that the CCC had become especially important as a labor force for the government, even more important as a labor source than as a way of providing relief to the unemployed. Of course it did both. It provided jobs for young people who needed work. And it also provided an impressive array of accomplishments on public lands and projects. The question is whether the balance tilted to the emphasis on productivity and away from an emphasis on relief.

The evidence on this issue is opaque. Only one point is indisputable: enrollee dissension and dissatisfaction within the CCC was increasing. In his study of the CCC in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, James Hanson found that “group discharges and wholesale desertions plagued the CCC after 1937, increasing from ten to twenty per cent of all discharges given.”⁴⁹ The administration of the CCC sought answers to this phenomenon but nothing tangible and definite could be nailed down. Some suggested that the problem was “weak” discipline in the camps. Some said the employees were unable to do the work. Homesickness was always a factor. One suggestion was that the removal in 1937 of the “relief” provision for enrollment—a critical development that meant, among other things, that enrollees no longer had to be from families on the relief rolls—opened up enrollment to people more likely to be critical of CCC work.⁵⁰ Some, like Hanson, suspected that improving economic conditions “removed the absolute need for many of the boys to remain in the Corps.”⁵¹ A variety of

47. “History of Company 1811, Camp F-3-W, Ranchester, Wyo.,” in *History of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Colorado and Wyoming District*, 17.

48. *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1940*, appendix M.

49. Hanson, “The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains,” 9.

50. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942*, 184.

51. Hanson, “The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains,” 9.

explanations can be offered, none of them entirely persuasive. Hanson himself ultimately observed that “the camps in the mountainous parts of Wyoming in 1941 had the highest number of desertions in the three states under study,” and concluded that isolation and weather were the critical factors. He also, however, points to the camp at Veteran, which was neither especially isolated nor as susceptible to Wyoming winter as many other camps, as an example of a camp that “had numerous desertions which were attributed to isolation and weather.”⁵² Moreover, the critical issue is the question of why desertions dramatically increased in the late 1930s, and for that neither climate, location, nor leadership (unless one accepts that better military leaders were leaving for regular duty, that the weather cycle worsened, and location somehow shifted) suffices as an answer.

While no evidence can ever be final on this matter, there are clues here and there that are suggestive. The 1937 removal of relief as a requirement for enrollment not only substantially altered the demographics of CCC enrollment; it also subtly but profoundly altered the mission of the Corps. The 1938 report of the CCC director conveyed a full understanding of the implications of the change; that report quoted the law stating that the CCC was established “for the purpose of providing employment as well as vocational training for youthful citizens of the United States who are unemployed and in need of employment.” By assuring that applicants would no longer be excluded from enrollment because their families were not on relief, the law

would “tone up interest in the work of the Corps and . . . clarify its purposes.”⁵³ Specifically, the CCC was no longer a work relief program. This was a profound change, but more was to come.

The camps were also being reorganized and made more productive. In 1939 the director observed of the Division of Grazing camps, “Each succeeding year of the Division’s participation in CCC work since April 1935 has seen a steadily increasing amount of work accomplished and number of construction units completed. . . . As a result of the increased efficiency through the years and the greater number of camps, a new peak of productivity and accomplishments was reached in the spring of 1939.”⁵⁴ In that light, the director’s report for the following year is not surprising, but it is revealing: “the CCC boy is trained primarily for a place in the industrial life of the country.”⁵⁵ The CCC was becoming increasingly industrial in its organization and increasingly product-oriented in its objectives. And that industrial productivity mission obviously conformed to the mainstream organization of the American industrial economy. Yet, it was also far removed from the mission articulated by the government and embraced by the nation, by the communities, and by the enrollees in the early years of the CCC. The program had been created by a law entitled “The Relief of Unemployment Through the Performance of Useful Public Work and for other Purposes,” and the president who envisioned and created it had articulated his vision: “We can take a vast army of these unemployed out into healthful surroundings. We can eliminate, to some extent at least, the threat that enforced idleness brings to spiritual and moral stability. It is not a panacea for all the unemployment but it is an essential step in this emergency.”⁵⁶

Something had changed along the way. The CCC no longer focused on helping the unemployed, no longer spoke of relieving the “threat of enforced idleness,” no longer exalted the spiritual or moral or healthful associations with working in the forest. The CCC had, to some degree, become industrialized with industrial organization, methods, and objectives. To put it another way, the institutionalization of the spirit of assistance, the conversion of an effort of relief and assistance into agencies with tangible economic objectives, with set routines and established organizational apparatus, with a focus now on output rather than day-to-day living and growth, represented a channeling of broad intentions and energies into industrial priorities and systems with very much different ends. In

52. *Ibid.*, 158.

53. *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1938*, 69.

54. *Ibid.*, 65.

55. *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1940*, 5.

56. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942*, 13.

this, the CCC was not alone, for a similar narrowing of objectives was taking place in other New Deal programs.

The Changing Way of the WPA

The Works Progress Administration, which became the Work Projects Administration in the reorganization of 1939, continued its programs and projects at the end of the decade, although, as with every other New Deal program, it would be a serious, ahistorical mistake to lump all of those individual projects together across time as having exactly the same significance. The projects themselves were evolving, the personnel were changing, and the political, social, and economic environment in which the relief projects operated continued to change. For one thing, the state administration of the WPA projects changed about the same time as the national. Will Metz had served as the state administrator of the Civil Works Administration, of the Wyoming Emergency Relief Administration, and then of the WPA in Wyoming, and he appears to have been dedicated, nonpolitical, and thoroughly honest in his service. Metz, however, was sometimes conflicted in his thoughts on the programs he administered. While proud that the projects were “real” projects of substance and value, he also informed workers who threatened to walk off the job because of low pay in at least one instance, “Go right ahead . . . This is made work.”⁵⁷ Moreover, Metz never completely accepted the wage scales that were to be applied on federal work projects. With the CWA, for example, he lamented that public work projects paid more than local employers did, although he also admitted that “the wage scale did have a decided influence towards improving business conditions.”⁵⁸ Harry Hopkins himself overruled Metz in 1934 because Metz refused to pay union wages on a project where it was required. Even so, Metz continued to maintain that union pay scales should not apply to less than highly skilled artisans, “especially on made work projects.” In December 1938 Metz was dismissed from his position. “I was asked by Washington to resign as a federal employee. I refused to resign, just went back to my ranch.” As T. A. Larson notes, “L. G. Flannery, who was more in tune with the New Deal philosophy, replaced Metz.”⁵⁹

The projects themselves continued; they appear to have dipped in number and funding in the aftermath of the federal government’s budget cuts

in 1937–1938, but that is impressionistic, not susceptible to quantifiable documentation. And Roosevelt specifically identified the WPA as a crucial agency for stimulating the economy through “maintenance of relief” when he reversed course in April 1938 from his contractionary policies to attempt to bring the nation out of the recession.⁶⁰ One of the elements that adds to the murkiness of the fluctuations in spending for work relief during and after the winter of 1937–1938 is the fact that a number of WPA projects were ongoing, one way or another. They may have been halted or modified in response to the president’s reduction in expenditures in the fall, but they were also repropose or renewed in the spring with little beyond the issuance of a letter indicating the resumption of the project. The plethora of projects for road construction, street building, sewer and water system installation or expansion were often undertaken as continuing projects, one year at a time, under blanket provisions. Or they may have been renewed or continued as separate projects covering, for example, the same kind of work with the same objective for different parts of the county or town. In 1938 one project undertook to move rock and riprap canals and clean ditches for four irrigation ditches in Big Horn

57. Larson, “The New Deal in Wyoming,” 264.

58. “State of Wyoming Review, C.W.A.,” 14. This document is the final report of the Wyoming administrator of the Civil Works Administration. Submitted in 1934, it appears never to have been published or even widely circulated. A copy can be found in the microfilm of the Wyoming CWA project files, Reel 009.

59. Larson, “The New Deal in Wyoming,” 265. Larry Joseph Krysl also notes that in autumn 1935, as the Laramie County potato crop was ready to be harvested, not enough workers were available so Metz came to the rescue. Metz, Krysl says, “brought pressure to bear on all able relief workers who refused jobs, forcing workers to accept jobs offered them at a fair wage or be taken off the relief rolls.” Krysl, “The Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1935–1940,” 41.

60. See Dean L. May, *From New Deal to New Economics: The Liberal Response to the Recession of 1937* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), 138.

County. This was not the first time that work had been done on those irrigation ditches and it would not be the last. Given the size of the project (thirty-eight man-years) and the one-year project timeline, it could not be otherwise. So it was around Wyoming.

Another project may have reflected something more than automatic resumption of a large project once funds became available. About the same time that President Roosevelt issued his mandate to expand relief work expenditures, the Wyoming WPA proceeded with a project “to provide employment for needy persons to assist in extending services offered by the County Home Demonstration Agents.” A statewide project sponsored by the State Agricultural Extension Service, these workers would prepare handouts and other materials for the demonstration agents. Of particular note in this was this explanation: “This project employs mostly women and no regularly employed personnel will be displaced.” Equally notable was the initial starting date of March 5, 1938; this carried the explanation also, dated April 28, 1938, “Revised estimate of a work project previously operated.”⁶¹ This was one of the projects being brought back to life as a result of the new activity of the spring of 1938. Exactly how vulnerable were projects that employed “mostly women” cannot be determined, at least from this instance.

Another project renewed in the spring of 1938, in fact, on the same date as the project providing aides for home demonstration agents, shows some continuity with previous work. As early as 1937 a project had been initiated by the State Department of Education “to provide employment for needy women certified as eligible for W.P.A. work in the preparation

of visual education material to be used in teaching social studies, reading and health in rural schools as outlined in the State Course of Study.” What happened to this project in the hiatus of 1937–1938 is unknown, but when this project to provide assistance for teachers in rural schools was renewed, the proposal stipulated that the project would “provide employment for needy persons” and indicated that “this project employs mostly women.”⁶²

One other set of continuing, and evolving, projects at the end of the decade of the 1930s involved the Wind River Indian Reservation. More research needs to be done concerning the Arapaho and Shoshone peoples on the reservation and their experience in the Depression and with work relief programs. If there was ever a neglected part of the state in the twentieth century—in terms of meaningful participation in the social, economic, and political life of Wyoming—it was surely the reservation.

But there were at least gestures toward assistance on the reservation during the New Deal. In addition to CCC work and the establishment of the cannery on the reservation, the WPA also approved projects to build roads and bridges and to improve government buildings at the agency. In the spring of 1938 one of the projects was to “construct and improve buildings and grounds on Wind River Indian reservation.” While similar projects had been undertaken on the reservation previously, this was identified as “a new work project selected for operation.” It also indicated, without further elaboration, that the project would “continue the type of work now being done” on an official project, thus suggesting that it was of the same type but represented an expansion of the work.⁶³ And more projects followed. In July 1939 another WPA project on the reservation worked to “improve roads throughout the Wind River Indian reservation in Fremont County, including grading, graveling, installing culverts and bridges, and performing incidental and appurtenant work.”⁶⁴ Some of the projects were more broadly social, including the construction of a community home for Arapaho Indians (the implication being that it was for older people), constructing a recreational center in the mountain area of the reservation, and building a museum at Fort Washakie.⁶⁵ The projects do not explicitly specify the workforce, but indications are that the people put to work on these were also the people living on the reservation.

In at least one project on the Wind River Reservation the object was specific and the materials were experimental. At the same time that the

61. Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 114, OP 465-53-3-18, Document #no. 25868.

62. See the files for this project(s) in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 114, OP 465-83-3-10, Documents #25868 and 25733.

63. Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 114, OP 565-83-2-2, Document #25953.

64. Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 121, OP 65-83-446, 265-83-1000, 765-83-1-2, Document #43150.

65. Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 121, OP 65-3-83-28, Document #43236.

reservation launched projects to construct a grandstand at the Fort Washakie Community Grounds, a new roof for the cannery and a new bathroom for the cannery residence, a new firehouse, improvements at the rodeo grounds, and some cottages at the Arapaho Farm Station, in June 1940, a project was also proposed (and approved) to construct three rammed earth buildings at an unidentified point on the reservation, but presumably at a school. The buildings would include a shop and classroom, a poultry house, and a hog barn. The rammed earth construction consisted of forming blocks of sand and clay and a small amount of Portland cement (for protection from weathering), and then using the blocks in the same way as concrete blocks, assembling them in walls and bonding them with a lime mortar joint. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, it was noted, was working with the National Youth Administration to “develop a cheap construction material for small buildings that would possess distinct advantages over the plain rammed earth methods.” The sponsors on the reservation added that the central offices of the WPA and also the Federal Housing Administration had expressed an interest in that work. The project appears to have been undertaken and completed, but the results of the experiment are not recorded.⁶⁶

Between the extension, reopening, resumption, or other action to continue those many ongoing projects around the state and the initiation of new projects, the two years following the spring of 1938 witnessed a surge of WPA projects, clearly in keeping with the administration’s return to work relief. Around the state old projects and new projects put people to work and enhanced the transportation and utility infrastructure, provided new recreational opportunities, and added public buildings.

Schools remained a high priority for the WPA throughout Wyoming. A brief survey of WPA projects shows that, among other projects, the Natrona County High School in Casper purchased (not with WPA funds) the entire block across the street from the school, removed the buildings, and drew upon WPA workers for landscaping and constructing sidewalks and curbs; in Lincoln County, one school district used the WPA to wire six school buildings and added two additions; Lusk public schools added a basement, moved one building, built new playground equipment, landscaped, and undertook other repairs and upgrades on the schools; Platte County School District No. 9 repaired and remodeled 20 rural schools, each one averaging only 740 square feet of floor space with a capacity of 20



WPA sidewalk in front of Natrona County High School.

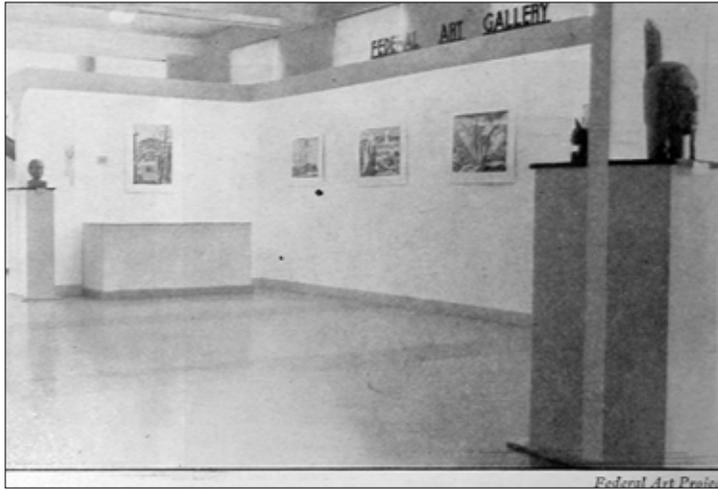
Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2012.

students; Uinta County constructed school buildings in Mountain View, Carter, Nebraska Flats, and Robertson; in Sweetwater County the school buildings and grounds in Winton, Dines, and Reliance were improved as WPA projects.⁶⁷

Not all of the WPA projects, of course, were oriented to constructing buildings, roads, or other physical facilities. There were also the white-collar programs that had been initiated in the middle of the decade, and

66. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 122, OP 65-83-28, Document #43613.

67. Natrona County High School: Albert Park to F. D. Bellamy, August 26, 1940, Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 122, OP 165-1-83-24, Document #45061; Lincoln County schools: Project Proposal, O.P. 65-63-14 and 65-1-83-11, August 29, 1940, Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 122, Document #44790; Lusk schools: J. W. Hungate to Albert Park, December 26, 1939, Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 107, Document #6503; Platte County schools, Report on work completed, November 22, 1939, Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 116; Uinta County schools: Statement of Project Estimate Detail, November 1, 1938, Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 116, Document #32228; Sweetwater County schools: Statement of Project Detail, October 4, 1938, Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 192, OP 665-83-2-30 (unnumbered document).



Federal Art Gallery, Liberal Arts Building lobby (second floor), University of Wyoming, 1938.

Federal Art Project photo published in Time, September 5, 1938, 36.

68. Gordon Olaf Hendrickson, "The WPA Writers' Project in Wyoming: History and Collections," *Annals of Wyoming* 49 (Fall 1977): 185; James Hanson, "The Historical Records Survey in Wyoming, 1936–1942," *Annals of Wyoming* 45 (Spring 1973): 79–80.

69. Hanson, "The Historical Records Survey in Wyoming," 81–83.

70. Hendrickson, "The WPA Writers' Project in Wyoming," 186. See also the description of the volume and the process by which it was prepared in T. A. Larson's introduction to the 1981 University of Nebraska Press Bison Book edition of *Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Wyoming*, *Wyoming: A Guide to Its History, Highways, and People*, ix–xi.

71. Hendrickson, "The WPA Writers' Project in Wyoming," 187–88.

these continued and even expanded at the end of the 1930s. After 1936 the Federal Writers' Project in Wyoming and the Wyoming Historical Records Survey, both WPA projects, were separate entities. The Historical Records Survey seemed to be plagued by leadership problems—with eight different directors in five-and-a-half years—and had difficulty finding workers who were both (1) qualified to perform the work and (2) listed on the relief rolls. The leadership problem was never successfully resolved and the project consistently sought exemption from the 90 percent relief worker requirement to be sure of hiring workers with appropriate skills who would be able to perform the necessary tasks.⁶⁸ The job of preparing the record surveys was, in fact, demanding, and progress was slow and uneven in the various counties of the state. But by the summer of 1938 the first county inventory (for Laramie County) was published. Within the next two years additional inventories were published for Sweetwater, Platte, and Goshen Counties, each one after a rigorous, even daunting, editorial process to bring them to publishable quality.⁶⁹

By 1938 the Wyoming Federal Writers' Project had become almost exclusively focused on the production of the state guide book; moreover, in that year a new director of this program, Agnes Wright Spring, began revising—and rewriting—the material that had been prepared previously and pushing forward with new material. Over the next two years she and her assistant, Dee Linford, drew together reports that had been submitted from the counties on different aspects of the state's social, economic, and natural landscape for the final book, and they wrote the sections on the general subjects themselves.⁷⁰ Certainly Spring and Linford contributed much, even decisive elements and entire sections, to the finished book, but there is considerably more that goes into a written volume than appears on the final pages. In particular, the enormous collection of material gathered in the state, the interviews conducted, the reports prepared, and the tours outlined reflected both the depth of the project and also, again, its purpose: which was not just to produce information but to put people to work. When the 1940 guide was published, the Writers' Project turned its attention to new and narrower endeavors, including a history of the National Guard in Wyoming, a history of grazing, and some smaller projects.⁷¹

In at least two instances, the Wyoming WPA moved into new territory. One involved a wider and more systematic promotion of art and the employment of artists in the state. The other entailed exploration of

Wyoming's archaeological heritage. The Federal Art Project had sponsored the initial efforts in this direction in 1936 and 1937, but Federal One, as the national, parent project for art in the WPA was known, was based in Washington, D.C.; in other words, this work in the state was not initially funded or organized through the Wyoming WPA.⁷² Suffering from problems of leadership and organization, and constantly trying to raise funds locally, the Wyoming project turned to the WPA in the state for support. As early as 1936 the art project in the state submitted proposals to the state WPA office "to finance or aid in financing the following project to embellish non-Federal Public buildings and institutions, including mural painting, easel painting, sculpture, plastering, fresco preparing, poster painting, work in metals, museum work, and to train art teachers in various fields of activity."⁷³ In July 1937, the project was proposed to be broadened and extended in similar language: "This is a project to employ needy unemployed qualified artists, including painters, sculptors, graphic artists, craftsmen, art teachers, art lecturers, museum workers, and photographers. It is designed to assist in the embellishment of public buildings, Federal and non-Federal, to broaden the knowledge of art among the general public, and to facilitate re-employment of needy artists." This project envisioned essentially the same organization that it had had previously, with the operation of a community art center in Laramie (a Laramie Federal Art Center) and "extension" galleries in Casper, Riverton, and Rock Springs. The people to be put to work included three at the Laramie center, one person at each of the three extension galleries, one person at large supervising and coordinating, and nine others serving as teachers and artists at large. That proposal, however, seems to have fallen prey to the budget cuts of autumn 1937. Written across the proposal is the word "Disapproved," even though it had been assigned an official project number and other documents in the same file seemed to show a steady course through the approval process.⁷⁴ In the autumn of 1937 the Laramie gallery in a rented garage near downtown closed, although it was soon reopened on the campus of the university—on the second floor of the new Liberal Arts building.⁷⁵ The Casper gallery, however, faded as did the one in Cheyenne. This represented a break, albeit temporary, in the conduct of the art program in the state, and the setback doubtless caused a loss of momentum from its already shaky start.

With the renewed funding and expansion of relief work initiated in

the spring of 1938, the art project in Wyoming breathed new life. The summer was quiet but by September the art scene in Wyoming came into crisp public view. The opening of a gallery in Riverton was part of it. The gallery there opened in the high school and featured "something quite different from what has been there formerly," with photographs and sculpture produced by artists in the WPA's Federal Art Project from across the nation and from some in Wyoming.⁷⁶ The exhibit would show there and then move on to Rock Springs, where another FAP gallery operated. In the Federal Art Gallery in Newcastle another exhibit opened with a grand reception for the featured artist, Henrietta Wood from Sheridan, and broke local attendance records.⁷⁷ In Rock Springs, the director of the Federal Art Gallery, Darwin E. "Bud" Meacham, emphasized the growth of the FAP over the previous two years and reported that sixty-two exhibits had been displayed at the gallery in the Washington Grade School building and that attendance over the past two years amounted to 20,429 visitors.⁷⁸ Meacham proved to be an accomplished sculptor and painter, and an enthusiastic, effective promoter of art. Vince Campanella, another artist who worked in Rock Springs, noted that Meacham "developed [the gallery] from a small 'hallway' exhibit site in the high school to one of the best art galleries of its kind in the state, visited each week by hundreds of

72. Federal One included, in addition to art projects, programs for theater, writers, music, and historical records survey projects.

73. Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 107, OP 65-83-303, Documents #3022-3025.

74. Wyoming WPA Project Files, Reel 114, OP 265-6900-565-3-1, Document #25991.

75. Dieterich, "The New Deal Cultural Projects in Wyoming," 37.

76. "Art Gallery to Open to Public," *Wind River Echo*, September 13, 1938.

77. "Henrietta Wood Art Exhibit Draws Large Crowds at Newcastle," *Sheridan Press*, September 16, 1938.

78. "20,429 Visit Art Gallery in Two Years," *Rock Springs Rocket*, September 2, 1939.



Edward Chavez, *The Pony*, oil painting created for Federal Art Project, 1939. Many art works emphasized local themes, cultures, and work systems, and this painting demonstrates that aspect of the art projects. The painting is in the Albany County Library, Laramie, Wyoming.

Courtesy the Fine Arts Program, Public Buildings Service, U.S. General Services Administration.

79. Ibid.

80. "Art: In the Business District," *Time*, September 5, 1938, 38.

art lovers." An educator as well as a creator, Meacham's ability, according to one report, "to properly display an exhibit and to tell visitors about the different periods the paintings portray is held to be responsible for his success as a gallery director."⁷⁹

Art was being delivered to people in several Wyoming communities in the fall of 1938, but Laramie may have attracted the most attention. Still—or once again—the hub of the Wyoming art project, the Federal Art Gallery in the Liberal Arts building at the University of Wyoming opened the season in September 1938 with the nationally acclaimed exhibit of photographs by Berenice Abbott, "Changing New York." Abbott, who had started working with the Federal Art Project in 1935, continued work on this, perhaps her best known, series of photographs. The collection was being exhibited nationally, including in Laramie, Wyoming. Capturing in vibrant richness and detail the contrast of old and new, diverse peoples and changing cityscapes, people at labor and at leisure, Abbott's exhibit created a sensation wherever it was displayed, and Laramie seemed to be no exception. In fact, the gallery itself attracted significant attention. *Time* magazine, in its report on the Federal Art Project, a report that coincided with the opening of the Laramie exhibit, announced: "Laid out by experts from Washington, such a Federal art gallery as that in Laramie, Wyo. has all the elegance of Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art."⁸⁰ The art project was no longer a spit-and-baling-wire exhibition in an obscure rented garage with work by unknown artists.

In autumn 1938 WPA art galleries were opened and staffed in Laramie, Newcastle, Rock Springs, and Torrington, and E. E. Lowry, the Wyoming director of the art project, reported that three thousand people a month visited them. In December another gallery opened in Sheridan, and that fall and winter yet another gallery took shape in Lander, and a second, smaller, Laramie gallery opened in the Mechanics building on the campus of UW. Soon additional galleries opened in Evanston and Rawlins, and the Casper gallery reopened. This was, as the FAP slogan expressed, "Art for the Masses," but it was not just a laying on of culture to the benighted, as sometimes happens; instead it was a program that demonstrated sensitivity to popular needs and wishes. There was a mix of local, regional, and national art exhibited in the galleries. At the Torrington gallery, the local newspaper reported that it "presents the work of three New York artists in water color this week and that of Mrs. Wesley Evans, local artist,

Old Fort Laramie in the Early Days, one of four murals created in 1935–1936 by Ernest E. Stevens for the Torrington High School. The murals are located in the Torrington High School and the painting is reproduced with permission of Goshen County School District No. 1.

in charcoal and place card design. . . . The plan . . . to exhibit work of one local artist along with the traveling exhibits, is the objective of the gallery, according to its director, Maud Stevens, who invites local artists to contact the gallery.”⁸¹

It is important to keep in mind how much of a change these galleries represented. Lowry submitted a report to Washington in the spring of 1938 that described “the long felt need” of Wyoming’s communities for art:

Before these Federal galleries were established, Wyoming did not have even an art exhibit hall suitable for exhibitions of art. A professional gallery did not exist in Wyoming. The F. A. P. can take credit for establishing the first art gallery. Incidentally, it might be mentioned that a relatively few people of the state had ever seen an art gallery. Through the years, only a few exhibitions of any consequence had been shown in the state. Wyoming was not art minded nor is it yet, but there are signs of improvement.⁸²

The local artists tended (and were encouraged) to paint Wyoming-based art. One of the artists was Maud Stevens’s husband, Ernest E. Stevens. Ernest Stevens had struggled through the Depression like other artists, had been an artist with the Civil Works Administration in Nebraska, had returned with his wife Maud to their Van Tassell, Wyoming, homestead, and had worked with the WPA art project in Wyoming painting stage curtains and four murals at the Torrington high school.⁸³ In Rock Springs, another artist, Bud Meacham, was, according to one report, “painting a series of pioneer pictures.” He was also reputed to be an outstanding artist of Wyoming wildlife. But there was also a taste for something other than the familiar Wyoming scenes. When Vince Campanella, an artist from



81. “Work of Local Art and Traveling Exhibit Shown at Gallery Now,” *Goshen News*, December 22, 1938; “Traveling Exhibits Shown With Work of Local Artists,” *Torrington Telegram*, December 22, 1938.

82. E. E. Lowry, “A Review of the Federal Art Galleries in Wyoming,” handwritten date of “3-25-38,” copy in Herbert Dieterich Papers in Wyoming State Archives. This collection of materials, gathered during Dieterich’s research in Washington archives, is an essential source for anyone pursuing the various federal art efforts in Wyoming.

83. Florence Canfield Burden, “New Deal Artist Ernest E. Stevens,” *Nebraska History* 66 (Fall 1985): 225–33.

An intriguing and important work by WPA artist Virginia Pitman, *Youth and Ambition* portrays a futuristic society on the horizon with youth marching off military style into a regimented future, almost literally leaving the agricultural society behind, on its hands and knees in the dirt. As with many of these works, the roles of males and females, of past and present, of industry and agriculture, and of artists themselves in this image beg for sensitive exploration.

Painting in the collection of Albany County Library, Laramie, Wyoming. Courtesy the Fine Arts Program, Public Buildings Service, U.S. General Services Administration.



New York, started a series of art classes in Rock Springs, he planned to focus on the development of art through history, but his students had other ideas. Campanella reported to state WPA offices his intention, but he found “most [local] interest in desire to understand modern isms. Therefore modern art will be the subject of each class coupled with its derivations, development and parallel in art of former years.”⁸⁴ So modern art it was.

In fact, while a careful analysis of Wyoming Depression-era art is yet to be conducted, it is clear that the content of the art drew upon both traditional subject matter and modern tendencies. Art, like other creative endeavors, is not created in a vacuum, isolated from the world around the artist, and New Deal art is no exception. In important ways New Deal art even seemed to show a society engulfed in a transformation from traditional to modern, sometimes critically, with some art documenting or romanticizing the past and its pre-industrial cycles, lifeways, work patterns, and cultures and other art celebrating the new society of modern industrial institutions, structures, and callings. It could be argued that the

art ultimately did not so much bridge the past and the present so much as it subtly reflected the tension between tradition and modernity, between Wyoming as it had been and as it was coming to be. A close look at WPA art from this period shows a society being made over, from the ground up.

In late 1938 and 1939 Wyoming WPA artists were busy in their outreach efforts, and that was in fact the main focus of the program. As historian Herbert Dieterich observes of the Wyoming program, the purpose was community involvement more than it was the actual production of art works. Even so, he says, “the project turned out a respectable amount of creative work.”⁸⁵ Dieterich estimates that WPA artists in Wyoming produced around 150 pieces in all media. The work produced by project artists—that is, artists employed on the projects—belonged to the federal government. The government, however, would often assign it to a public entity such as a school, library, or other public building in return for a nominal fee to cover the cost of materials. Dieterich, who examined the records of these “allocations” in Washington, concludes, “perhaps as

many as two hundred separate pieces of work found permanent home in Wyoming.” This would include items from traveling exhibits that came to Wyoming, not just work produced by artists in the state. More than half of those pieces found their way into the collections of the University of Wyoming, and especially of the new Student Union. “Modestly priced, original, and often technically excellent,” Dieterich writes, “these art works were a collective addition of considerable importance to the cultural resources of Wyoming at the time.”⁸⁶ An unknown number of murals—medium-sized or larger but detachable—were produced, and most of these wound up in Laramie at the university or in the public schools there, but they were also located in Torrington schools, the Cody library, Rock Springs High School, and Cheyenne High School, and a series of seven panels by Willie Spoonhunter was displayed in the Fort Washakie dining room.⁸⁷ It is important to add that there is no complete list of New Deal artworks just as there is no complete list of New Deal buildings. In addition, there was art produced by projects other than the Wyoming WPA Federal Art Project, and some of the extant work could, with research, be traced to those other programs.

Even some WPA art in the state was produced by *outside* artists specifically for Wyoming and was independent of the Wyoming WPA art project. For example, obviously inspired by the tremendous attention of the new gallery on campus, the University of Wyoming student senate, in October 1938, decided to commission a WPA artist to produce a mural for the new Student Union. The WPA agreed to provide an artist if the university would pay for the artist’s materials and other expenses. The national WPA sent three artists to Wyoming to gather information and develop sketches and then a Student Union committee chose from the submissions.⁸⁸ The winning artist was Lynn Fausett of the Utah WPA art project, and the final mural that Fausett produced captured a moment in the history of the university juxtaposed with current developments. Celebrating the tenure of long-serving university president Arthur G. Crane, the huge—seven-by-twenty-eight-feet—mural focuses on the mock cowboy-kidnapping reception of Crane when he and his family arrived in Wyoming in 1922. The mural also shows identifiable and prominent faculty members as well as featuring the various buildings added to the university campus during the Crane administration, including the brand new union.

Other New Deal art included the famous post office murals and related

art work in the state, but those pieces do not come from the WPA. Instead, they are the products of a separate program in the Treasury Department. The Treasury Department, as a glance at many post office cornerstones will suggest, was the agency directly responsible for the construction of post offices, even in those instances when PWA funds were used. And the Treasury Department set out to provide appropriate art for some of those new post offices, creating a Section of Painting and Sculpture, sometimes known as the Section of Fine Arts. These artworks were not designed to combat unemployment, and were often the product of juried competitions, but they nonetheless reflected the broader impulse of New Deal art—to create an art of and about the people. As one account of this operation notes, “Mural artists were provided with guidelines and themes for executing their mural studies. Scenes of local interest and events were deemed to be the most suitable.”⁸⁹ This art, moreover, drew on the vigorous current

84. Report of Vince Campanella, December 30, 1938, in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 195, unnumbered section on Federal Art Project. Campanella was not aloof in his work with the aspiring artists of Wyoming. Once he reported, “Because of cases of physical disabilities, or shyness, and most often the severe criticism of laymen critics, people are driven to cover and I have had to visit them at their home. The talent I have seen is genuine and in some cases excellent. The class spirit will grow. . . . Students are very eager to absorb and already there is much more freedom in their work.” Class report for December 31, 1938.

85. Dieterich, “The New Deal Cultural Projects in Wyoming,” 38.

86. *Ibid.*, 38.

87. *Ibid.*, 39.

88. “Mural to Adorn Wyoming Union, Senate Decides,” *Branding Iron*, October 6, 1938.

89. Patricia Raynor, “Off the Wall: New Deal Post Office Murals,” *EnRoute, Magazine of the Smithsonian National Postal Museum*, 6 (October–December 1997), found online at http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/resources/6a2q_postalmurals.html. See also Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 7–8.



Lynn Faussett, *Western Welcome*, mural in the Wyoming Union. The vast (7' x 28') mural depicts the ceremonious, mock kidnapping of UW president Arthur Crane upon arrival in Wyoming and also celebrates faculty members as well as the buildings he saw constructed on campus (right center) in nearly two decades of prosperity and strife.

Painting reproduced with permission of the University of Wyoming Union.



Detail from Faussett's *Western Welcome*, showing date and affiliation.

Painting reproduced with permission of the University of Wyoming Union.

90. On the post office art program in Wyoming, see Petravage, "A Study of Three New Deal Art Projects in Wyoming," and Dieterich and Petravage, "New Deal Art in Wyoming," 53–67. The Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts was preceded by the Treasury Relief Art Project, which, however much it tried, failed to identify unemployed artists to produce the contemplated art and thus did not generate any completed works in the state.

of social realism in Mexican mural art then flourishing and tended to both document and celebrate the world of work in the communities, albeit usually without the themes of social struggle prominent in Mexican murals. It was, however, a form of art accessible in every sense to the broad range of people using the public buildings. And like the Mexican art, the murals often included cycles of narrative, of action, of change. Murals appeared in post offices in Riverton, Kemmerer, Worland, Greybull, and Powell. As part of the same program, sculptures of two grizzly bear cubs were created for the post office at Mammoth in Yellowstone National Park. Out of the handful of these murals created in Wyoming, some have been moved to locations other than where originally placed.⁹⁰

Eugene Kingman, *Excavation*, 1938. This mural, located in the Kemmerer Post Office, portrays the excavation of fossils in the area, and is part of a series in the lobby that makes connections between prehistoric life and modern life and work. This display also includes a border (bottom) across the entire wall depicting dinosaur footprints and also a cross-section of landforms of North America. Used with permission of the United States Postal Service®. All rights reserved. Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2011.



The federal art projects in Wyoming, whether sponsored by the WPA or the Treasury Department, and certainly the two together, represented a significant departure in the state in the involvement of art and artists with the local communities, in the content of the art, and in the contribution the art made to public buildings. That art also remains, seven decades later, one of the most visible and identifiable physical legacies of the New Deal in Wyoming.

The launching of the Wyoming Archaeological Survey as a WPA project in the autumn of 1938 represented a new path for Wyoming work relief projects and also a counterpart to other professional work conducted



The two bears outside the post office at Mammoth also were created as part of the Treasury Department's program to provide art for the nation's post offices.

(Used with permission of the United States Postal Service®. All rights reserved.) Photograph by Richard Collier, Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office.



The Fertile Land Remembers, by Louise Rönnebeck (1938), was originally commissioned and executed for the Worland Post Office. Sometimes taken as a simple tribute to pioneers in their Conestoga wagon, the painting is actually more complex. On the lower left is a bucolic landscape of a farm fed by modern irrigation, and on the right are the marks of the petroleum industry complete with wells, tank farm, highway, and tanker truck. Yet above all else is the ghost-like, almost haunting, image of American Indians hunting bison, clearly replaced on the landscape by the agricultural and industrial society below. In addition, it appears that the emigrant family in the wagon has also been replaced by a different social order as well. At a minimum, the different elements of the painting hardly fit together in rapturous harmony. Nor was this an accident; Rönnebeck, a nationally prominent artist, studied with Kenneth Hayes Miller, whose other students included realist artists Edward Hopper, Reginald Marsh, and Isabel Bishop. The title itself is enigmatic and calls into question the direction of social change. This post office mural was subsequently moved from Worland and now hangs in the lobby outside the downtown Casper Post Office. *Used with permission of the United States Postal Service®. All rights reserved. Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2012.*

George Vander Sluis, *Farm Scene*, 1942, oil on canvas mural, U.S. Post Office, Riverton. In the Riverton mural above, at least one local resident is able to point to her father as one of the figures in the scene.

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under the auspices of the WPA.⁹¹ The need for the survey was universally expressed in the state in two main threads. First, the prehistory of the state was usually regarded as “practically unknown archaeologically,” although such knowledge was also regarded as vital in understanding the record of human habitation in North America. Second, and just as important, university president Arthur Crane, an early and consistent supporter of the survey, expressed a prevailing concern: “For so many years outside institutions have exploited the historical artifacts and materials in the State and a great many of them have been taken out of the State and are today reposing in other institutions.”⁹² There was thus even a sense of urgency to get into the field and conduct a meaningful survey.

As formulated, the survey had several sponsors, chief among them the University of Wyoming, but also Natrona County and at various points the cooperation of the Sundance Museum and other entities around the state. Survey headquarters were located in a laboratory in Casper, but additional laboratory space was made available at the university in Laramie. In addition, the Wyoming Archaeological Society, the Lander Chamber of Commerce, the Lander Public Schools, and the State Department of Commerce and Industry were listed as cosponsors.⁹³ From its very beginning the effort demonstrated broad support, including from groups and agencies that did not always have archaeology in their mission but that recognized the importance and potential of the survey.

91. The internal records of the Wyoming Archaeological Survey can be found in several accessible locations. Some are in the open stacks of Coe Library on the University of Wyoming campus; some are located in the Hebard Collection of the Special Collections of Coe Library. The most complete set, however, can be found in the WPA Collections, Historical Records Survey, especially files 163–68. In some instances, the typed reports include information not found in the official published reports found at Coe. In addition, of course, the WPA project files (as distinct from the records and reports of the survey itself) regarding the establishment, funding, and review of the archaeological survey provide additional information. Generally I cite the published reports to provide widest access, but I also attempt to identify the location of particular items that are only found in one location.

92. Crane was quoted in a memorandum later in the project from C. W. Skinner to L. G. Flannery, January 27, 1941, in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 214, OP 665-83-3-17.

93. See the list of sponsors included in the initial project outline in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 214, OP 665-83-3-17. The sponsors actually represent a changing cast of characters in the project’s reports without a discernible pattern. The final report (1941) simply identifies the WPA as being assisted by the University of Wyoming as sponsor, and also the Natrona County commissioners, the U.S. Indian Service, the Soil Conservation Service, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Dubois Chamber of Commerce. Ted C. Sowers, *The Wyoming Archaeological Survey: A Report* (Laramie: University of Wyoming, 1941).

There had been previous relief-work efforts that touched on archaeology to various degrees. At the CCC site at Fort Caspar in 1936, ten workers appear to have “worked on” prehistoric Indian sites, although what they did and under what supervision are unknown.⁹⁴ In addition, a small detachment, or side camp, from the CCC unit at Guernsey undertook some archaeological work at Fort Laramie between 1937 and 1939 to clean up and map the area.⁹⁵ But these were not the systematic archaeological surveys that some had been pressing for. The survey that took to the field in 1938 was of a different order.

The mission of the survey explicitly embraced the need “to give employment to needy persons, through exploring sites, surveying and mapping sites, collecting of surface and sub-surface materials and specimens, preparing collections for display, preparing maps, charts and descriptive materials for publications cataloging, preparing bibliographies, drawings and photographs.”⁹⁶ And if it was ambitious as an archaeological project,

94. Hanson, “The Civilian Conservation Corps in the Northern Rocky Mountains,” 236.

95. I wish to thank Danny Walker in the Wyoming State Archaeologist’s Office for helpful information; Dr. Walker is currently conducting research into New Deal archaeological activity at Fort Laramie.

96. “A Statewide Archaeological Project,” evidently dated 1938, in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 214, OP 665-83-3-17. This was the fundamental outline of the structure and operation for the proposed survey; the individual sheets do not carry document numbers.

97. The workforce at this point is illuminating. At the end of March, the survey reported “there are 7 men from Hot Springs County, 11 from Fremont County, and 35 from Natrona County. Fremont County gets the first choice, when obtaining new men, but has up to this time been unable to supply very many.” Dinwoody Camp Report, Quarterly Report, Wyoming Archaeological Project, Works Progress Administration, January, February, March, 1939, WPA Collections, Historical Records Survey file 161.

98. Sowers, *The Wyoming Archaeological Survey: A Report*, 6–7.

it was equally ambitious as a work relief project. In addition to the trained and experienced archaeologist supervising the project, the project would employ 125 people, including photographers, artists, surveyors, researchers, typists, draftsmen, cooks, miners, and truck drivers, but the single largest group was forty-five laborers. The survey would put a good number of people on the relief rolls to work.

The initial director of the survey was identified as Gene M. Stirling, but he retired less than a year into the project and was succeeded by Ted C. Sowers, who supervised the project until its termination. The initial foray into the field was at the Dinwoody Camp Site, a cave and campsite on the northern boundary of the Wind River Reservation. From December 1938 to March 1939 the survey excavated the cave “with a yield of six hundred thirty-three artifacts,” leaving behind still “a wealth of material” to be explored; “only one-third of the trash heap was exposed.”⁹⁷ After March 1939 the Dinwoody site was trenched and screened, uncovering 4,800 artifacts. Work continued at the site, but the camp was closed in August 1939 because of expense and because some of the workers were from Casper, which entailed transportation problems and prolonged absence from home—something most WPA projects avoided by requiring a local workforce. In addition, the artifacts gathered at Dinwoody, since they were on the reservation, actually belonged to the Indian tribes there. Before leaving the Dinwoody site, however, the petroglyphs and pictographs “were chalked and photographed” with a report finished in December.⁹⁸ After Dinwoody, the survey moved to the so-called Spanish Diggings, but WPA funds were withdrawn in Niobrara County within a month (September 19–October 13, 1939), so that part of the project was discontinued, but not before five thousand specimens were collected. After that the survey documented the petroglyphs and pictographs at Black Mountain (north-east of Dubois) and at Castle Gardens (south of Moneta), and excavated Medicine Creek Cave (sixty-one miles northwest of Sundance) and other sites around the state.

In addition to the fieldwork, it is clear, although the published reports barely acknowledge it, that the survey was also involved in the administration of the museum in Sundance, with an individual there submitting regular reports, and also with laboratories in Laramie and Casper. As of October 1940, the survey reported that it provided “employment for an average of twenty-five people in the three laboratories at Casper, Lara-



(Left) WPA Archaeological Survey Camp at Dinwoody Cave.

WPA Wyoming Archaeological Survey, Wyoming Archaeological Project, Work Projects Administration, Quarterly Report (January, February, March, 1939). This report is located in the Emmett Chisum Special Collections, Coe Library, University of Wyoming.



(Right) WPA Archaeological Survey at Dinwoody Cave.

WPA Wyoming Archaeological Survey, Wyoming Archaeological Project, Work Projects Administration, Quarterly Report (January, February, March, 1939). This report is located in the Emmett Chisum Special Collections, Coe Library, University of Wyoming.

mie, and Sundance,” and this work was in addition to that of the field crews. Plus, it was also noted, “On various field trips, the State Supervisor located several more or less important sites, gathering specimens which are property of the survey. Many of these sites yielded only petroglyphs and pictographs, but these, too, are of great importance.”⁹⁹ The Wyoming Archaeological Survey took in a lot of territory, literally and figuratively, and was busy with different tasks going on at different places at the same time over a period of several years.

This was an archaeology project, but it was also a WPA project. The 1941 report, reflecting work done through September 1940, expressed satisfaction with the project’s accomplishments and looked forward to the future, anticipating in particular that “field and survey work will be done in the Big Horn Mountains and in the vicinity of Casper.” It also brought perspective on the efforts of the survey: “Wyoming as a whole has barely been scratched. The state is one of the richest areas of the Great Western

99. *Ibid.*, 12.



Log craft hut under construction in Sheridan.
Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections.

Plains in the material culture of the Indians who once lived here.”¹⁰⁰ With the art projects and the archaeological survey at the end of the 1930s, it is clear that the WPA was alive and moving forward but also evolving in ways and with dimensions that were not obvious. It was, at any rate, not the same organization it had been when it first took to the field in 1935.

One program that had been a vital and visible element of the WPA actually left that agency in the reorganization of 1939, and with that change it also took on a different mission. In 1939 the National Youth Administration, which had been an independent agency within the general WPA

100. *Ibid.*, 30.

101. Lund, *Final Report, National Youth Administration for the State of Wyoming*, [43].

framework, was removed from the WPA and made a part of the new Federal Security Agency—a counterpart to the Federal Works Agency. This was not just a reshuffling of the organizational chart; it represented a fundamental change. The NYA had been created to attend to the special relief needs of the nation’s young people, needs that were different from those of the rest of society. While it focused its efforts and energies on youth, NYA projects generally resembled WPA projects with the requirement that 90 percent of the participants be from families on the relief rolls. After the reorganization, this no longer applied, including in Wyoming. A report of the NYA in Wyoming summarized the change:

For some time it had been apparent that the National Youth Administration was rapidly ceasing to be a relief agency as such and that it was more and more becoming a basic youth program to provide training through supervised employment, counseling and guidance and to facilitate the development of broad youth programs in communities throughout the United States. As a result of this transfer of the National Youth Administration to the Federal Security Agency, the way was opened to broaden the base of operations and to eliminate the principle of relief.¹⁰¹

With that change, vocational training became a central component of the NYA, and its sponsors became the public school systems in communities where projects were located. The State Board of Vocational Instruction served as another sponsor. The removal of the relief requirement was actually a gradual process, but by 1941 the program was open to everyone provided they met the citizenship and age requirements (in 1936 the minimum age had been increased to eighteen).

The projects undertaken at the end of the decade showed a continuation of some of the earlier kinds of projects, but there were also some new directions. At Hulett, NYA youths landscaped the schoolyard; at Kemmerer, workers copied and indexed land title records; in Evanston, they worked in the public library filing newspaper and magazine articles and hosted a story hour for children; at Spotted Horse, an NYA student developed a community recreational program. At communities around the state NYA young people continued to work in these kinds of projects, but increasingly, as part of the transformation of the agency, construction played a larger and larger role. At Mountain View, two youths participated

in a construction project for a new school; the result was “this supervised work experience made it possible for these youth to later secure private employment in the construction field.” In Cheyenne, seven young men were employed by the NYA “to make rustic benches and tables for the city;” in this case, the object was partly construction and partly training: “the youth received supervised training in the fundamentals of carpentry and use and care of tools.” In fact, construction was becoming increasingly important to the NYA, both for its training function and for the physical contribution to the community it made. The increasing emphasis on construction also, the NYA reported, “marked a transition stage from the early general employment plan to a specialized shop training program.” The agency was transforming into something different from the program it had been when it had helped students stay in school.

Several examples provide rich documentation of this shift in the NYA program. NYA workers built a log Boy Scout cabin at Fort F. E. Warren and a similar one for scouts in Sheridan, a log building at Fort Caspar to be used as a museum, and several remodeling projects at various points. In North Casper, a long neglected part of town, NYA workers constructed a clubhouse made of tamped earth blocks, similar to the construction methods and materials being tried on the Wind River Reservation. With walls eighteen inches thick, and finished inside with metal lath and plaster and on the outside with metal lath and stucco, the building marked a substantial contribution to that area and, the NYA noted, “this building was planned to meet a pressing need in the North Casper community and has been extensively used by various organizations and activity groups.”¹⁰² The importance of these projects is substantial. Obviously they represent a far different order of work from that evident in the initial years of the NYA where young people were put to work in schools and community programs where they were serving, and serving well, but were not especially productive in their tasks. And where the fundamental object had been to provide relief and, in the process, help young people develop some skills, the emphasis became increasingly on production and training, leaving relief out of the equation entirely. There had been, in other words, a complete transformation in what the program was all about.

That transformation was evident in work projects elsewhere too. In virtually every work relief project a delicate tension existed between the competing objectives of (1) providing a system of assistance for unemployed worker



North Casper clubhouse under construction by NYA.

Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Collections.

and (2) creating useful products for society. There is nothing inherently exclusive about these two objectives, but it certainly was easy for one to gain dominance over the other. The Public Works Administration, for example, explicitly and structurally placed a priority on the buildings, dams, and other physical contributions that they sought to create, even if that meant not necessarily putting very many unemployed people to work. On the other hand the Civil Works Administration and often the Works Progress Administration/Work Projects Administration had generally reversed those priorities, making an effort to put people to work ahead of any other con-

102. *Ibid.*, [59].

sideration. But the adoption of priorities was not just a choice between big projects and small, between capital-intensive projects and labor-intensive work, between putting people to work directly or contracting out the project, or between fighting unemployment or creating an enduring legacy in buildings. The alternatives even had to do with the organization of work and the fashioning of the product of that work.¹⁰³

In the WPA sewing rooms around the state, the project and the work system rapidly evolved in a process that formed a valuable microcosm of the institutionalization of these programs, that is, the organization of the work into a conventional industrial framework of production. The sewing project to put needy women to work in the creation of clothing, comforters, and other household sewn items in the middle of the 1930s was initially characterized by its decentralized, almost individualistic, structure, its training function to prepare women for positions in the private sector as independent seamstresses or in retail operations, and its emphasis on quality, worker pride, and individual responsibility in the production of these items. An additional benefit, of course, was that the articles that they made would then be distributed to others in the community and, given the material and construction used in their creation, the families who received them would not be subject to the stigma of receiving welfare

103. The national political contours of the shift away from fighting unemployment in public works projects have been carefully addressed by Jason Scott Smith in his *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933–1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). It is only when one goes into the projects themselves at the state and local level, however, that more dynamics become evident. Those dynamics do not refute the process that Smith identifies, but they do add other dimensions to suggest a larger social, economic, and institutional—even human—transformation that was intimately linked to those political and administrative processes.

104. WPA Division of Community Service Programs, State of Wyoming, “Report on Statewide Activities during 1940,” February 21, 1941, Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 214, OP 165-1-83-28; the individual sheets do not carry document numbers.

clothes, something that in other circumstances could be a literal badge of dishonor. As the project evolved, however, changes were made in the priorities, processes, and purposes of the sewing rooms, and those changes came within just a few years.

About the same time that the NYA moved away from relief to training and production, the sewing rooms followed a parallel course in their own operation. Exactly when the specific changes came is unclear, but by 1940 the process was largely complete. In that year there were an average of nineteen “units,” or sewing room centers, in the state, but that number conceals a process of reduction underway. At the beginning of the year there were twenty-six such units, but by the end of the year there were only fifteen. The smaller units (usually with fewer than ten workers) were being closed down. The sewing rooms employed an average of 354 workers per month and produced a total 198,546 items during the year.¹⁰⁴ Aside from the consolidation of the sewing operations into fewer rooms with more workers in them, the major change came in the organization and processes used. The report on the sewing rooms for 1940 proudly recorded, “All units are organized to give an orderly business-like appearance resembling a small factory.” That included an industrial system of production. The number of patterns was reduced and special cutters would cut twelve dozen items at once. Using a centralized system where all plans were prepared in Cheyenne at the state office, the materials would be distributed to different sewing rooms, and “each unit makes only one or two types of garments according to the plan.” At the sewing room, the bundles were “then taken to the machines by the floor woman or supervisor where they are constructed on a group plan with four workers facing each other.” A central tray with a cone thread holder distributed the thread to the machines grouped around it, and the new system removed even the shears from the individual work stations to reduce or eliminate “excess handwork.” Finally, where the sewing room project director previously boasted of the use of short bolts of material, well diversified in pattern and texture, to avoid the stigma of recipients wearing identifiable “relief” clothing, the new dispensation was otherwise: “In this State we prefer the longer bolts of material. With our specialized production plan each unit uses only one or two types of textiles, and we find that with the shorter bolts there are more bolt-ends to be worked into the lay. If the lay cannot be spliced, these ends must be accu-

mulated and cut into small size garments, which require more time than standard size garments, thus cutting into production.”¹⁰⁵

Production itself was now the objective of the sewing rooms. In spring 1941 a memo went out to the sewing rooms, “Please stress in all your units that as much time as possible be spent on machine production and as little as possible on all other duties: such as, the cleaning, finishing, inspecting, etc.” And where trained home economists had been the preferred supervisor in the sewing rooms, that too changed. In that same spring, the regional director in Denver sent a directive to the state directors of community service programs: “Since these projects are becoming more and more mechanized production units, we believe that qualified production persons should be assigned as technical supervisors, rather than home economists.”¹⁰⁶ In a transformation almost Dickensian in its contours, the work relief system, at least in some projects, was becoming not only increasingly institutionalized and modernized but its very purpose was shifting from assistance to production.

That transformation of work relief was one part, and an important part, of the changes underway. And, the importance of that transformation notwithstanding, it did appear that much of the New Deal’s work relief program continued vigorously at the end of the decade. Schools, roads, parks, bridges, fairgrounds, golf courses (and buildings for those courses), athletic fields, cemeteries, sanitary privies, fish hatcheries and rearing ponds, curb and gutter work on city streets, sewage disposal plants and systems, irrigation ditches, armory improvements, airport expansion and improvement, university buildings (not just the major edifices but also the utility shops and garages), historical records inventory and state guide book, sewing rooms—just about everything, and more, that had been operated previously continued to be active WPA projects in the field in Wyoming at the end of the 1930s.¹⁰⁷ And there were some new projects, like the archaeological survey, as well as projects that were reorganized or that simply evolved into something different. The WPA and related work relief projects may have transformed, but they had not gone away, and proposals for projects continued to come in to state headquarters. In 1940, L. G. Flannery, responding to the complaint of a Thermopolis editor who was pushing for approval of a project for that area, explained the crush of project applications: “our engineering division is working overtime almost every night on the large number of project applications which are being submit-

ted, and are giving each application consideration in its turn, according to the date received in this office, except projects directly concerned with the national defense, which have first call.”¹⁰⁸

There was, it seemed, a different kind of project that was rising to take the place of the others.

The End of Work Relief

It is a commonplace that the New Deal ended with America’s entry into World War II, or, as Roosevelt himself put it in 1943, Dr. Win-the-War had replaced Dr. New Deal. But the process of bringing these work relief programs to an end was more complex than simply closing the books on one set of agencies and then opening up new ones. In fact, it was not so much a matter of shutting down relief programs and then mobilizing for war as it was a transitional and transformational process with several dimensions.

105. Virgil Payne to R. L. Nicholson, regional director, Work Projects Administration, Denver: January 13, 1941, correspondence located in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 214, OP 165-1-83-28.

106. Memorandum from Mary H. Isham, chief regional supervisor, Division of Community Service Programs, WPA, Denver, to “All State Administrators,” May 15, 1941, Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 214, OP 165-1-83-28.

107. Some new projects were tiny, but attracted attention, such as the effort to restore the Fetterman Battle Monument between Sheridan and Buffalo. Subject to serious deterioration, the tall stone marker standing high on the hill at the battlefield was virtually ready to fall down. While it appears that ultimately the repairs were undertaken, it is not clear that the WPA approved and sponsored the project. Some funds were provided by the State Historic Landmarks Commission, but additional sponsor funds to cover gasoline and truck hire were needed. See the proposal and correspondence on Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 121, January 1940.

108. L. G. Flannery to George C. McCormick, August 6, 1940, in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 122, OP 163-1-63-3.

And it did not happen when Pearl Harbor was bombed and the United States declared war on Germany and Japan. The process was already well underway before December 1941, and it continued afterward.

Although American involvement in World War II officially came with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and then the U.S. declaration of war against Japan and Germany in the following days, it is easy to overstate the abrupt change that entry into war represented. The war in Europe had been raging since autumn 1939 and, while not directly involved, the Roosevelt administration moved as forcefully as it could, though constrained by neutrality laws, to support the Allies and build the American military. In 1940 the United States resumed the draft, and a partial mobilization of the National Guard in Wyoming began in autumn of that year—well over a year before Pearl Harbor. Military installations across the nation, including in Wyoming, continued, and accelerated, a program of build-up and expansion, some of which had already been going on for several years. In February 1941 the full Wyoming National Guard was mobilized and soon left the state, reporting for active duty with the U.S. Army on the West Coast. In March 1941 the Lend Lease Act ended any pretense of neutrality, and the United States began to actively supply armaments and other materiel to the Allies in Europe and Asia. Moreover, the U.S. Navy escorted the ships carrying those supplies across the ocean, and at the end of October, the USS *Reuben James*, a destroyer escort, was sunk by a German submarine, killing 115 sailors. By the time the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the United States had already been marching toward war.

In the preparations for war, there was not a clear line separating New Deal work programs from those for the war. National defense, as it turned out, had been an important element of the various work programs throughout the 1930s. The state's single active military installation,

Fort F. E. Warren, received the benefit of a variety of work programs in the 1930s. That work ranged from the grading and paving of streets and roads on the post and the installation of sewer lines and water extensions to the construction of recreational facilities. Funds for those projects were augmented by regular military funds dedicated to improving facilities at the post. In 1936 a major appropriation directed funding to the medical detachment at F. E. Warren, to remodeling the post gymnasium, and to telephone system construction and also to the construction of post magazines, including roads and fences.¹⁰⁹ This appropriation, a special allocation, when added to funds already committed to the post for construction amounted to more than \$600,000, an amount that puts work projects in the state into perspective by its substantial size; this was almost twice the amount used for the construction of the Liberal Arts Building (including funds both loaned and granted) at the University of Wyoming.

While federal employment for defense carried the same economic implications—providing jobs for people who needed jobs—as for construction activities associated with work relief, and while they are indistinguishable from other projects on the post that were funded by the WPA and other agencies, these specific activities funded by the 1936 appropriations were not officially designated as part of the relief effort. Future work at the fort would be.

Increasingly the army drew upon work project resources to expand and upgrade the fort at Cheyenne. In the summer of 1938, after the administration reversed course in its budget and restored (and expanded) federal spending, the Cheyenne newspaper announced that Fort F. E. Warren stood to gain more than a quarter million dollars in new construction, this money to come from a portion of the relief funds that had been set aside for the military. Picking up where previous efforts had left off, these moneys would go toward the construction of barracks for the medical detachment and the construction of a new gymnasium. Specifically, in an unusual arrangement that appears not to have been duplicated elsewhere in Wyoming, those relief funds would come from both the WPA and PWA allocations for the state. Moreover, these funds had been explicitly denied the post from the regular military appropriation and speculation at post headquarters was that, according to the *Wyoming Eagle*, the conference committee in Congress “turned down the amendment [to the military appropriation bill] with the understanding that the money would

109. “Carey Obtains Big Allocation to Fort,” *Wyoming State Tribune*, June 2, 1936.

110. “Barracks and Gymnasium to be Built Here,” *Wyoming Eagle*, June 22, 1938.

111. This work project funding meant that Fort F. E. Warren had a construction program in 1938 of nearly \$400,000, but there was more. When a local newspaper reported, five days after the news of those funds, that the fort “may get \$145,000 more



Medical detachment barracks, joint WPA PWA project, Fort F. E. Warren.
Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2012.



Post gymnasium, Fort F. E. Warren.
Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2012.

be expended from relief appropriations.”¹¹⁰ Relief funds and work project programs were clearly going beyond the modernization of roads and utilities at the base.¹¹¹

One way to view this is that instead of a defense build-up being used to fight the Depression, the programs to provide work for the unemployed were being used to build up the military. This use of WPA and PWA funds to supplement military appropriations and to replace military funds that Congress had denied meant that funds originally intended either for building up the civilian infrastructure or responding to county appeals to hire unemployed workers were diverted to other purposes; this diversion provided those military buildings a distinct historical significance. Above all, it showed the growing tendency toward the militarization of work project funding and, in this case, of work projects themselves.

This building program at F. E. Warren was substantial indeed; three buildings in particular appeared at the fort in 1938 and 1939—each one a major construction effort. The post theater was constructed in 1938 and

for building,” it was not clear whether this was some of the same funding previously discussed or if additional moneys had been included at some point in the budgetary maneuvers of Senator Joseph C. O’Mahoney, but the report gave every indication that it was (1) money from relief appropriations, and (2) money *in addition* to “the \$600,000 . . . already spent in construction work at Ft. Warren under the present program under way at the local army post.” “Post May Get \$145,000 More for Building,” *Wyoming Eagle*, April 2, 1938. Finally, it should also be noted that these projects on the post did not go through the usual WPA review process at the state and local level. Wyoming WPA funds and administration were used, but the decision was made in Washington with only formal approval in Wyoming. In June 1938 a memo to the Commanding Officer at Fort F. E. Warren described the process: “This office has been informed by the Washington W. P.A. Headquarters that the State Administrator has been instructed to radio or telephone approval of this project as soon as he receives a copy of the application which is being mailed him from Washington Headquarters.” C. D. Hartman to Commanding Officer, re: W.P.A. and P.W.A. Funds, June 27, 1938, Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 119, Document No. 38923.



Post theatre, Fort F. E. Warren. When construction began on this building in April 1938, 200 WPA workers started constructing the foundation and basement; “A large number of these have been working at other jobs in the post rehabilitation program.” “Work on New Post Theatre Begins Today,” *Wyoming Eagle*, April 5, 1938.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2012.

112. “CCC-WPA Legacy Grant Case Study: F. E. Warren AFB, Cheyenne, Wyoming,” in Susan Goodfellow, Marjorie Nowick, Chad Blackwell, Dan Hart, Kathryn Plimpton/e2m engineering-environmental Management, Inc., *Nationwide Context, Inventory, and Heritage Assessment of Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps Resources on Department of Defense Installations* (n.p., July 2009), D-155-D-210. This report makes no mention of PWA participation in these projects or even of the existence of the PWA.

113. As an indication of the ongoing nature of this work, the 1940 renewal of this project represented a continuation of earlier projects OP 265-83-2001; 265-83-5000; 265-83-4000; 265-83-1001; 265-83-8001; 265-83-4001; 265-83-1-1; 265-83-2-5; 265-83-2-5; 713-2-109; 713-2-67; 713-2-80; 13-2-33-21; 13-3-83-132. See Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 122, State Application 50,025, Document No. 45436.

114. Gerald M. Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne: A History of Fort D. A. Russell, 1867-1930* (Cheyenne: High Flyer Publications, 1989), 218.



NYA Boy Scout house at Fort F. E. Warren.

Photograph courtesy the Wyoming State Archives, WPA Photo Collections.

the base gymnasium and the medical detachment quarters or barracks were constructed in 1938–1939—all well before U.S. entry into World War II. And each represented a combination of WPA and PWA funding and to some degree also added to regular military appropriations.¹¹²

In addition to those three buildings, another building at F. E. Warren was constructed by the National Youth Administration. The Boy Scout house at the army post came at a time (1939) in the history of the NYA when the program was shifting its operations to actual construction. Of course, in addition to these new buildings, the WPA projects on the base included, as in an ongoing project to “improve buildings and grounds” at Fort Francis E. Warren, the broader but less dramatic work of improving existing structures, roads, sewer lines, water lines, and constructing sidewalks, gutters, and drives.¹¹³ Plus the CCC work at the fort included not just the horticultural center and nearby recreational facilities but also buildings, some of which would be recycled for other uses.¹¹⁴ Put the grand buildings together with the infrastructure developments in the 1930s, and it is plain that the army post west of Cheyenne underwent not just extensive growth but also modernization and expansion of infrastructure, utilities, and buildings of the first order in the 1930s. Perhaps the only

Row of kitchens, among the first buildings to be constructed, and constructed by WPA workers, at Camp Guernsey. WPA medallion is above door in first building.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2012.

similar concentration of such federal construction activity, with the exception of the major dams, was at the university in Laramie, and even work at the UW paled in comparison with the expanding and vigorous construction at Fort F. E. Warren.

While Fort F. E. Warren was the only active, operative military installation in a state where relics of nineteenth-century forts could be found in many places, it was not the only military facility to benefit from the 1930s work projects of the New Deal. Several armories received help under the auspices of various programs, including the Civil Works Administration and the Works Progress Administration. Casper, Sheridan, Lusk, and Torrington armories were enlarged, improved, or enhanced by these projects. Of course the Newcastle armory received an additional building far removed from the existing armory for its stables.

In addition, in 1939 the state began construction of a statewide training site for the National Guard. The original proposal by the National Guard to the WPA was “for the construction of a more or less temporary type of camp at Guernsey.”¹¹⁵ The project quickly evolved, however, and by March 1939 the proposal included “Changing present water line and laying new sewer. Construct hospital, enlarge kitchen, grade roads, plant trees.”¹¹⁶ Camp Guernsey was starting to take shape, and it was no longer temporary in any sense but a permanent training and administrative facility being built from scratch next to the town of Guernsey. And the WPA provided workers and funds for this construction. One study notes



WPA medallion over door of first kitchen building, Camp Guernsey.

Photograph by Michael Cassity, 2012.



115. F. D. Bellamy to Colonel R. L. Esmay, February 22, 1941, Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 117, OP 665-63-2-106, Documents No. 33491 and 33492. This letter briefly recounts the origin and evolution of the project and also recommends the rescission of the original project and its replacement with a new proposal since the Camp Guernsey project had evolved into something much different from the initial plan and proposal.

116. Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 117, OP 665-63-2-106, Documents No. 33436.



Airport construction and expansion continued as federal priorities throughout the decade, and more and more Wyoming communities joined the Air Age and the national network of air communications and transportation. *Airmail cover from the collection of Michael Cassity.*

that “by October 1940, a crew of 85 men had begun work on sewer lines, enlisted men’s latrines, mess halls, a warehouse, and the officers’ mess.”¹¹⁷ Progress continued on the buildings, and a row of buildings serving as kitchens for preparation of meals for the units stationed at the camp gave the place a military appearance of uniformity and close order arrangement. As early as January 1940, still nearly a year before U.S. entry into the war, the Guernsey newspaper noted that construction efforts were accelerating, even if that meant less methodical stone cutting and placement in the veneer of the buildings—a difference that can still be seen.

The military was anything but overlooked under the New Deal; it was a vital and conspicuous beneficiary of the work projects of the various programs. And the role of the military as a focus of the work projects increased in the late 1930s and early 1940s; its needs were not neglected prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. In fact, close analysis reveals that other projects earlier in the decade that had ostensible civilian, peacetime uses were also being justified, directly or indirectly, in language connecting them to national defense. The final report of the WPA was explicit on this point: “Much of the work done by the Work Projects Administration in peacetime years was later recognized as being of military value to the Nation. This work included the construction and improvement of civil airports, the reconditioning of buildings and utilities at military and naval establishments, and the improvement of highways and roads.”¹¹⁸

The airport construction program of the various work relief projects had been an essential component of the Civil Works Administration from its beginnings, and the CWA even had a separate division dedicated to airport construction, designating each project in that part as AP-1, AP-2, and so on. Even the smallest communities seemed to be destined to have an airport of some modest scale, even if just a landing strip or two. But what is notable is that the administrative classification of the airports built or repaired by the CWA was that of “Commercial-Military.”¹¹⁹ The WPA and the PWA both ranked airport construction as a high priority and with the same justification. This was not just a program to provide work for people, although that was critical, but the larger national interest was being used to promote airport construction in an especially pointed way. In his 1936 report on public works programs, Harry Hopkins noted that WPA airport construction involved consultation with the Treasury, the War Department, the Post Office Department, the Navy Department, and the Depart-

117. *Built by WPA CCC: New Deal Historic Resources on Department of Defense Installations* (n.p.: engineering-environmental Management, Inc. [e2M], n.d.), 16.

118. United States Federal Works Agency, *Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935–43* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), 84.

119. The listings of county projects in the CWA final report indicate that some form of airport construction or improvement had taken place at nearly every community in the state, including some with only a hundred or two hundred residents. See the airport listings in “State of Wyoming Review, C.W.A.” The table following page 11 in that report indicates that the only category of CWA projects in the state that used more man-hours was that of roads.

CCC Company No. 4821 in military formation in parade in Powell, May 15, 1941.

Record Group 115, Records of the Bureau of Reclamation, ARC Identifier, 293555, National Archives and Records Administration, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Denver.

ment of Commerce.¹²⁰ It was not only the Post Office and the Commerce Department that took an interest and helped shape the air transportation network and facilities but the military authorities as well. Many people in Wyoming's small towns and villages in the 1930s looked to the skies as a way to relieve some of their isolation and to connect their communities to the larger world, but others saw those airports as part of a larger national defense network connecting through them the other parts of the nation.

Or consider the roadways of the state. Ever since the U.S. Army took two truck companies, a medical unit, a repair unit, and an engineer unit across southern Wyoming on the Lincoln Highway in 1919 and reported back on the military necessity of improving the roadway, local, state, and national eyes focused on the convergence of commercial and military uses for transportation networks. During the 1930s this consideration of the military implications of transportation networks remained in the background of a number of projects providing for highway construction and improvement. As the Public Works Administration observed, "Although a highway is a local project, the sum total of roads make up major arteries for the Nation's commerce and for the national defense."¹²¹ Virtually every agency was able to justify its activities in terms of national defense, some more convincingly than others, and fairly typical is the language used by the Grazing Service as it explained how its use of the CCC to build roads contributed to the nation's defense: "While minor roads, truck and stock trails, and water storage improvements have been constructed primarily for stock purposes, they can serve, with but little additional work on them, as important links to be utilized in National Defense plans by supplementing main highways, as well as opening up vast areas in which resources of valuable minerals may be tapped."¹²²

For its own part the CCC underwent a conversion experience in its identity, at least at an administrative level, during the 1930s. In its early years, the CCC, eminently popular, raised eyebrows and concerns about its



camp administration by army officers and its organization along frankly military lines. The opposition to the creation of the CCC usually focused on fears of regimentation of labor on the one hand or the militarization of the nation's youth on the other hand. But virtually every assurance was built into the program to guarantee that no military training would take place in the CCC. With the rise of Hitler in Germany and his youth corps projects, those fears even intensified, but the CCC consistently turned away from any conception of itself as a training ground for soldiers, or future soldiers.¹²³ That is, it did so until the government began gearing up for war in the late 1930s.

120. Hopkins, *Report on the Works Program*, 31.

121. Public Works Administration, *America Builds: The Record of PWA* (Washington, D.C.: 1939), 97.

122. Grazing Service report in *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1940*, 49.

123. See, for example, Douglas MacArthur's statement that he anticipated "no military training whatsoever" for the CCC recruits in Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942*, 17.

In 1939 the CCC chose its words carefully: “While the Civilian Conservation Corps does not teach military training it does strengthen national defense by teaching discipline, by improving the physical condition of young men, by training them in skills which would be useful in an emergency and by teaching them to live together, work together, and exert their energies as a team. There is no doubt but that the United States is a stronger nation because of the CCC.”¹²⁴ That argument grew and became more literal in its focus on the development of skills necessary for military service. By 1940 the CCC would report, “As defense became the most important national task, the maximum development of young men trained in the constructive arts of *building* and *operating* and *repairing*—whether it be bridges and roads, or caterpillar tractors and trucks—received even more impetus than ever before, since these mechanical arts are crucial in modern defense, as well as being essential in times of peace.”¹²⁵

The line between peacetime New Deal projects and wartime projects is further blurred by the way that the work relief agencies directed their efforts toward projects that were directly connected to the nation’s defense effort; it was not just a matter of using defense to justify existing programs but of converting existing programs to new missions. Probably the clearest example is the National Youth Administration. The NYA had already started to move away from work projects for young people on the relief rolls to projects that would provide training for all youth. In 1940 the agency made another change when Congress appropriated more money for it to “expand and adjust” its “out-of-school work program to meet the

requirements of the national defense effort.” Thus, the Wyoming NYA began developing work projects “in line with the needs of defense industries.”¹²⁶ The NYA would train industrial workers for the war. Initially it attempted to balance its previous goal of responding to the needs of youth with the national defense effort, but “by the end of the year it was apparent . . . that the National Youth Administration would have to convert all of its facilities and efforts to the training of war workers.” The consequence was explicit in Wyoming: “it was at this point that the National Youth Administration in Wyoming was forced to discontinue its broad program of youth employment in many fields and to leave behind the many plans and arrangements for youth counseling and guidance, youth services and community planning.”¹²⁷

Soon the NYA was no longer providing broad work experience but was focusing on industrial work skills. By autumn 1941 the NYA, in response to the growing demand in the defense industry for women workers, inaugurated training for young women in “radio, machine shop, sheet metal, drafting and electric wiring.” The Wyoming NYA established a woodworking shop for thirty youths in Cheyenne and shops for sheet metal and forge work in Casper, and then expanded to other skills and communities with shops for welding and drafting in Casper, for welding, sheet metal and machine shop work in Cheyenne, for sheet metal in Evanston, for auto mechanics, welding, machine shop, and sheet metal in Laramie, for machine shop, sheet metal, and welding in Rock Springs, for machine shop, sheet metal, and welding in Sheridan and Torrington, and for electric wiring and drafting at Fort F. E. Warren.¹²⁸ The conventional NYA nondefense programs were not eliminated entirely, although they faded in comparison to the defense work, and they were continued with the narrower objective of meeting the needs of “youth not qualified for defense employment,” preparing them to take the positions in their communities of those who left for the armed services or defense industry.

The final step in the transition was itself both symbolic and practical. The national offices of the NYA established NYA “induction” centers on the West Coast. “Upon the completion of training in Wyoming youth were then transferred by the National Youth Administration to these induction centers for a few weeks of final specialized training and were then referred to a nearby defense plant. A considerable number of young men and young

124. *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1939*, 9.

125. *Annual Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1940*, 14.

126. Lund, *Final Report, National Youth Administration for the State of Wyoming*, [44].

127. *Ibid.*, [45].

128. *Ibid.*, [67].

women from Wyoming were transferred in this fashion to Seattle, Washington, where they were employed by Boeing Aircraft Company and other firms.¹²⁹

After the United States officially entered the war, the NYA was transferred from the Federal Security Agency to the new War Manpower Commission; in line with its new mission there, the NYA “found it expedient to drop the emphasis on the production of goods and services and to devote all of its energies to the development of basic skills in the [various] trades.”¹³⁰ It also increased the hours that young people could work and reduced the age for eligibility for the program. The only sites remaining in 1942–1943 for NYA training in Wyoming were at Casper, where it added woodworking and clerical training to meet the needs of Casper Army Air Base, in Cheyenne, where the agency also trained young women to work in sheet metal and trained men and women in machine shop and aircraft work, providing workers for local aircraft plants, and at Torrington where the NYA provided training in machine shop, welding, and sheet metal. By the time the NYA was shut down in Wyoming—on July 1, 1943—the transition from relief work, to production operation, to war industry training agency was thorough and complete.

The NYA was probably exceptional in its ability to transform so thoroughly to war-related projects. Some agencies made similar shifts, but not so completely. The Historical Records Survey took on other projects connected with the gathering war clouds. In 1940, much of the year was occupied with the preparation of cards identifying every foreign national in the state so that the federal government would have a comprehensive list. The next year it conducted an “Automobile Graveyard Survey,” so as to provide a database of locations where scrap metal could be gathered.¹³¹ And there were the construction projects that directed more of their efforts to defense. Again, airports figured prominently. In the summer of 1941 the acting manager of the Veterans’ Administration hospital in Sheridan sought WPA assistance for much-needed work at that facility. L. G. Flannery responded to that request and informed the manager that most projects in the Sheridan area had been either suspended or drastically curtailed: “The Sheridan Airport project has a priority call on available certified labor over all other projects due to its certification as a National Defense Project.”¹³² Likewise the Casper airport and the Cheyenne airport in their communities; defense projects moved to the head of the line, and

that also meant that Casper and Cheyenne moved to the front of the line, ahead of the smaller communities and their public projects .

The projects that did not establish their importance in terms of defense began to close their doors. One after another, they shut down, often, but not always, after being starved of resources. In autumn 1939 the local art centers were being transferred from federal sponsorship to local sponsorship. Florence B. Kerr, the national assistant WPA commissioner in charge of professional and service divisions, spoke in Sheridan at the art center there and explained that “art, music, writers, and historical records survey projects must be sponsored locally after September 1 in the same manner as other WPA projects.”¹³³ It appears that most community art centers did indeed survive, on some scale, by finding local sponsors, but increasingly the other projects, the construction projects, required resources that the community (or even the state) did not have. The archaeological survey was already spread too thin, trying to accomplish a statewide project, conducting on-site work at several locations simultaneously, using mainly unskilled relief labor with too few trained professionals to supervise. Thus that project, with the pressures of war priorities in the background and structural weaknesses internally, was not renewed in 1941.¹³⁴

Construction projects such as the ongoing utility work in individual communities suffered greatly as the priorities shifted to defense work.

129. *Ibid.*, [66].

130. *Ibid.*, [71].

131. Hanson, “The Historical Records Survey in Wyoming,” 84–85.

132. Flannery to Dr. N. K. St. Antoine, August 20, 1941, Wyoming WPA Project Files in Reel 196, OP 265-3-83-6.

133. “Local Art Forum Seeks Sponsorship Here in Sheridan,” *Sheridan Press*, September 18, 1939.

134. Two separate evaluations of the program had been conducted by outside experts and both raised similar concerns about staffing and scope. See the correspondence in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 214 regarding the project evaluations by consultants Stella Deigman and William Mulloy.

These projects, needed though they may have been, were unable to compete with defense projects. That competition operated on several levels. One level was the preference given for defense projects in funding, an important ingredient for success. The others were more subtle. In order to proceed, projects had to demonstrate that they had the material necessary to achieve their objectives. With government control of the economy to support the mobilization for war through rationing and raw material allocations, building materials of all kind were in increasingly short supply. In the spring of 1942, four or five months after war had been declared, a WPA project to improve the water system at Burris on the Wind River Indian Reservation ran into exactly that problem. Even though this was a “Federal Project” (as opposed to “Non-Federal”), it had a low priority in its ability to secure necessary pipe to make the projected improvements; when officials at Wind River and the state WPA tried to work around that shortage by substituting wood stove pipe, the same obstacle remained because the wood stove pipe required iron bands that would have to be shipped according to the same priorities, thus still depriving the project of necessary material.¹³⁵ This shortage of essential building and construction materials would plague every project except for those that were identified as certified defense projects.

Just as daunting, and perhaps more so, was the shortage of workers. The general formula required for WPA projects, with specifically granted exceptions, was that 90 percent of the workers be taken from the relief rolls. As the economy strengthened, albeit incrementally in the resurgence after the Recession of 1937–1938, relief rolls also shortened. Although much of the private employment that was available was agricultural,

135. See F. D. Bellamy to Harlow E. Durt, acting supervisor, Wind River Indian Agency, April 20, 1942, in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 196, OP 265-3-83-9.

136. L. G. Flannery to Major B. W. Marlee, assistant commissioner and chief engineer, Work Projects Administration, Washington, May 14, 1940, in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 116, Document no. 31455; this correspondence relates to OP 665-83-1-46 and 665-83-3-29.

and thus seasonal, even seasonal private employment made it difficult to sustain public work projects. For that matter, employment on the Union Pacific and in the coal mines was also often seasonal.

Meanwhile, many public work projects, such as road construction, were seasonal, but others required a constant labor supply for a longer period, including during the summer when the labor supply was reduced. In May 1940, U.S. Senator Harry Schwartz, after receiving complaints from Tensleep about a work stoppage on the fish hatchery project there, wrote the WPA offices in Washington asking why the project had been suspended. Washington then passed the inquiry on to the Wyoming office. In his role as Wyoming WPA administrator, L. G. Flannery responded that “there is not sufficient labor to operate all available projects.” This situation provided an example of the complexity of the problem. The fish hatchery was not the only WPA project in Washakie County. There were also road projects (employing 13 men) and sewer and water line projects (employing 36 men). There were, at that time, 38 males certified on the relief rolls to do this work. So, to proceed with the fish hatchery, it would be necessary to close down the other projects and transfer those workers to the hatchery. Sometimes it was possible to transfer workers from one town to another, but in this case, they would have to be transferred from Worland—too great a distance. Moreover, Flannery explained, “this is an agricultural area and based on past experience it is anticipated that opportunities for seasonal private employment will soon reduce the load to such a small number that all project operations will be suspended in accordance with present policy and reduced quotas. Therefore this office does not consider it practical to open additional project operations in this area at this time.”¹³⁶ It was getting increasingly difficult to put together a large enough workforce to operate the projects, a situation that became that much more of a challenge as the war mobilization proceeded. If workers were not already employed on other relief projects, they were increasingly enlisting in (or drafted into) the armed services or going to work at defense plants and, one way or another, were less readily available.

Time and time again the projects in the field ran into a shortage of workers. In Sweetwater County, the Bureau of Reclamation’s Eden Valley Project near Eden and Farson needed just a few more workers in the spring of 1941 to proceed, but the quota had been reduced for the county. The WPA area engineer lamented the situation to state headquarters:

If we have to take some workers off our present operating projects, it is going to be bad business, as the Mayor of Rock Springs wants more men to do the paving and street work. The County wants to go along as fast as possible on the road south of Rock Springs. The people at Superior want to start their water line project, and it will look bad for the Area Office to take workers off our present operating projects for the Eden Valley job, and me telling the Mayor of Superior that we do not have quota to take care of them at the present time. I surely would appreciate any information you can give me regarding the above.¹³⁷

At that same project, where construction on the Big Sandy Dam took off in 1941, an already difficult manpower situation quickly got worse because of the mobilization for war. As soon as war was declared, the project lost another critical source of labor that had been counted upon. In January 1942, the Bureau of Reclamation construction engineer on the project wrote F. D. Bellamy, state administrator of the WPA at the time, “It appears that developments in connection with the National Emergency may soon require that all CCC Camps not engaged in defense work be made available to the army or some other defense agency. Consequently, we may be confronted on this project with the necessity of carrying on the work by WPA forces.”¹³⁸

The lives of work relief project administrators were doubtless complicated by this set of circumstances, but so were the lives of people in the state who needed jobs and communities that needed improvements made with public projects. The labor situation itself was complex. The economy was growing, and growing faster as the government poured more and more money into the defense effort, and jobs were increasing. But those jobs—and the defense industry providing them—tended not to be distributed around the state in the same way that unemployment was. Many were on the West Coast, and the jobs in Wyoming were concentrated in a few particular areas, like Casper with its new air base and Cheyenne with a growing Fort F. E. Warren and aircraft industry. This left serious pockets of unemployment in the state. At the Wind River Indian Reservation, Nellie Scott, an important voice for the Indian community there, wrote Bellamy in an effort to get the WPA to start a project, which had been previously approved, to extend the water main at Fort Washakie. She told Bellamy that there were workers there, certified relief workers at that, who could do this work. They would not be eligi-

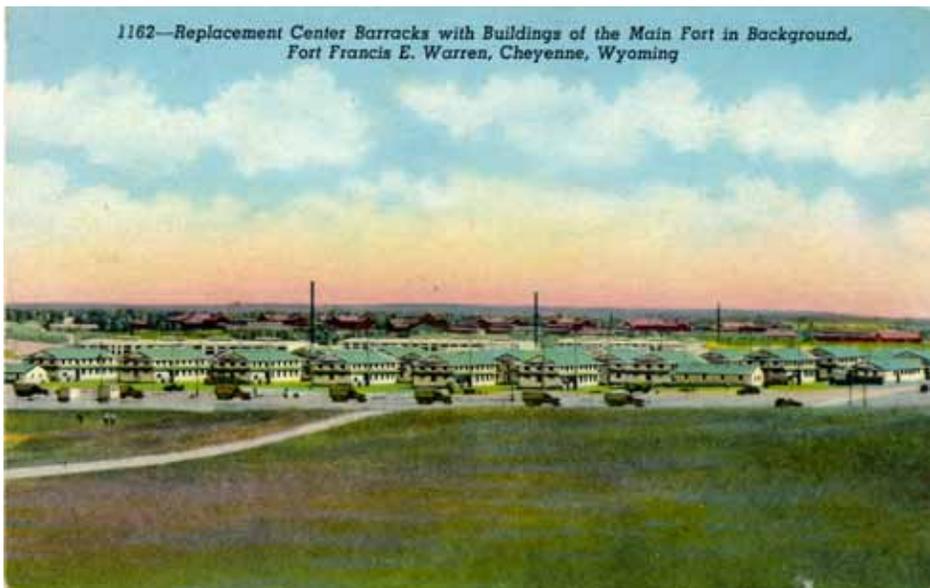
ble to do defense work “but they can dig a ditch,” she said. They had worked on the harvest, but the harvest was over, so they could be put to work: “It would be a decided benefit to the community, and what is more important, give a work project for some poor Indians who are certified for WPA. These men would prefer to earn their wages through W.P.A. than receive help from the Government as relief.”¹³⁹ Even so, it appears the project was not opened because of a lack of certified workers in that area.

The defense projects had first priority for workers and materiel, and they also had funding. The contrast they presented with the other, fading, troubled, and closing projects was stark as they proceeded dramatically with the continuing expansion of Fort F. E. Warren and with construction of the Casper Army Air Base in the summer of 1942. These were government projects just as much as Alcova Dam or Lander School or Guernsey State Park were government projects. But the manner of putting people to work had changed. In the competition between PWA and WPA projects, the difference had historically been clear, almost a defining difference, with the PWA contracting out the projects and the WPA using the system of “force account,” whereby the government hired people directly. Two different agencies, with two different approaches, they had far-reaching implications for how many people were put to work, how much money was available for hiring people as opposed to being applied to other costs in the project, and, in fact, what the priority for the project actually was—construction of a

137. Lee C. Huston, acting area engineer to F. D. Bellamy, April 15, 1941, Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 196, OP 165-3-53-62; the correspondence in this file does not carry a document number.

138. T. R. Smith to Bellamy, January 6, 1942, Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 196, OP 165-3-53-62.

139. Nellie Scott, member of Indian Council at Fort Washakie to Bellamy, December 6, 1942, in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 198, OP 265-1-83-43. See also her letter in the same file dated October 10, 1942; a handwritten note on the letter by “C.J.D.” in the WPA office indicates that the state office concluded there were only three certified workers since others had been inactive too long; those others had therefore been removed from the rolls.



1162—Replacement Center Barracks with Buildings of the Main Fort in Background, Fort Francis E. Warren, Cheyenne, Wyoming

140. Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism*, 207. The documentary record of this shift in Wyoming is not so clear as the national record that Smith has found, but the WPA obviously switched from force account to contracted projects. This could be seen even in small projects, and was not restricted to defense contracts. Fort Laramie School District No. 11 in 1941 was the sponsor of a WPA project to renovate the old school building and to build a new gymnasium. Instead of hiring local workers from the relief rolls though, the school district contracted essential elements for construction to firms mainly from Torrington. Those contracts then became part of the project record. See the contracts for plumbing, sheet metal work, and electrical wiring in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 195, OP 165-1-83-30-[indecipherable]. The dates on this project are both 1941 and 1942. This practice would have been commonplace under the PWA, but this was under the WPA—the WPA.

141. T. A. Larson, *Wyoming's War Years, 1941–1945* (Laramie: The University of Wyoming, by Stanford University Press, 1954), 204.

The old and the new at Fort F. E. Warren. The dramatic expansion of the post put thousands of construction workers to work.

From the collection of Michael Cassity.

particular structure or putting people to work. Increasingly, however, priorities changed; employment became a secondary concern while the physical object being constructed or produced became the first. Increasingly, not just the PWA but the WPA used contractors instead of direct employment. By 1941, historian Jason Scott Smith has observed, “the WPA was turning to contractors at an unprecedented rate.”¹⁴⁰

Further, a critical feature in the new reliance on contractors was the “cost plus” provision in which the contractor passed all the costs along to the government and in addition charged a fee; while this was promoted as a time-saving measure, and it may have been, it was not a money-saving measure, and the process invited the inclusion of substantial additional costs by the contractor as the project went along. The government had moved a long way from the force-account construction of the CWA in 1933–1934 and of the WPA in its robust years.

Construction of new and expanded facilities at Fort F. E. Warren had been underway in the 1930s, but the post received an important boost with the resumption of a peacetime draft in 1940. With the influx of new soldiers, Fort Warren was designated the location for the Quartermaster Replacement Center (activated in February 1941). Nearly three hundred new buildings were constructed, putting 4,546 workers on the payroll at the peak of construction. T. A. Larson notes that employment was to be local as much as possible, and in this instance “men from Laramie County (Cheyenne) were given first consideration, men from elsewhere in Wyoming, second, and men from out of state, last.” Even so, Wyoming appeared unable to provide all the skills necessary, and 900 of the 1,400 carpenters hired came from out of state.¹⁴¹

As for the costs in this “cost plus” arrangement, the final bill for construction was almost exactly twice what had been originally calculated, \$5,026,938.62 instead of \$2,505,200 dollars. This final, doubled price tag was, according to the final report, “not abnormal in comparison with similar projects of the same period.”¹⁴² Additional expansion at the fort occurred when the Quartermaster Replacement Center’s revised mission made it a

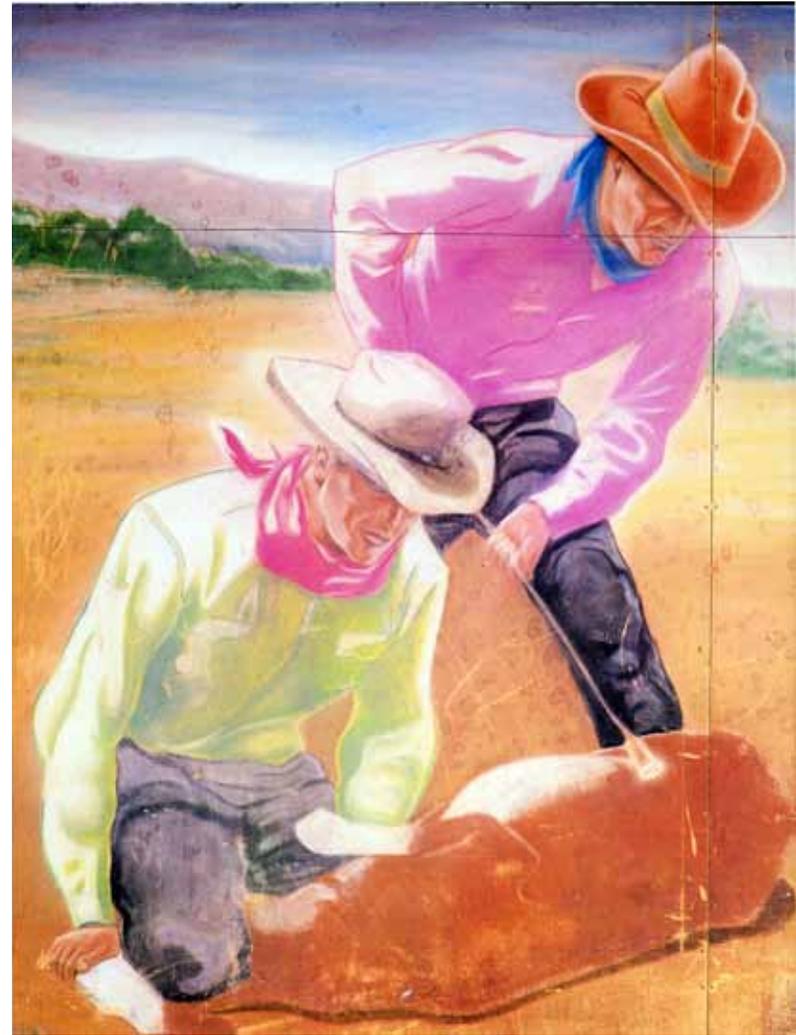
Mural (Panel 16) from walls of enlisted service members' club at Casper Air Base evokes New Deal art programs in subject and style.

Courtesy the Wyoming State Archives/Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office Photograph Collections.

central training facility, and in the summer of 1941, another seventy-four buildings were constructed. As if to seal the connection of this military expansion with other government work programs, Fort Warren in 1942 received forty buildings that had been used by the Civilian Conservation Corps.¹⁴³ In addition, the city of Cheyenne constructed a water main to the fort. It had not been that long before that the federal government had been constructing water mains for Cheyenne and other cities of the state; this turn of events signified the new era emerging. Where a few years earlier the city had sought multiple federal projects to improve its infrastructure, Cheyenne would now leverage its own infrastructure to encourage a larger federal military presence nearby.

The Casper Army Air Base was likewise the result of a concerted effort to attract government spending. Casper beat out Sheridan, which also sought an air base. Larson quotes the Casper newspaper, "Without the effective work and cooperative effort of the chamber [of commerce], it is safe to say, there would be no air base."¹⁴⁴ This military base was designed to provide final-stage training for bomber crews before they went to their combat assignments. Constructed in the summer of 1942, this was a ten-million dollar project, although with a smaller service population than Fort Warren; again Larson notes the impact: "In no time at all the base brought the city out of the economic doldrums." As with the Cheyenne installation, Casper likewise extended the city's water system to the base and expanded its system of water pumps. Larson captured the immediate economic impact when he noted of the construction, "approximately four thousand men were put to work erecting more than two hundred buildings, installing the water and sewer system, and laying streets and runways." The base was virtually a separate city, and in ways large and small its construction resembled that of other projects in the previous decade except that it was a military installation.

One small but impressive detail that ultimately emerged in the buildings at the army air base indicates a broader, cultural, connection with the works projects. This was the mural painted on the walls of the enlisted ser-



142. Ibid.

143. Ibid., 205.

144. Ibid., 213.

vice members' club. Depicting twenty-one scenes from Wyoming history, from the Arapaho creation legend and Shoshone Indians hunting buffalo, to fur trappers, the Oregon Trail, building the Union Pacific, cattle and sheep ranching, the oil industry, and finally the establishment of the Army Air Field in Casper, the mural, understandably enough, has sometimes been mistaken for a WPA art project of the sort often found in schools and other public buildings.¹⁴⁵ This one was painted by four soldiers who had not only to perform the artwork but also devise a medium that would adhere to the walls without being completely absorbed. The connection of this art with the WPA projects is virtual not actual, but the WPA and Treasury Relief Art Project inspiration for the work is unmistakable in conception and execution.

The exact role of the WPA and the PWA in the construction of Wyoming's defense establishments in World War II remains unclear; the role of private contractors is far more prominent. Whether this work was performed under official WPA and PWA authority and supervision or not

145. See the discussion of the "Casper Air Base Murals," in "World War II in Wyoming," *Wyoming History Journal* 68 (Spring 1996): inside front cover, inside back cover, 48. Additional murals, importantly, emerged in other military establishments in Wyoming during the war. A painting by Private Charles L. Savitt, *Heritage of Democracy*, was added to the library at Fort F. E. Warren (upstairs in the new gymnasium) in 1943. See Gerald Adams, *Fort Francis E. Warren and the Quartermaster Corps in World War II, 1940 to 1946* (Fort Collins, Colo.: Citizen Printing, 1994), 27. The Douglas Prisoner of War Camp, a large facility, also includes murals depicting Wyoming life. These murals were painted by Italian prisoners of war on the walls of the Officers' Club. As with the Casper Air Base murals, they make a visible association with previous work projects.

146. Mike Mackey, *Heart Mountain: Life in Wyoming's Concentration Camp* (Powell, Wyo.: Western History Publications, 2000), 25.

147. *Ibid.*, 26.

148. Eric A. Stene, "Shoshone Project," Bureau of Reclamation paper (1996), 15; this Bureau of Reclamation publication is at http://www.usbr.gov/projects/ImageServer?imgName=Doc_1305642556544.pdf.

may be less important than the fact that governmental administrative structures and processes for massive public construction projects had been well developed over the previous eight years.

Perhaps the final public works project undertaken in Wyoming was done not by the PWA or the WPA, but by a new agency that had been created to address a situation some perceived as a threat to the nation. In February 1942 President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 announcing the "military necessity" of removing Americans of Japanese descent from the West Coast and relocating them into camps in the interior of the nation. In Wyoming, historian Mike Mackey reports, "a number of communities . . . expressed interest in the relocation camp projects. The town of Worland made a concerted effort to bring a relocation center or a prisoner-of-war camp to that area." This eagerness, as it turns out, was less that of helping people in distress find homes and support than it was taking advantage of a windfall source of labor. Mackey writes, "Worland had a number of projects in the works for which a great deal of cheap manual labor was required." Evidently the thought at a public meeting was more along the lines of moving the Japanese American evacuees into CCC camps to perform cheap labor. Among the projects the Worland Chamber of Commerce had in mind was putting them to work in the sugar beet fields and also constructing a section of highway to serve as a shortcut to Yellowstone National Park.¹⁴⁶ Failing to secure a labor camp for the Japanese Americans, the Worland business leaders, as Mackey says, "began to pursue the possibility of acquiring a prisoner-of-war camp, again in an effort to exploit a possible labor source for their own benefit."¹⁴⁷

The site ultimately chosen in Wyoming was on the Heart Mountain Division of the Bureau of Reclamation's Shoshone Project. This was the last of four divisions in the project and had been started in 1937 in order to develop the unoccupied lands that the Shoshone Project had not yet reached.¹⁴⁸ The Bureau of Reclamation contracted work first on the Shoshone Canyon Conduit and then at the Heart Mountain Canal followed by work on the siphons, laterals, and sublaterals. While construction was underway by the contractors, the Civilian Conservation Corps contributed to the undertaking. Camp BR-87 at Corbett began working on the project in 1939 and, as Bureau of Reclamation historian Christine Pfaff notes, "Among the items they accomplished were installation of riprap above and below siphons and drain inlets on the Heart Mountain Canal; construc-

tion of operating roads, bridges, culverts, weirs, and turnouts; and installation of fencing along the east boundary of Shoshone Reservoir.¹⁴⁹ This camp closed at the end of October 1941 as part of the general reduction of CCC operations in the nation, but another camp nearby picked up some of the projects, including work at Heart Mountain. BR-72 at Powell, which had also worked on the other three divisions, assisted with the Heart Mountain project in 1941, providing work mainly on grading and graveling roads but also mining bentonite for lining the canals. When Camp BR-72 closed in June 1942, the Heart Mountain Division of the Shoshone Project was still unfinished.

The project would be continued by the new people who were forcibly moved to Heart Mountain, and the new “relocation center” overlapped and intersected significantly with the existing projects. It was not something separate because it had to do with the war. On June 1, 1942, the Bureau of Reclamation officially transferred 21,521 acres of the Heart Mountain Irrigation Division to the War Relocation Authority.¹⁵⁰ On June 8, construction began on what would be in the end a complete city, even though it was also surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. Historians have routinely referred to it as an American concentration camp.¹⁵¹ The Corps of Engineers contracted out the construction and allowed sixty days for the building of what would amount to the third largest city in Wyoming. T. A. Larson writes,

Some 2,500 workers quickly raised 456 barracks (tar paper “hutments”), each 20 feet by 100 feet, and various auxiliary buildings to accommodate 11,000 persons. The barracks were divided into family-size apartments. Community toilet and bath facilities were provided for each block in a combination latrine and laundry building. Mess halls, 40 feet by 2100 feet, were included. The center looked like a temporary army camp except for the barbed wire fence and guard towers which surrounded it.¹⁵²

Although other projects cost more, this was one of the largest work projects in the state of Wyoming, perhaps even the largest in terms of social engineering, and it was also done with amazing swiftness. Construction was finished on September 6. That the buildings went up so quickly was less a testimony to the expert skills of the builders than it was to the pressure for speed and the lack of regard for the final product. As

the National Historic Landmark nomination of the Heart Mountain site notes, “The camp builders bragged that it took them only 58 minutes to build one apartment barrack from foundation to roof.”¹⁵³

The construction project offered higher wages and incentives and was able to attract workers quickly for the project. In fact, this even had a disruptive effect on other work relief projects in the area. The Lovell irrigation district had a WPA project underway to improve the canal, but on June 15, 1942, Robert E. Despain, WPA representative on that project, sent word to F. D. Bellamy in Cheyenne: “The Heart Mountain Jap Center broke this week end and this morning I haven’t any one to go to work on the project. They came down yesterday and took all of the men and are paying them 70¢ per hour, 10 hours a day.”¹⁵⁴ Despain was pleased that the workers, as he said, “got a break,” but now he was in a bind on the project at Lovell. The local sponsor, the canal board, hoped for a temporary suspension of its project until August when the work would be finished at Heart Mountain and the workers would presumably be available at Lovell once again.

149. Pfaff, *The Bureau of Reclamation’s Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy*, A-369.

150. Kara M. Miyagishima, Heart Mountain Relocation Center National Historic Landmark nomination (2006), 21.

151. See, for example, Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Douglas Nelson, *Heart Mountain: The History of an American Concentration Camp* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 1976); and Mackey, *Heart Mountain: Life in Wyoming’s Concentration Camp*.

152. Larson, *Wyoming’s War Years*, 297.

153. Miyagishima, Heart Mountain Relocation Center National Historic Landmark nomination, 21.

154. Robert E. Despain, supervisor on WPA project to Improve Lovell Irrigation District Canals, to F. D. Bellamy, June 15, 1942, in Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 198, OP 265-1-83-41 (no document number).



Construction workers applying for work at the Heart Mountain Relocation Center project.

From the Jack Richard/Bacon Sakatani Collection, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody.

Workers from all over flocked to the Heart Mountain work site looking for jobs; some of those employed were housed and fed at the recently vacated CCC Camp BR-72. Ownership of that camp itself was then transferred to the War Relocation Authority in November, and the evacuees at the “relocation center” dismantled the buildings and moved them to the main center.¹⁵⁵ While at the Heart Mountain camp, starting shortly after their arrival in 1942, “internees from the camp constructed works originally slated for contract work,” evidently directly for the Bureau of Reclamation; in addition, subcontractors hired these people to perform

155. Pfaff, *The Bureau of Reclamation’s Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy*, A-297.

156. Stene, “Shoshone Project,” 16–17.

concrete work on a section of canal, though grumbling about the efficiency of these workers compared to the CCC workers who had previously worked on the project.¹⁵⁶ Of course, CCC enrollees may have been enthusiastic about the opportunity they received to escape the privation of the Depression or to learn new skills to help them get a job; in contrast, the Japanese American internees were not just youths but also mature people who had established lives and careers, had sacrificed businesses and homes, and were forced to take up residence in tarpaper barracks in confine-

ment. If there was a lack of enthusiasm on their part it may be understood in that context. In addition, the contractors’ judgment may also have been tinged by an already pervasive xenophobia and racism that colored perceptions of these new residents and workers

The War Relocation Authority itself became something of a work agency, and Jason Scott Smith details the close working relationship between the WPA and the army nationally in establishing the “relocation centers”; he also reports instances in which national WPA officials lamented the lack of credit that agency received in setting up the camps. In reference to Wyoming, Larson identifies several prominent officials in the state WPA who went to work as administrators at Heart Mountain: Joe Carroll, former state administrator of WPA, became chief of employment and housing at Heart Mountain; Virgil Payne, former state director of professional and community services for the Wyoming WPA, became director of the social welfare section for the center; and William B. McFarlane, former state director of employment for the Wyoming WPA, served as chief

Heart Mountain Relocation Center during construction.

From the Jack Richard/Bacon Sakatani Collection, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody.

of the personnel section at Heart Mountain.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, once established, the camp directly employed internees to work on the canals and in the agriculture program for the center. As a Bureau of Reclamation report on the Shoshone Project notes, in 1944, “the WRA program for the internees used nearly all of them for work on the relocation camp and the agricultural program, because expansion of canal construction proved impossible. They continued working on small features in the system, but nothing more. No internees participated in canal construction after May, 1944.”¹⁵⁸

With the almost complete shift by the government to defense-related projects, with the assignment of construction projects to contractors, and with the shortage of relief workers and construction materials, the mainstay work relief agencies of the Roosevelt administration faded from the scene. The PWA had largely turned over its construction functions to other parts of the government before it was abolished by Executive Order 9357, on July 1, 1943, its remaining activities to be liquidated by the Federal Works Administrator.¹⁵⁹ The CCC camps closed, one by one, each continuing or closing according to the circumstances of its own existence, faced by dwindling enrollment and the dominance of war priorities in assignment. Among the last in Wyoming were Bureau of Reclamation Camp BR-72 at Deaver and General Land Office Camp GLO-1 at Gillette, both of which shut down at the end of May and beginning of June 1942. The last was probably BR-102 at Eden Valley, which closed on July 29, 1942.

The WPA also receded quickly. Some projects were cut off abruptly while others broke their project into separate stages so that a sudden ter-



157. Smith focuses mainly on national figures and policies in the WPA as they related to the War Relocation Authority, but he also examines the case of Manzanar in California where that cooperation was clear. Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism*, 222–31; Larson, *Wyoming’s War Years*, 298.

158. Stene, “Shoshone Project,” 17.

159. Executive Order 9357, “Transferring the Functions of the Public Works Administration to the Federal Works Agency,” can be found at John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project [online], Santa Barbara, Calif., <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16423>.

mination would not leave an entire project awkwardly unfinished, but instead with part of it finished and part of it perhaps not even started, at least in its major work effort. Some projects made plans, as best they could, to have someone else pick up the work. In September 1942, Virgil Payne wrote all county libraries in the state, sending them forms to use in their war information work (in 1942, Wyoming's libraries were all designated War Information Centers). In her letter Payne informed the libraries that the staffing of the program was uncertain: "In some cases, it will be possible to use WPA workers. In many instances, it will be necessary to carry on this phase of the Program through voluntary workers. Just how that will be done has not yet been definitely worked out."¹⁶⁰ The last sentence was an understatement of great proportions.

Project by project, town by town, the Wyoming WPA was shutting down. Hanson quotes the final report that the state office submitted, which summarizes the last throes of WPA activity in the state: "Mr. Fulton D. Bellamy served as State Administrator until March 1943, at which time the liquidation of the Works [*sic*] Projects Administration was completed. The period from December 7, 1941 to the close of WPA activities was accomplished by waves of Administrative reductions, and the administrative staff reached a basic minimum in October, 1942."¹⁶¹

In important ways the government construction that took place in World War II in Wyoming represented not so much a termination of federal work projects as it did a transformation of them. They were becoming both militarized and privatized. The essentials were otherwise there—centralized planning, the flow of federal funds to targeted areas of the state, hopeful employment opportunities in particular communities, and the creation of a permanent dependence on federal military expenditures. In critical ways the New Deal in Wyoming came to completion, not rejection, during the war as massive government spending, a planned economy, and

full employment finally ended the Depression. In the process, the Wyoming landscape was being shaped not just by the addition of new buildings, dams, highways, canals, and other projects, but by social, economic, and political forces that emphasized centralization, consolidation, and business growth with the federal government as chief agent of change. Wyoming had changed dramatically from what it was when the nation's economy, undermined by structural weaknesses in the 1920s, began its downward spiral in 1929 into the depths of depression; and it had changed in ways that were both for the better and for the worse. Change itself was one of the new constants, and in the future Wyoming would continue to be transformed.

Change is an ever-present feature of life, but the specific direction of change is not. And the specific direction of change in Wyoming in World War II is clear. Indeed, the centralization and consolidation of power and control, both private and public, in the nation and in Wyoming, was even more due to the changes of World War II than it was to the changes wrought by the New Deal during the 1930s. During the 1930s a careful effort had been made to assure that work relief projects were available throughout the state, in every county, probably in every community. Those projects and their payrolls had stimulated local retail trade in both small towns and larger cities, and the desire for a CCC camp, a WPA road project, an armory construction, a community hall, an irrigation canal, almost any kind of project at all, was embraced and articulated by business groups and civic leaders across Wyoming. As government work projects increasingly focused, directly and indirectly, on defense-related work, however, the public projects focused on selected locations—Casper and Cheyenne primarily and, to a lesser extent, Powell, Cody, and Douglas.

The military, and more broadly defense facilities of various kinds, had been important in the 1930s, but during the war it became supreme, a fact that sometimes obscures an underlying development: by the end of the war Wyoming remained dependent on the continuing influx of federal money—in projects, in payrolls, in subsidies—only now those funds were going to support a large military presence rather than the broad array of public buildings and infrastructure support that had characterized much of the early New Deal work relief projects. Plus, private industry may have surged elsewhere as a result of the war, but not in Wyoming. Manufacturing increased throughout the nation during the war—almost.

160. Virgil Payne, state director, Services Division, WPA, to all county librarians, September 25, 1942. Wyoming WPA Project Files Reel 105, OP 165-1-83-16.

161. Hanson, "The Historical Records Survey in Wyoming," 86.

The two states that were exceptions to that increase were Wyoming and New Mexico. Wyoming increased its manufacturing employment in 1945 by a grand total of three hundred workers over what it had been in 1940. Wyoming's senators and congressman tried to get contracts for Wyoming businesses, but to little avail.¹⁶² Larson notes that in 1942 Senator Harry Schwartz was rebuffed in his effort and was told, as Larson summarizes it, "the war department and navy department were awarding most of the war contracts, and they could not be expected to deal directly with each small shop in Wyoming."¹⁶³

Probably representative of the frustrations felt across Wyoming was a letter from a Thermopolis resident to Governor Lester Hunt: "Why wouldn't it be possible to scatter small factories in these towns like Thermopolis and let the people living there work in the factories doing their bit to help the war effort and at the same time benefiting them by giving them a wage so they will be able to pay their taxes and thus keep their homes?"¹⁶⁴ The irony is that what this Thermopolis citizen was seeking was something very close to what the New Deal provided with its Civil Works Administration and Works Progress Administration projects—productive jobs in communities all across the state, where neighbors employed neighbors, where even those without a job had an opportunity to build up their community.

The further irony is that former Laramie mayor Thurman Arnold at the time was serving as U.S. assistant attorney general responsible for enforcing the antitrust laws. Arnold wanted exactly the same thing that the Thermopolis writer sought: a competitive economy that would work in the interests of small towns, small businesses, consumers, and the public at large. Since his appointment as assistant attorney general, Arnold had launched a vigorous campaign against the concentrations of economic power that had used their position to drive out competition, destroy small business, and raise prices, lower quality, and limit choices available to the consuming public. Arnold prosecuted the automobile industry for requiring customers to use specific lending agencies for automobile financing, the dairy industry for controlling prices and blocking entry to the trade of distributing dairy products, and the American Medical Association for using its leverage to prevent physicians who wished to cooperate with plans to provide prepaid medical care from practicing in hospitals. His campaign had been stunningly successful and popular. Arnold's goal was to

secure free markets unhampered by restraints and collusion, to protect the public as it went about the business of navigating everyday life—as he said in 1939, "a free and independent economy . . . not government controlled, nor dominated." He said that the object of trustbusting "represented the public's antagonism to power wherever it may be and by whomever exercised."¹⁶⁵ He also argued that this limit on power of the government and of the private corporations and labor unions was essential to democracy: "Congress understands that when private power reaches its peak, it provides the perfect set-up for dictatorship. Never forget that the cartelization of Germany preceded Hitler in power, and that Mussolini even called his government the 'corporate' state."¹⁶⁶ Thurman Arnold was the person, it seemed, in a position to help the small businesses and consumers of the nation, and of Wyoming.

As the mobilization for war developed, however, Arnold found that his goal was not widely shared by his counterparts in the Roosevelt administration; instead the government developed a centralized, planned, and directed economy—a partnership of business and government with the power to regulate economic activity, to the advantage of the largest operators and to the detriment of the weak or unorganized, reminiscent of the

162. For a broader analysis of the challenges to and transformation of Wyoming during the war, see Michael Cassity, "In a Narrow Grave: World War II and the Subjugation of Wyoming," *Wyoming History Journal* 68 (Spring 1996): 2–13.

163. Larson, *Wyoming's War Years*, 245.

164. *Ibid.*, 251.

165. Thurman Arnold, "Why Trustbusting?" typed rough draft of article in Thurman Wesley Arnold Papers, University of Wyoming, American Heritage Center, Box 80, Folder 10. There are actually several drafts of this, and while the language varies, the argument remains consistent.

166. Arnold, "Why Trustbusting?" 3.

National Recovery Administration. Specifically, while Arnold maintained that a competitive economy would be more productive in supporting the mobilization for war, the major defense contractors, and the war agencies that worked with them, viewed it otherwise. The climax of the conflict in views probably came when Arnold launched his campaign against the oil industry, and against Standard Oil in particular. Arnold brought suit against the cartel of Standard Oil and I. G. Farben, a German chemical manufacturer; the two firms had a close working relationship underscored

167. Alan Brinkley, "The Antimonopoly Ideal and the Liberal State: The Case of Thurman Arnold," *Journal of American History* 80 (September 1993): 577. Arnold was a brilliant and complex person and to attempt justice to him in a short treatment risks reducing him to a caricature. The reader is directed to Brinkley's article, "The Antimonopoly Ideal and the Liberal State: The Case of Thurman Arnold," and his book, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Random House, 1995), 106–22; to Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly*, 420–55; and also to Edward A. Purcell, Jr., *The Crisis of Democratic Theory: Scientific Naturalism and the Problem of Value* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 111–14, 159–60, 197–99. One should also consult, of course, Arnold's own autobiography and his other books and papers. On this defense issue in particular, see coverage of his activities in "Says Monopolies Retarded Defense," *New York Times*, January 4, 1942. While Brinkley offers an important and sensitive analysis of Thurman Arnold's role in shaping modern American liberalism, my own assessment of Arnold finds in his approach to antitrust enforcement a clearer attention to the political (and social) potential of the antitrust laws, including a widespread diffusion of power in society; moreover the militarization of Keynesian economics needs to be separated carefully from what Brinkley defines as a "consumption-oriented, increasingly Keynesian liberalism of the 1940s." Probably the most comprehensive list of Arnold's publications can be found in Spencer Weber Waller, *Thurman Arnold: A Biography* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 207–11.

by financial and other agreements. Because of that cartelistic and uncompetitive relationship, and because of the sharing of patents and technology, not only did Standard Oil impede the development of the synthetic rubber industry in the United States, but it even transferred critical technology to Germany. Arnold filed suit in early 1942 when the United States was at war with Germany. As historian Alan Brinkley explains, Arnold was charging that Standard Oil "had resisted participating in other war-related industrial efforts all in deference to its financial and patent agreements with Farben. These were not only anticompetitive arrangements, Arnold argued; they were threats to American security."¹⁶⁷ Standard Oil had even withheld information essential to the U.S. Navy after Pearl Harbor. But after the oil industry brought pressure to bear on the administration, and after the War Department protested the Justice Department suit against Standard Oil, Arnold had to accept a token and unsatisfactory settlement in the case. A year later the administration forced him to drop a suit against the railroads for price fixing. In 1943 Thurman Arnold resigned as head of the antitrust division.

The end of the antitrust element in the New Deal coincided with the end of the work projects and both gave way, in part, to mobilization for war but, more important, they gave way to a consolidation of power, by the powerful, in the economy and government. Insofar as work relief had ever represented something beyond putting people to work, and something beyond constructing buildings and structures across the landscape of the state, it had in a fundamental way held forth the promise of restructuring the economy so that people would be able to find work in their own communities and states, living productive and satisfying lives, contributing to the neighborhoods around them, participating meaningfully in society, and living and working with dignity, fulfilling the birthright of freedom where national public and private institutions operated in the interest of people like themselves. It was not just the war that brought that promise to an end; the process was already well underway when the work relief projects became industrial in their organization and outlook. When that happened, work relief had come to an end and so had the effort to shape the larger economy to meet the needs of people and communities in Wyoming.

Building Up Wyoming

Between 1929 and 1943 the federal government established a series of programs and projects that ultimately built up and transformed Wyoming. In the process, it left buildings, structures, and enhancements of all kinds in towns and cities, in forests and on plains, on rivers and streams, on the deserts, in streets and alleys, on highways and county roads, virtually everywhere in the state. Each one of those buildings, dams, airports, parks, or other projects had a specific mission and met a specific need. As we explore the patterns of the efforts that brought those buildings and structures into existence, we come to a closer appreciation of the individual buildings and the larger context alike—and what their legacy is. Such is the starting point for a consideration of the historical significance of the historic resources that we still encounter today in Wyoming. The physical, economic, cultural, and social resources left in response to the crisis of the Great Depression live on as resources for the people of Wyoming in the twenty-first century.

Of Buildings, Jobs, and Lives

In the cold light of day, the physical accomplishments of the federal projects in Wyoming are substantial, are numerous, and are almost everywhere. Many of them, however, are completely invisible since they were pipelines for water mains and laterals, or for storm sewers, or for sanitary sewer systems—all of them buried underground. Simply stating that such improvement and expansion of infrastructure took place should make

anyone pause to consider the systems that those enhancements replaced and what a difference it meant to the people in the communities that experienced the upgrades. How extensively these systems were developed in Wyoming cannot be calculated in a table, but anyone who browses the project files of the Civil Works Administration and the Works Progress Administration cannot help but be impressed by the pervasiveness and frequency of these municipal utility projects. They were always going on and they seemed to be everywhere. And consider this, too: the WPA nationally considered the construction of sewer systems and water and sewage-treatment plants to be “well suited in every respect for prosecution by the WPA; they were the backbone of the winter work program.”¹ Any kind of winter work program in Wyoming raises questions simply because of the working conditions, but people did this work. In Wyoming’s communities, the WPA alone constructed 23 utility plants (water treatment, waste treatment), and constructed 78 miles of water mains and distribution lines, aside from those other miles where existing water mains and lines were improved. WPA workers also were responsible for installing 49 miles of new storm and sanitary sewers. They built a total of 6,288 sanitary privies in a state that in 1940 had 15,018 farms and ranches—theoretically providing up to 42 percent of them these facilities, although clearly some

1. United States Federal Works Agency, *Final Report on the WPA Program, 1935–43* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947), 50–51.

also went to rural schools and meeting houses.² These figures are just for WPA work. Add to them the thousands of stock tanks and similar features built by the various agricultural programs. And then add whatever numbers were generated by the CWA and PWA and the assortment of other agencies that also operated in Wyoming. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation loans, the Resettlement Administration projects, and the Civilian Conservation Corps added to the numbers in those categories too. In the very basic aspects of life—clean water, running water, and a sewer system—the alterations to the Wyoming landscape may have been underground (or slightly above ground), but the change they marked was greater than their physical appearance or lack thereof.

And then consider the streets and roads and highways that were graded, graveled, oiled, paved, or otherwise extended, connected, straightened, widened, or improved. Larry Joseph Krysl went through the highway commission reports and put together his calculations in a summary statement: “In 1931 there were only 351 miles of oiled and paved highways in the state, but at the end of 1938 there were 3,117 miles of hard-surfaced roads.” Additional work brought the “finished portion of the state’s highway system to more than 3,700 miles, completing a network of oil-paved state highways connecting every section of the state” by the end of Fiscal Year 1939. At that time, Krysl says, “Wyoming’s percentage of hard-surfaced roads was among the highest in the nation.” In addition, Wyoming joined the nation in a campaign to eliminate railroad grade crossings in 1934–1936 and to widen and otherwise improve existing roads, in the process putting to work as many as a quarter of the people on the relief rolls, providing work, Krysl says, “for more relief men than any other one agency operating with Federal money.” A significant part of the money to

finance this expansion and improvement came from federal funds poured into the state by the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations, much of it in the form of outright grants; other portions were dispersed in a formula of 60 percent federal, 40 percent state.³ And that is before WPA construction projects are considered. So it is important to note that the WPA reported that it was responsible for constructing or improving 3,855 miles of “highways, roads, and streets” in the state. It also built 1,346 bridges and viaducts (new and improved), and built or improved 4,075 culverts.⁴ Many of these, of course, were on county roads and city streets. Wyoming was on the road to the future in more than one sense.

It would be unwise to attempt a guess at how many public buildings were constructed by the various federal projects in Wyoming between 1929 and 1943. Some estimates for New Deal buildings range from fourteen to several hundred. Not counting those thousands of privies, the number must still, however, be high. The WPA reported that it built 21 new schools and reconstructed or renovated 92 more. It also constructed and made additions to 214 additional public buildings of other kinds and reconstructed or improved 252 more.⁵ Those numbers, of course, do not include the iconic New Deal buildings around the state—the post offices, the university’s Liberal Arts Building or the Wyoming Union in Laramie, the city-county buildings and county courthouses, and still more schools built by the PWA. And they do not include the federal buildings added by the Hoover administration, not to mention the locally sponsored construction projects that responded to the urgings of President Hoover. And they do not include buildings constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps, by the National Youth Administration, by the Bureau of Reclamation, by the Forest Service, by the Division of Grazing, by the General Land Office, by the Resettlement Administration and Agricultural Adjustment Administration/Soil Conservation Service, by the War Department or other agencies—or by the War Relocation Authority. Those buildings are all part of the legacy of the federal projects during the Depression.

And then there are the dams and irrigation structures. Even the two huge parts of the Kendrick Project—Alcova and Seminoe—are too often neglected in assessments of public construction in these years, and the number of dams increases when the various irrigation projects from the Shoshone Project to the Eden Valley to the Wheatland Project are considered. But whatever the number, it grows even higher when the engineering

2. *Ibid.*, 136.

3. Krysl, “The Effects of the Great Depression on the State of Wyoming, 1935–1940,” 1960, 59–61.

4. United States Federal Works Agency, *Final Report on the WPA Program*, 135.

5. *Ibid.*, 135.

project dams built by the CCC for the Division of Grazing are considered, and we still don't know how many of these there were (although that number may be ascertainable with enough resources and research). But then start to factor in the multitude of small dams for stock tanks—the hundreds claimed by Floyd Dominy in Campbell County alone give pause as one does some quick arithmetic to extend that number to the rest of the state—and other range improvement projects, and it is clear that this kind of construction took place everywhere in Wyoming where water is important—in other words, everywhere.

On top of these are the multitude of other construction projects—building fish-rearing/hatchery facilities at numerous points, constructing picnic tables, horseshoe pitching grounds, and other facilities at municipal parks in every community, creating campgrounds, latrines, and outdoor structures (and buildings) of all kinds in the national forests and national parks, building and repairing monuments, and constructing lookout towers. And the airports: perhaps every airport in the state felt the hand of federal project workers during the 1930s, some on a continuing basis.

The construction projects and their resulting creations are all part of the legacy of these federal programs. But “accomplishments” include more than physical construction. The federal projects accomplished other things too. They sponsored statistical surveys and data-gathering efforts concerning every aspect of agriculture, concerning recreation and tourism, and concerning health conditions among the state's population. They canned food and provided hot lunches in some schools, sent nurses or housekeeping aides to homes in need, set up nursery school programs in some communities, and sponsored a program to gather the state's historical resources and inventory county courthouse records. They talked with old-timers and recorded the oral history of the state, a history that often would not otherwise be available—and certainly not with the personal and social depth that these interviews provide. The Writers' Project produced a guide to the state that, although now dated as the tour guide it was originally intended as, still provides a window into Wyoming of the 1930s. The archaeological survey unearthed and examined and recorded aspects of Wyoming's prehistory that had previously been the province of outside institutions or had not been done at all. The WPA sewing rooms around the state produced more than a million garments and “other articles.”⁶ Herbert Dieterich estimates that the WPA art projects produced around

150 pieces of art and that a total of about 200 pieces from all art project sources (including from outside Wyoming) wound up in the state.⁷ It was not just buildings and dams and parks; it was down to the essentials of life and culture.

But there was even more to “accomplishments” than things constructed, produced, or recorded. In many eyes the single most important accomplishment was providing work for people in need of jobs, in need of income, in need of hope. During the Hoover administration, the expanded payrolls of the National Park Service helped nearby communities even when they hired just a few more local people, so they hired them; John Daugherty quotes the custodian at Devils Tower who wrote in his monthly report in 1932, “there continues to be need among residents by payrolls of the past [that] have helped many who would have otherwise been charges of charity at this time.”⁸ In the Roosevelt administration the gratitude of those who were first put to work in the Civil Works Administration was palpable, and there were a lot more of them than had found a job with the Park Service or Forest Service under Hoover, and certainly those people had been grateful and encouraging too. Within just a few months the CWA put to work more than 10,000 unemployed Wyomingites as they entered the fourth winter of the Depression. The CCC provided jobs for another several thousand—perhaps a peak of around 6,000 in 1935 (calculating about 200 in each of the 32 camps)—with most of them from out of state. The WPA in Wyoming employed 4,764 people on average during the quarter reporting in December 1935 and that increased to 5,219 by March 1936. The number fluctuated seasonally, dropping by as much as half during the summer and into the autumn; by 1938 and 1939, the WPA would put to work somewhere around 4,500 people in winter and about 2,500 or

6. *Ibid.*, 134.

7. Dieterich, “The New Deal Cultural Projects in Wyoming,” *Annals of Wyoming* 52 (Fall 1980): 38.

8. Daugherty, *Devils Tower National Monument: A History of National Park Service Developments through 1966*, 21.

3,000 in summer. These people, of course, were not the same people, and many stayed on WPA jobs only a short time until they could find other positions that would pay more and provide longer hours. WPA work was not a career opportunity, or even a long-term prospect, for the unemployed. It was a bridge between one job and another, between no job and anything else. The people who found their way onto WPA projects, around 90 percent of them anyway, were taken from the relief rolls.

And those people each had different stories, the vast, vast majority of which are known only to their families or have been lost forever. On a few occasions, noted in this study, people shared their experiences. One person, however, may have articulated the sentiment of a great many of her counterparts in the various federal projects. In 1941, a woman in Casper had put in her first day with the Historical Records Survey, working in the courthouse. She wrote her supervisor in Cheyenne: “I have finished one day and what a lovely day. The new Court House is such a beautiful place to work and every one here seems glad to have me. I really feel again like a human being on an office job. Thanks for giving it to me.”⁹

Again, everybody’s experience was different. And what this person’s previous experience was—on another job where her skills were underused and unappreciated (possible), on relief (quite probable given the need for 90 percent of WPA workers to come from the relief rolls), on even another relief project, such as the sewing rooms (also quite possible given the association of those programs with women), or wherever—is completely unknown. What is known is that this position, where she felt constructively and humanely employed, meant the world to her. When it comes to building up Wyoming, and building up the people of Wyoming, surely making someone—two or three? two or three hundred? two or three thousand?—“feel again like a human being” counts for something. In such cases, and especially when the sentiments seem excessive or effusive, it is reasonable to ask what the alternative might have been for the person who expressed those words. The answers do not come easily. That is also part

of the legacy of the federal projects: there were no easy answers, only hard questions.

And many of those questions have to do with the needs met by specific projects. Whose needs were addressed by a specific project? In some instances, clearly it was the need to put people to work, but there were always options in the kinds of projects created and made available, and there were different programs that saw public needs differently. Other questions have to do with the organization of the work itself, whether it was privately administered through government contracts or publicly operated through direct hires. How centralized or decentralized was the work—was the project formulated and administered at the state or federal level or was it run by local officials or civic groups? Was it labor-intensive or mechanized? To build up the state is not necessarily the same as building up the people of the state—that depends on many variables. Ultimately, it may be that the question to be answered for each of these projects is whether the project was such as to build up and strengthen the individual and the community or to build up and strengthen the institutions—public *and* private—that diminish the individual and community. Of course, to put this further into context, that is also exactly the question to ask of other developments in the economy and society, developments that included the increasing power and role of vast private institutions and the diminution of individuals in their structures and operations. The questions, in other words, are profound and they go beyond particular buildings, beyond specific projects, and beyond the state of Wyoming in the Depression.

An Enduring Legacy

An explicit goal of the Public Works Administration in Wyoming was the creation of “distinctive and enduring additions to our national wealth,” and certainly many of the tangible results of the various public works programs, including not just the PWA but the others too, provide examples of such enduring additions. But the enduring legacy may even be broader and more important than the public buildings or other objects of the various projects. The enduring legacy has to do with what they all mean.

In assessing that legacy, the first consideration is to remember that both

9. Fanny Morris to Mrs. McIntosh, February 3, 1941. In WPA Project Files, Reel 214 (no OP number or document number).

President Hoover and President Roosevelt led governments that included substantially more than just work projects; to evaluate, say, the New Deal's work projects is to touch only one part of the Roosevelt administration's response to the needs of the nation during the Depression; there were many other programs beyond public works addressing the organization and operation of the economy. In some instances those other programs complemented the public works efforts, but the total endeavor was frequently less than harmonious. Second, it is essential to distinguish the different projects from each other, for they not only targeted different parts of society, but they even were conceived with vastly different assumptions and goals, they competed with each other, and they sometimes even conflicted with each other. Third, they evolved over time, so that even any single program, like the WPA or NYA or CCC, was not the same in 1939 or 1940 that it had been in 1935 or 1933.

There are, in fact, several enduring legacies that cross the lines of administrations and programs that can be discerned in the projects of the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations.

One legacy has to do with the physical construction and other work that took place. At the most basic level, there was a tremendous amount of work that needed to be done in the state to improve and extend streets and sewers and roads and to build schools and courthouses and post offices and irrigation systems and to develop the national parks and forests and to create new airports and improve the old ones. If there had been a list of public needs in 1929 it would have been a very long list indeed. There was, of course, another need, and that was to put people to work, people who had been out of work, looking for jobs, trying to get by, sometimes at the mercy of charity (when it was available) or forced onto the relief rolls (when they became available), or sometimes doing without the basics of life. Both Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt put these two needs together and created programs that provided work for those who needed jobs, and in the process they built up Wyoming. The differences in the way and degree to which they did this, however, are important.

Roosevelt's New Deal, of course, moved much further in that direction and much more vigorously and with much greater recognition—and with much greater results. Hoover was terrified of the social cost of putting too many people to work. He was concerned that using public resources to help out the disadvantaged would be a problem, not because he blamed

the poor for their plight, but because public-financed relief would especially relieve the people who had prospered, and who thus had it in their means to help their neighbors, of *their* responsibilities.¹⁰ He was as much concerned about the power of monopoly capitalism in society and government as he was the about threat of socialism. He even seemed to regard the economy as the means to an end, not an end in itself. Of course, Roosevelt was much less bothered by these fears; he embraced proposals that Hoover rejected, his administration vastly enlarged some programs that Hoover had launched, and the vast majority of the Depression-era buildings and structures around the state are the result of New Deal projects.

But those projects did more than physically build up Wyoming, which suggests a second legacy of those efforts. The substantial infusion of money for these projects into the economy, an economy starved for demand, created exactly that demand, and the people who previously had nothing now had just a little but they spent all of it, and they spent it in ways that filtered up through the economy—to the merchants and grocers and landlords and utility companies, to their suppliers and workers, with the net result that the economy began growing again. It still was in the circumstances of depression, but the economy was expanding, not shrinking, and that was important. And this is an important legacy, something of continuing relevance. At one level it is simply the Economics 101 understanding that depressions are not inevitable and that they are reversible; the lesson that prudent fiscal policy, including deficit spending in a depression or recession, can be directed in ways that stimulate economic growth; and, by the same token, the lesson that a fiscal policy oblivious to the consequences of reductions in government spending can produce serious recessions and economic pain. At another level, it means paying attention to history.

10. In this regard it is helpful to rethink Hoover's nuanced approach, as William Appleman Williams does in "What This Country Needs . . .," originally published in *The New York Review of Books* and reprinted in Williams, *Some Presidents: From Wilson to Nixon* (New York: A New York Review Book, 1972): "Hoover was done in by his faith in the dream of a cooperative American community, and by his ruthless intellectual analysis of what would happen if the dream was not honored." Williams, *Some Presidents*, 39.

In fact, Wyoming's own history goes straight to the point. In 1937, after four years of the New Deal, Franklin Roosevelt told the people who had gathered to hear him speak in Cheyenne, Wheatland, and Casper (and also briefly in Thermopolis in the middle of the night as his train paused in that town) that it was time to cut spending on those programs that had brought the state and nation upward toward recovery so that he could now move toward a balanced budget. And he did just that: he cut spending and reduced public works. In the process he also reduced the stimulus and the economy slumped into the Recession of 1937–1938, *within the Depression*; many people who had been working on government projects were now back in the government breadlines. Ultimately Roosevelt restored those work projects, and expanded them, and the economy began to grow again. A lot could be accomplished with neighbors helping neighbors to build up their communities and state. There is an important, enduring element in that lesson.

There is, of course, a third factor that is also part of the enduring legacy of these years, a legacy that goes beyond construction and work relief, beyond economic growth, and into the very structure of the economy and society. In this case, the work projects demonstrate the pervasive pattern of modernization in society; in the late 1930s, the work projects became increasingly industrialized and militarized, and increasingly centralized and privatized, so that the transition into war, with all its implications of spending and regimentation, was taking place well before American entry into actual armed conflict. Some of those elements had been evident early on in the New Deal, but by the end of the New Deal they were dominant. That too is part of the legacy of these projects.

In its work projects, the Roosevelt administration was like a stream that followed a long and winding course, and that stream had many channels—some that dried up, some that flourished, many that ebbed and flowed intermittently. For a while, however, and with some projects longer than others, the New Deal work projects had provided valuable support and relief, work relief with dignity, not only to Wyoming's unemployed but to Wyoming's communities and their businesses and public institutions. The results of that effort, beyond the help it provided to individuals, had been in some instances the construction of an enduring system of buildings, irrigation systems, roads and highways, municipal sewers and water systems, city parks, productive forests, tourist-magnet national parks and

forest campgrounds, schools and more schools, artworks, and a multitude of other tangible works, many of which remain in use.

There were instances, many of them in fact, in which the responses of the federal government under both Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt seemed to move people closer to greater freedom from want, oppression, and inequality—a greater realization of the promise of individualism and democracy. At some point, however, the *means* for that realization—greater productivity—became the *end*, the overriding objective. And the centralization and planning and specialization and regimentation became the organizational framework for that greater productivity.

Both Hoover and Roosevelt were deeply humane people, keenly sensitive and sympathetic to the plight of their fellow citizens. And they both valued freedom as an essential American birthright and as a goal in modern society. Hoover talked reverently of freedom and individualism in his political outlook, in his economic values, and in his objectives as president. Roosevelt couched many of his programs in terms of greater freedom for people who felt the bite of misery in their lives, and his idea of the Four Freedoms—freedom of expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, freedom from fear—provided an important hinge as he shifted his own orientation from domestic action to preparation for war. And both Hoover and Roosevelt sincerely sought to help people.

But the visions of each held limitations. Hoover's faith in those who had been blessed by their community during good times to turn around and come to the aid of their less fortunate neighbors during hard times was met with false promises at first, and then a cold shoulder. It was a bitter, bitter pill for him. And Roosevelt, despite his powerful desire to help out those he called "forgotten," helped develop an enormous social, economic, and political mechanism that too often would forget those same people as individuals and mobilize them into a vast economic machine. If there was a tension always at work between the programs used by the two presidents, which there was, and if there was a tension at work in the programs offered by others of the same administration, which there also was, those tensions are an additional legacy of the Depression and the programs and projects of the federal government in Wyoming.

Those tensions were of profound significance and they did not melt away with the end of the Depression, the coming of the war, or the passing of generations. Nor was it as simple a matter as a choice between two

political parties. On one level the issue was, and remains, a question of who benefits from the operation of the economy, whether the economy is organized and managed to meet the needs of the broad public as citizens and neighbors in their communities or whether it is structured to meet the interests of the most powerful in society. This issue is perhaps the fundamental one of whether organized society responds to need or to power. On another level, however, those tensions in society, economy, and government represented a broad range of issues that focused on the conflict between means and ends, between the individual and organized society, between the local and the central, between the community and the nation,

between, for that matter, the economy and the rest of life. Those issues may even constitute the ultimate enduring legacy of the federal projects in Wyoming during the Depression. For Wyoming and the nation were being transformed in these years and the world we live in today was taking shape. It is only when contemplating the contours of that transformation and the alternatives that were possible, for better and for worse, that we can understand the full significance of the concrete products of the projects undertaken. Their full historical significance, after all, contributes also to an understanding of Wyoming and the nation in the twenty-first century.

Appendix

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS FOR SELECTED FEDERAL AND WYOMING AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

AAA:	Agricultural Adjustment Act, Agricultural Adjustment Administration	NIRA:	National Industrial Recovery Act
BPR:	Bureau of Public Roads	NPS:	National Park Service
CCC:	Civilian Conservation Corps	NRA:	National Recovery Administration
CWA:	Civil Works Administration	NLRB:	National Labor Relations Board
ECW:	Emergency Conservation Work	NYA:	National Youth Administration
ERA:	Emergency Relief Administration (also FERA, Federal Emergency Relief Administration)	POUR:	President's Organization on Unemployment Relief
ERCA:	Emergency Relief and Construction Act	PWA:	Public Works Administration
FAP:	Federal Art Project	PWAP:	Public Works of Art Project
FDIC:	Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation	RA:	Resettlement Administration
FERA:	Federal Emergency Relief Administration (also ERA, Emergency Relief Administration, and after the demise of the CWA, FERA would often refer to the Wyoming work programs funded by the FERA)	REA:	Rural Electrification Administration
FHA:	Federal Housing Administration	RFC:	Reconstruction Finance Corporation
FSA:	Farm Security Administration	SCS:	Soil Conservation Service
FSA:	Federal Security Agency	SEC:	Securities and Exchange Commission
FWA:	Federal Works Agency	SERA:	State Employment Relief Administration (also often referred to simply as FERA, but meaning Wyoming's work programs funded by the Federal Employment Relief Administration)
FWP:	Federal Writers' Project	TNEC:	Temporary National Economic Committee
HRS:	Historical Records Survey	TRAP:	Treasury Relief Art Project
		USFS:	United States Forest Service
		WPA:	Works Progress Administration (and Work Projects Administration after 1939)



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