The depression of the 1930s had an early effect on the state of Oregon. A decline in timber and agricultural production resulted in severe unemployment in the late 1920s. State and local charitable organizations attempted to care for the unemployed but they did not have the financial resources to do so. Although President Herbert Hoover was worried about the effects of the growing economic crisis on the business community, he continued to believe that the depression would be short lived despite the worsening social conditions. When Franklin Roosevelt was elected president he initiated a series of measures aimed at ending the depression and bringing people back into the work force. Among those measures was the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

In Oregon the WPA built upon earlier state relief organizations. However, unlike the earlier Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the WPA was a federal organization staffed with federal employees. Its programs were run according to federal guidelines and regulations and much of its funding came from the federal government. Those guidelines often worked against the state programs. The means test, quota systems, and the need to refer programs to Washington D.C. prevented the Oregon program from being as effective as it could be. In addition, the Oregon legislature and governor acted against the program by not providing adequate funding to support it.

However, even though Oregonians did not always accept the WPA, they were dramatically changed by its programs. The most obvious change was in the physical appearance of the state - new roads and highways, more bridges, expanded parks, additional airports, and many new services. The state was altered politically because by World War II, the federal government had permanently insinuated itself into the life of most Oregonians.
The Works Progress Administration in Oregon:
An Administrative Overview

by

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INTRODUCTION

The prosperity of the 1920s ended abruptly with the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in October, 1929. Prior to the crash, the Gross National Product (GNP) for the United States was at $104.4 billion. With only 3.2 percent of the labor force out of work, it seemed that jobs were available for everyone. Three years later, GNP had fallen to $74.8 billion and more than 12 million workers or 23.6 percent of the labor force, were out of work. Such dramatic unemployment called for dramatic solutions. Throughout the 1930s, the federal government under the leadership of President Franklin Roosevelt and his advisors experimented with a variety of programs to put the economy back on track. Included among the programs that were soon referred to as the alphabetical agencies was the Works Progress (later Projects) Administration or WPA.

The WPA was one of many federal responses to the problem of massive unemployment which was haunting the nation. Prior to the Great Depression, unemployment (and its attendant social evils) was a local problem. Local charitable organizations or the family assumed responsibility for providing relief to those who were without any other means for survival. The depression of the 1930s changed that pattern. Sources of local funding were quickly overwhelmed and exhausted by the enormity of the situation. Traditional methods for helping the economic victims of the thirties were an abysmal failure; a new approach was needed.
The dilemma facing the Roosevelt administration was determining what form that relief should take. Should the federal government take over responsibilities for the states and provide direct relief to the unemployed? Or should the federal government offer some form of work relief program. (When used here, the term "direct relief" describes the payment of money or, in some cases, goods to those in need without requiring work in return. "Work relief" refers to the payment of money as a salary for work which has been performed.) Politicians worried over who would administer the program: should it be local jurisdictions, state governments, or a new federal organization established for that purpose?

This study will explore how the State of Oregon reacted to the depression, and how the way of handling relief changed from relying on private, local, and state funding to looking for federal assistance. This inquiry will look at the organizations established in Oregon to aid the unemployed: the quasi-official agencies, the more formal state agencies, and finally the major federal agencies. While the Public Works Administration (PWA) played a large role in providing employment throughout the state, the focus of this study is the Works Progress Administration. There will be some discussion of the programs of the WPA, although the concern here is organizational: the way the WPA was organized, the agencies that preceded it, and an assessment of its success.

The inquiry will also discuss the changes in relief funding which took place in Oregon as a result of the depression. That is a story within a story. As the residents of Oregon came to rely more and more on financial assistance from the federal
government, the balance of power between the state and Washington D.C. shifted. The spending programs of the Roosevelt administration benefitted Oregon's economy. Yet, those programs came at the cost of increased federal control especially in terms of the regulations imposed to administer them. While the second World War solved the immediate unemployment problems of the state, the programs of the 1930s, including those of the WPA, permanently altered the economic and political relationship between the state and the federal government.¹

The following chapter will discuss the response of the Hoover administration to the stock market crash of 1929 and the economic decline that followed. It will also look briefly at the early reactions of the administration of Franklin Roosevelt toward the growing economic depression. Chapter two examines the Civil Works Administration and its successor the Works Progress Administration. Chapters three, four, and five focus on the depression in Oregon and the state and federal relief programs designed to end it. The final chapter provides a summary and conclusion of the WPA experience in Oregon.
CHAPTER I

THE DEPRESSION

Although the United States had suffered previous financial crises, it had never undergone one as long lasting and all pervasive as that touched off by the stock market crash of 1929. The depression of the 1930s was beyond the experience of most citizens in this country. Those caught in the middle of it wondered if life would ever return to a normal state. According to historian William E. Leuchtenburg, "Many believed that the long era of economic growth in the western world had come to an end."¹ Everywhere people turned there was unemployment and poverty. Industrial production slumped from $949 million to a low of $74 million between 1929 and 1932.² Unemployment, conservatively estimated, was above twelve million in 1932. Homelessness was on the rise and for many people a solid meal was a memory. Lester Chandler notes that "America was totally unprepared philosophically, politically, financially and administratively to cope with the massive unemployment, loss of income, and poverty that came with the great depression."³

Much of that lack of preparedness was due to the pervasive belief that success was a matter of individual initiative and determination. Both James Oliver Robertson and Loren Baritz have written books about America as the land of the chosen and the land of the rugged individual.⁴ To meet with failure, to be somehow unable to take care of yourself and your family was frequently perceived as a sign of
weakness. Baritz eloquently makes the point: "This culture detests poverty and fears
the poor. The ladder of economic mobility is a conceit of the many who have
climbed it and a reproach to the many who cannot get on it."\(^5\) Obviously, in the
traditional scheme there would be some who were unable to climb that ladder for
various reasons. However, in those unfortunate cases, it was believed that local
governments and private charities would provide appropriate relief. In general, relief
whether it was direct relief or work relief was viewed as a private affair with the
burden resting upon the family or the local charitable organizations. Few expected
the state or the federal government to help the needy.

The depression of the 1930s changed those expectations. As unemployment
grew, workers clamored for some form of relief assistance. For a while, the local
agencies were able to provide help. When local funding began to dry up, some states
began filling the void through their own funding programs. Those resources,
however, were exhausted very quickly. Having nowhere else to go, states began to
turn to the federal government for help. But assistance from that quarter came
reluctantly and slowly; those who believed that the federal government had no right
to intervene in local and state affairs resisted the effort.

While federal leaders then might deny that the federal government had a role
in providing help to those in need, that denial was not based on historical fact. For
years the government had, in reality, been providing various forms of public
assistance: grants-in-aid programs to the states, monies to correctional institutions
for federal offenders, and funding for the care of disabled and wounded soldiers.\(^6\)
Although those programs had broad-based support, there was, as yet, no such tradition for the funding of relief projects.

_Hoover's Response to the Depression_

The policies of President Herbert Hoover reflected those contradictions. Hoover was clearly aware that the unemployment situation in 1930 and 1931 called for some sort of government action. While he was willing to depart from tradition and insist that the government act to relieve suffering, he was not willing to put funds directly in the hands of the state governments. Hoover's policies towards relief were a forerunner of the trickle-down policies of later administrations. Federal money would be used to attempt to end the depression, but under Hoover those funds would go to business, to men of affairs, not to direct relief of the poor. Hoover believed that government should fund major projects that would be income-producing, such as toll bridges and toll tunnels which would earn money to pay for themselves. He regularly opposed "non-productive" public works projects.

As the economic situation continued to worsen, Hoover moved the government further along the path of direct relief by establishing a new program to deal with unemployment. Headed by Arthur Woods, the program called for the establishment of a non-partisan organization called the President's Emergency Committee for Employment. According to Josephine Brown, a social welfare worker and writer of the period, "The name was chosen deliberately both to indicate the
emergency nature of the situation and to avoid the discouraging term: unemployment.° The primary job for the group was to offer advice to the states and to coordinate unemployment assistance programs currently in effect. When the committee recommended the creation of a federal works program, Hoover rejected the idea.° In his view, the committee was not intended to provide financial assistance to state and local jurisdictions. As John Garraty has noted, "Hoover insisted that only state and local agencies and private charities could deal properly with such problems as unemployment and relief of the destitute."\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Reconstruction Finance Corporation}

Hoover's attitude was consistent with his belief that the depression would soon correct itself. While he continued to believe that encouraging business to invest in the economy was the way out of the depression, he finally agreed to more direct measures. On July 21, 1932, he signed the \textit{Emergency Relief and Construction Act}, establishing the \textit{Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC)}. Title I under the Act authorized the use of $300 million in federal monies to make loans to the states for furnishing both direct relief and work relief. To apply for the money, states first had to certify their need for relief funds and then apply through their governors. The funds were grants to be paid back at a rate of 3 percent. In addition, no state could apply for more than 15 percent of the total federal appropriations. Those provisions illustrated the view of the Hoover administration that all states were equally hit by
the depression, and therefore, funds must be evenly distributed. It also reinforced Hoover's belief that federal funds must be viewed as loans rather than gifts. Unfortunately, the money provided under the RFC was too little to relieve the distress of the states.

An irritant to the states was the requirement of certification of need. This not only infuriated many of the state governors but also slowed down the granting of funds. Essentially, certification was a process whereby the states were required to assure that state funds were inadequate to meet their relief needs. While the intent was to eliminate indiscriminate freelod

ing, the states interpreted it as an attempt to prevent them from taking advantage of federal funding. In spite of the certification requirement, the RFC did not try to set up an organizational structure that would impose a federal presence in the administration of relief. Once funding was approved, the money was handed over to the states who would then use existing channels for delivering it to those in need.

Title II of the Reconstruction Finance Act created the bulk of the RFC funding. It provided for $500 million that would be loaned to banks, railroads, and other institutions threatened by financial collapse. The primary purpose of Title II loans was to prop up the failing financial structure of the country. The RFC did not become a potent force in the banking community until the administration of Franklin Roosevelt, due to the innate conservatism of Hoover's administration. Under Roosevelt appointee Jesse Jones, the RFC sought to enlarge bank capital by purchasing bank stock instead of loaning to banks and increasing their indebtedness.
Those procedures allowed the banks, in turn, to increase loans to business, municipalities, and other financial institutions.\textsuperscript{16}

The Emergency Relief and Construction Act fit with Hoover's sense that relief must not come at the expense of the free enterprise system. Although he believed that it was necessary to end the depression and the immense suffering resulting from it, he also believed that government action must not interfere with the administration's long-term goal of keeping the nation's financial institutions intact. As Lawrence Lashbrook notes in his work on the WPA in Maine, "Hoover's fear of public relief eroding the human spirit, his dogged reliance on volunteerism and local initiative, his opposition to government competition with private enterprise and concern for balancing the budget barred truly effective action."\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{The Depression and the Roosevelt Administration}

Recognizing that more funds had to be forthcoming in order to stem the growing relief rolls in the United States, Congress began considering legislation that would eventually be known as the Federal Emergency Relief Act. Passed by Congress in May of 1933, the measure was signed by the newly elected president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It created the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and on May 22, Roosevelt selected Harry L. Hopkins to be FERA's first administrator.

The FERA was both similar and different from the Emergency Relief and
Construction Act. While both used the Reconstruction Finance Corporation as a funding agency, the methods for granting appropriations to the states were quite different. The RFC loaned funds to be paid back at an interest rate of 3 percent; the $500 million provided by FERA allowed for outright gifts to the states. Under this act, funds could be handed out on a matching basis, or they could be given as grants to those states too poor ever to hope to be able to repay them.\textsuperscript{18} Relief whether it be direct relief or work relief would now go to anyone who was unemployed.

FERA also went much further than the Emergency Relief and Construction Act in providing different mechanisms for meeting relief needs. Under FERA, the Works Division had the major responsibility for initiating federal works projects or for supplementing state and local projects. FERA money also provided direct relief for those who were considered unemployable (e.g. the mentally or physically handicapped) or those who for reasons other than lack of employment opportunity were unable to find work. Also, for the first time, a relief program was offered for transient workers. As was the case in Oregon, transient workers were a problem in most states and any successful relief program needed to recognize them.

Because of its organizational structure, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration encouraged greater participation by the states in the administering of relief funds than had been the case with the Emergency Relief and Construction Act. Authorized loans under the latter had been made directly to political subdivisions of the states, even though application was through the governor. A
disadvantage to the practice was that the funds became state or local property and therefore were not subject to federal guidelines. The federal government was unable to press for increased standards for administering relief or hiring personnel.\textsuperscript{19} As administrator of FERA, Harry Hopkins was determined that funding would be administered efficiently and wisely and through the state governments. States standing the best chance of receiving money were those who could provide good administrative supervision: those that had established state relief boards to administer the funds, or those that quickly moved to establish such a board. The method of centralized dispersal of federal allocations from state governments was the beginning step in removing relief administration from the hands of volunteer and local bodies.\textsuperscript{20}

Under FERA, the federal government intended to exert much more control on how its funds were administered. Unlike the laissez-faire attitude of the Emergency Relief and Construction Act, FERA provided for investigation into how relief funds were allocated and required governors to file monthly reports. Those reports included information on the amount of federal funds required, the purposes for which they would be used, and the provisions for administering them.\textsuperscript{21} Because most states were desperate for relief assistance, they were willing to accept guidelines that they might have resisted earlier. Forty-five states had applied for FERA funds by June 1933 and most states had established centralized relief agencies to administer them.\textsuperscript{22} By the end of the FERA program in 1935, over $3 billion had been spent on state and local relief.
According to most accounts, FERA was a reasonably successful, if stop-gap, program. Yet the money provided for the relief programs was inadequate to meet the relief needs of the states. In addition, the inability of many local relief administrators to overcome their personal repugnance about granting aid to any but the most destitute complicated matters. Such administrators tended to be untrained in handling relief cases and defined the truly needy in a very narrow fashion--those who were truly incapable of providing for themselves. Moreover, since they were without federal support, relief administrators tried to allow only the most unemployable to be put on the relief roles. "Aging workers without skills, women with dependent children, the temporary disabled--all were likely to be told that they could work and were therefore ineligible for assistance." If there were jobs available, they were going to only the most skilled or most robust workers. Thus a class was created of those persons who were ineligible for local relief and were also unlikely to find employment.

A further impediment to the relief program was the provision that state governments match all federal funds on a three-to-one basis. That provision caused unforeseen complications because many states took funds from their already skimpy relief budgets to meet the matching-fund requirement, while other states, particularly in the South, lacked the matching money. In those situations, the need was so great that the matching requirement was overlooked. In other cases, as in Oregon, a frugal legislature dragged its collective feet in providing the additional funds. Often it took a personal letter from Harry Hopkins threatening to cut off all federal aid before
states would carry out their side of the bargain.

The experiences learned through the administration of the FERA programs were incorporated into the later Works Progress Administration organization. The WPA replicated the organizational structure of FERA in the four divisions responsible for carrying out the programs: Research and Statistics, Relations with the States, Work, and Rural Rehabilitation. More important, FERA staff members were incorporated into the WPA network. By calling upon the experience, the personnel, and the administrative network of FERA, the WPA was able to save itself valuable time and energy and to begin operations almost immediately after it was given congressional approval.
CHAPTER II

CIVIL WORKS ADMINISTRATION
AND WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

The origins of the Civil Works Administration and, later, the Works Progress Administration lay in the belief of many Americans that most people would rather work for money than have government handouts. Hopkins echoed that sentiment when he expressed his dissatisfaction with FERA's ability to provide aid to the unemployed by saying, "What most of them needed was not case work but a job."\textsuperscript{1} In 1933 as the relief rolls once more began to grow, Hopkins and his aide Aubrey Williams developed a work program that would put the federal government in charge of administering work relief. While FERA would continue to provide direct relief grants to the states, the Civil Works Administration (CWA) would fund relief through work programs.

The CWA, funded under Title II of the National Industrial Recovery Act, was a response to the Roosevelt administration's fears that the winter of 1933-34 would wreak unbearable hardships on the unemployed unless immediate aid was provided. The CWA program was intended to remedy the defects of the FERA work-relief program, to meet the critical unemployment needs of the winter, and to promote recovery through an injection of purchasing power into the economic system within a short period.\textsuperscript{2} It, too, was under the jurisdiction of Harry Hopkins. The primary
purpose of the CWA was to provide winter employment for approximately 4 million people and to do so as quickly as possible. While half of the workers were selected from the relief roles, the other half were those who were unemployed but not considered "unemployable". That policy was a deviation from earlier programs that drew only upon relief roles and disregarded the unemployed or marginally employed. A fundamental difference between FERA and CWA was reflected in the administrative network of the agencies. FERA worked through the governors and the state relief agencies, while CWA dealt with the unemployed through a newly established federal organization. The headquarters of CWA was in Washington D.C., with each state, county, and city having local CWA offices. Federal administrator Hopkins appointed the local administrators, making them federal employees. As Kenneth Davis has noted, unlike FERA, CWA was truly a federal organization.3

The philosophy behind CWA was to provide aid through work programs rather than providing direct relief. Foreshadowing WPA procedures, the CWA relied heavily on the local and state governments to sponsor appropriate work-relief programs. And like the WPA, the CWA attempted to require projects that would offer work to both blue-collar and white-collar workers. By the time the CWA was phased out, white-collar and professional workers filled 10 percent of its ranks.4 When questioned about his decision to fund unemployed artists and writers, Hopkins replied that those people have "got to eat just like other people."5 At the peak of its existence in mid-January 1934, more than 4 million people were employed on CWA projects. Though it only lasted from November 1933 through March 1934,
CWA pumped $1 billion of purchasing power into the economy.6

An unfortunate legacy of the CWA was the image of the idle leaf-raker. Such appellations sprang from the hasty manner in which the program was first set up. In the desire to quickly employ workers, projects were started that were not well-planned: people would arrive at a work site without the necessary equipment; an observer might see fifty men working on a road project, but only twenty-five would have the proper tools to do the job—the others would either be standing around waiting for supplies or would be working with pick and shovel. Because much of the early CWA work was clearing brush and landscaping parks, it is easy to understand where the image might have originated.

Because of the emergency nature of most of the projects, in one sense the image was true. The first goal of Hopkins and the CWA was to immediately see that people had jobs. Executive Order 6420-B, creating the CWA, was dated November 9, 1933; by November 23, the first pay day, the CWA issued checks to 814,511 workers.7 Obviously, such haste resulted in confusion. One of the ongoing problems (and one that originally plagued the WPA) was the inability to smoothly coordinate the materials needed for the project, the activities of those needing work, and the actual work itself. Frequently, this resulted in programs being characterized as "make-work" or more familiarly, leaf-raking work. Though planning, equipment, and supply coordination improved through the year, the early stereotypes of the program persisted.

When the CWA program came to an end in the spring of 1934, workers either
left the projects or were transferred to a new emergency relief program sponsored by FERA. During its brief history, CWA built or improved some 500,000 miles of roads, 40,000 schools, over 3,500 playgrounds and athletic fields, and 1,000 airports.\(^8\)

Moreover, the program provided proof that those on relief preferred to work for a salary rather than receive direct relief. Dixon Wecter quotes a Michigan county administrator who observed men weeping with happiness at the sight of their first paycheck.\(^9\) Perhaps even more poignant is the comment of a woman whose husband had just been hired on a CWA project; she bought a dozen oranges, saying "I hadn't tasted any for so long I had forgotten what they were like."\(^{10}\)

Despite the program's success in getting money to the people who needed it, and despite the original support it had from the Roosevelt administration, CWA soon came under attack. While there were those who were suspicious of any federal relief program, the major attacks were politically motivated. Southerners objected to CWA regulations requiring that blacks and whites be paid the same wages. Republicans accused the Democrats of using CWA to dispense patronage. Eventually, Roosevelt began to worry about the political consequences of supporting a program that might create a permanent class of workers dependent on government aid. He summed up the feelings of many when he told his advisors to bring an end to the CWA because work relief might "become a habit with the country."\(^{11}\) FERA, which continued to dispense direct relief through the grants-in-aid program, completed unfinished CWA projects. Work relief under FERA lasted into July 1935 when the WPA program replaced it.
Although CWA is a chronological link between FERA and WPA, on two counts it differed significantly from either of those programs. It was the only public relief program that paid prevailing wages throughout its existence. While the original intent of WPA administrators was to follow this practice, there was never sufficient financial support to do so. Moreover, neither the Roosevelt administration nor the general public was philosophically willing to have a government program that would compete with private enterprise. Under WPA regulations workers were allowed to earn a maximum monthly salary; once that point was reached, the worker was laid off from the job.

The other significant difference between CWA and WPA was the means test used to determine qualification for participation in the program. No such tests were required to qualify for CWA employment. With WPA, all aspects of a worker's financial life were examined. If that person or anyone in the immediate family had income, even though it was inadequate to support the family, the worker was ineligible for WPA employment. Such practice discouraged savings and blurred the line between work relief and charity. In an article on work relief and traditional American values, William Bremer notes that with the exception of CWA, work relief programs under the New Deal were not meant to provide an adequate wage level for support. Bremer writes, "Instead of guaranteeing a 'right to work' by instituting programs to offer employment to people who experienced joblessness during good times as well as bad, they developed an unemployment insurance system to preclude the need to assist temporarily unemployed, able-bodied citizens at public expense."
The Works Progress Administration

The Roosevelt administration continued to search for a program that would return providing of direct relief to the states, allowing the federal government to be involved only in work relief programs. The establishment of the Works Progress Administration was the answer. Roosevelt and his advisors knew that there were many in the country, on both the right and the left, who wanted government out of the business of providing direct relief. Business leaders feared that the continuation of government programs aimed at helping the unemployed would result in a welfare state. Organized labor opposed federal employment programs because federal wage rates were below those offered by private industry. According to conservative Republican Robert Taft, the government should solve the unemployment problem by encouraging more development in private industry. Among leftist critics, the creation of a welfare state was an "indirect subsidy to business, making it even less responsive to poverty and unemployment."

Without clear directions from either side, Roosevelt consulted his advisors, Harry Hopkins and Marriner Eccles, for a course of action. With 20 percent of the labor force yet unemployed in 1935, Roosevelt announced his plan to have a "gigantic program of emergency public employment." He selected Harry Hopkins to lead the program. Hopkins had first worked with Roosevelt as deputy director of New York State's Temporary Emergency Relief Administration. Later, Roosevelt appointed him to direct the programs of the Federal Emergency Relief
Administration and those of the Civil Works Administration. Both Roosevelt and Hopkins believed the states should bear a portion of the financial burden of any proposed relief program, and both thought direct relief sapped worker morale. In early 1935 Congress passed the first of a series of emergency relief appropriations acts that provided $4.8 billion for work relief. On May 6, 1935, Roosevelt established the Works Progress Administration, assigning to it $1.4 billion of the total $4.8 billion.

The establishment of the WPA satisfied the desire of both Roosevelt and the Congress to have a work program rather than just a direct relief program. In addition to the passage of the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act, Congress passed the Social Security Act of 1935. This was important to the success of the WPA because it provided financial aid to a portion of those individuals who were the most difficult to find work for: people over 65 years old, the blind, and dependent children. With those people removed from the concerns of the work relief program, the WPA was ready to move into action.

While the WPA was a relief program, it differed from earlier schemes in that it would provide only work relief. The states were once more responsible for the provision of direct relief. Although certifying workers for WPA programs required a close working relationship with state and county officials, only federal employees administered the work program. As with the CWA, the states were obligated to furnish the major funding needed for equipment and materials. State and local officials were also expected to provide local supervision for projects. However, in
contrast to CWA practices, WPA employees were chosen entirely from the relief rolls, thus excluding those who were unemployed but who had not yet requested relief. That provision was criticized throughout the existence of the program. Critics believed it punished those who were trying to make it on their own without government aid.

The Works Progress Administration built upon and expanded the administrative organization set up by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. The expanded organization functioned through four levels: (1) the central administration in Washington D.C. was responsible for setting policies; (2) the regional offices covering eleven areas were responsible for acting as technical advisors both to the Washington office and to the state office; (3) the state administrators were responsible for final authority over its activities; and (4) the district offices were responsible for proposing projects and for administering those that were approved.\textsuperscript{17} As was the case in Oregon, the state organizations were replicas of the federal one. Unfortunately, that administrative network often resulted in delays in the implementation of projects since each level of administration had to review projects before they were given final approval at the federal level. Some of the guidelines used to administer the program dealt with eligibility, quotas, sponsorship, and funding requirements.

Eligibility for employment on WPA programs had specific limits; individuals had to be on the relief rolls. Those who were unemployed but who continued to look for work were not eligible for work relief. Furthermore, only one member of
a household could be employed through the program even if the family was large, in need, and had other able-bodied persons desiring employment.\textsuperscript{18} Those two requirements plagued relief seekers in Oregon. The specific requirement for eligibility stated that only those on the relief roles from May to November would be eligible for WPA employment. In Oregon that policy resulted in complications for those who were employed in the agricultural sector. Other requirements included: a sixteen-year age minimum, no felony convictions, and residency in the state providing work.

Although the primary objective of the WPA program was to hire only from the relief rolls, there were exceptions. Exceptions were necessary to hire workers who had experience at project supervision. In addition exceptions were made to allow project managers to hire individuals with skills and professional expertise which might not be found among those on the relief rolls.\textsuperscript{19} Exceptions were also made to give those workers without a skill an opportunity to learn one. Allowances were made to offer employment to the marginally needy and to those too proud to request relief. Finally, as the WPA began to devote more funding to cultural projects, exceptions were made for writers, authors, and others who qualified, but were not on relief rolls.\textsuperscript{20}

States also had to meet qualifications in order to be eligible for funds. The most important was the requirement that each project had to have a sponsor. Usually the sponsor would be a local or county jurisdiction, although in some cases it might be the state. The importance of the local sponsors was both symbolic, in
that it indicated local support for the program, and practical. It was up to the sponsor to provide funding for supplies, and when possible, equipment. Sponsors were also responsible for providing local supervision of projects. The use of local sponsors served a political purpose since many states were concerned about the intervention of the federal government in local matters. State and local leaders believed that if they provided a portion of the funding for the projects they would be able to maintain a greater voice in determining what projects would be done in their jurisdictions. The federal government supported local involvement because federal officials knew that the WPA would not succeed without state and local participation.21

In his history of the WPA, Donald Howard notes that the majority of projects were sponsored by municipal (39.3 percent), county (26.7 percent), and state (15.6 percent) agencies. The remaining sponsors were township (14.5 percent), federal (3.7 percent), and other (0.2 percent).22 The incentive to sponsor projects was the desire of the jurisdictions to obtain local improvements and aid unemployment at a reasonable cost. From 1936 to the end of June 1943 sponsors contributed 21.9 percent of the funds spent on WPA projects.23 The most popular projects included: highway, road, and street improvement; the repair or construction of public buildings; the development or improvement of parks and other recreational facilities; conservation; the repair or building of sewer systems and other utilities; and the construction of airports and other transportation facilities. White-collar work included such diverse projects as sewing, educational and cultural programs, clerical
training, and a variety of service programs.\textsuperscript{24}

Funding for WPA projects was done through the passage of the Emergency Relief and Appropriations Act. The original 1935 Act provided funds that were to be spent within two years. When it seemed that the United States was coming out of the depression in 1937, the funding of relief projects was more controversial. Roosevelt asked for and received less funding than he had in 1935. As a result of the inadequate appropriations, 35,000 people were dropped from the relief roles. That inability to count on regular funding caused difficulties for the states. Some local bodies were reluctant to support projects because of the uncertainty of the support being renewed at the end of the fiscal year. The difficulty was an ongoing one for the WPA and was never satisfactorily resolved. Because states were also vying for funds from the Public Works Administration (PWA), it was necessary to distinguish eligibility for WPA funding. The rule of thumb was that WPA projects cost less than $25,000 and must benefit the public health and welfare. PWA activities included major construction projects such as dams, schools, and highways that involved large expenses. Harry Hopkins was often able to find ways around the $25,000 limit by dividing projects into smaller increments.

The work programs of the WPA continued in place throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s. In 1939, in an effort to bring about more efficiency in government, the Roosevelt administration passed the Reorganization Act. Under that act the Works Progress Administration was renamed the Works Projects Administration and, along with other work relief agencies, was transferred to the newly created Federal
Works Agency. Earlier, Harry Hopkins had resigned his position with the WPA to become a special advisor to Roosevelt on domestic and foreign matters. A former head of the Engineering Division, Colonel Francis C. Harrington, was appointed the new WPA director. Under his leadership, the WPA began to take on large-scale construction projects.

As the United States began to prepare for entrance into the war, WPA projects became more defense-related. In 1941 Congress sanctioned that trend by allowing WPA employees to work on construction projections costing more than $100,000. WPA workers were also permitted to work in excess of the normal 130 hours per month limit if they were employed on defense or war-related projects. However, as war preparation advanced, the demand for workers in the private sector increased. Because the government was unable to match private industry salaries, men and women began leaving their WPA positions for those better paying jobs. In March 1942, with only 5,000 WPA projects in operation, Roosevelt instructed the Federal Works Administrator to begin shutting down the program. On June 30, 1943, the WPA was officially over.
CHAPTER III

THE DEPRESSION IN OREGON

The depression got off to an early start in the state of Oregon. Unlike some other states, Oregon felt the effects of the economic downturn quite early. Between 1927 and 1929 Oregon had the highest rate of business failures in the country.\(^1\) Much of the early downturn in the state's economy was a result of the decline in the timber industry, Oregon's primary employer. Lumber mills were operating at half of their capacity by 1930 and demand continued to decrease.\(^2\) Using 1929 as a base year, the lumber industry dropped in employment from 100 percent to 40.0 percent in 1933. For all other industries, the drop was from 100 percent in 1929 to 58.9 percent in 1933.\(^3\) The period from 1929 to 1933 also witnessed a reduction in farm income. Farmers were able to purchase only about 57 percent as many goods and services in 1932 as they did in 1929.\(^4\) Portland had more than 13,000 unemployed in 1930, or 4.4 percent of its total population. That unemployment record was the worst of the four largest West Coast cities.\(^5\)

Although statistics indicate that Oregon was in economic difficulty, the leaders of public opinion were reluctant to recognize the situation. The *Oregon Voter* noted in June 1930 that while production in the lumber industry had fallen off by 40 percent and wheat exports were down, conditions in Oregon "continue to be somewhat better than elsewhere on the Pacific Coast and considerably better than
in the greater part of the United States. In fact, Oregon's Governor Julius Meier, upon discovering a budget deficit of $2.5 million when he entered office, insisted that the legislature slash spending. Reflecting the belief of Herbert Hoover, Meier thought that only an increase in business activity would result in an improved economy.

*Early Responses to the Depression*

In attempting to deal with the effects of the depression, Oregon followed the pattern of the rest of the United States and relied on local civic and charitable organizations to provide relief to the unemployed and the needy. The prevailing attitude of Oregonians towards relief, especially those charged with administering it, was based on a 1854 law that detailed the chain of responsibility for caring for the poor. The law which reflected the national tradition of relief funding stated that the county courts were responsible for administering aid to the poor, that the liability for the poor rested with the family, and that three month's county residency was required before county relief would be granted. When the state's economy continued to decline, local leaders began to seek new solutions for handling the problems of relief.

While local organizations were generous in their desire to help, they were frequently unable to meet the demands placed upon them. The primary organization for handling the relief effort was a citizens group, the Civil Emergency Committee of Portland. A subcommittee of that group, the Public Relations
Committee, assumed direct responsibility for administering work programs. With a budget of $300,000 in 1930, it began a work program for the unemployed designed to provide work for 1,350 people at a salary of $24.00 a month. So great was the demand by those wanting work that the allotment was reduced to $12.00. When money ran out in 1931, voters approved an additional $200,000 and when that, too, was exhausted voters approved another $200,000. Although the citizens of Portland were supportive of relief programs to help the unemployed, funding such programs was beyond their abilities.

In areas outside of Portland, the picture was even bleaker. Most counties were unable to mount a campaign to provide relief to the unemployed with the result that funds were administered by the county judges. Unfortunately, most of those judges were not oriented toward social services and continued to reflect traditional attitudes that the needy were ne'er-do-wells who were responsible for their condition. Relief work was poorly coordinated and never provided on a regular basis. One writer of the period observed, "That few or none actually died of starvation during this period is due not to such an unco-ordinated relief system, but to the resourcefulness of the unemployed themselves." In counties that were more sympathetic to the poor, attempts were made to provide help but funding was inadequate.

Finally, in the fall of 1930 the state recognized that the increase in unemployment demanded state-wide action. Governor A. W. Norblad called for an Oregon economic conference to discuss the unemployment problem. Within two
months of that conference, the governor appointed a volunteer group, the State Emergency Employment Commission. Originally composed of the governor, the chair of the highway commission and the labor commissioner, it was expanded under Governor Meier to include two additional members, one of them from the Oregon Federation of Labor. The group's charge was to speed up aid to the unemployed so "no man willing and able to work for support of himself and his family should ever become the object of charity in Oregon." The commission also encouraged the counties to establish emergency relief committees to help provide aid for the unemployed. Governor Meier called for a meeting of the county relief committees in 1932 and as a result, there was formed the Executive Committee of the State-Wide Relief Council. Later this group became known as the State Relief Committee.

The only other major source of state funding during this period was the State Highway Commission. Since the Highway Commission was able to issue bonds without seeking authorization outside of itself, it was in a unique position to help provide work relief programs for the counties. Using highway funds, workers were hired to do clean-up work, brush-clearing, and other unskilled labor. Almost $3 million had been allocated for work on the state's highways by the end of 1931. In March 1932, in spite of the protest of relief administrators throughout the state, the Highway Commission discontinued its work relief program arguing that it was not a responsible use of public funds to hire inexperienced workers and that it was more efficient to contract out projects.
Governor Meier continued to believe that the state of Oregon had enough internal resources to meet emergencies resulting from the growing depression crisis. Hence, he concentrated his relief efforts on programs that he believed would result in a more efficient organization of those resources.\textsuperscript{15} Although he was willing to accept funding from the Highway Commission for relief work, he focused his energies on the work of the State-wide Relief Council. The group, soon to be known as the State Relief Committee, was advisory and was charged with coordinating the county relief efforts throughout the state. In order to do this, the group set out to gather as much information as possible on unemployment conditions. In 1932 it contacted the county relief agencies and requested the following information: the number of unemployed; the amount spent on relief; and any other information that would provide a clearer understanding of county needs. Next, members of the State Relief Committee divided into smaller groups to visit selected counties. According to a confidential report made by the group to Governor Meier, unemployment would continue to increase in the state. Reserves in clothing, food and money, the report noted, would soon be exhausted with no hope for improvement in the next year; rent, utility bills, and other payments would keep increasing and either would not be paid or would be delinquent. Finally, it predicted that counties would be unable to meet the demands for relief without outside help.\textsuperscript{16} At the time the report was issued, the only means for providing work relief was the Highway Commission fund.
The committee's primary concern was fear of the growing danger of malnutrition in both children and adults. One of its suggestions was to establish state food exchanges that would transfer food from areas of plenty to areas of need. To facilitate this, they established a special food committee that would receive reports of food surpluses and deficits, and act as a clearinghouse "to bring the traders together to negotiate their own deals."\(^{17}\)

The group took an interesting side road in its recommendation for a form of script to be adopted as payment to workers. The script would be printed under strict guidelines at the state printing plant. It would be redeemed, in exchange for work completed, in amounts of $.25, $.50, $1.00 and $5.00. The idea was rejected in the final report because it "appears predicated upon an acknowledged collapse of our present economic system."\(^{18}\) Instead the committee proposed a plan that called for the use of script in food exchange. The plan would provide for a labor investment fund in each county. Businesses that were currently donating money to relief agencies would instead contribute to the fund and receive script. They would hire workers for a job and pay them in script; the worker would in turn use the script to purchase food. Although script was not used as a means for providing relief in Oregon, the fact that it was contemplated by such a blue-ribbon committee is an indication of how far from traditional thinking about relief some Oregonians had moved.

A final concern of the State Relief Committee was the influx of unemployed laborers from other states. In its investigations, they found that most counties had
temporary arrangements to accommodate transient laborers. At their meeting in Klamath Falls, they were told that the city's Labor Council was opposed to providing jobs for itinerant workers because it would take work away from the local unemployed. The county's solution was to establish small enclosures called "Hoovervilles". An itinerant was allowed to remain in the camp for twenty-four hours and then urged to move on. The committee's report quoted the Klamath Falls Chief of Police: "We haven't been hard on them; we are afraid to run them out hungry for fear of robbery." The committee also worked with the Employment Service of the United States Department of Labor to set up a temporary labor information bureau near the border between Oregon and California. The purpose of the bureau was to tell those unemployed laborers entering the state that there was no work to be had in Oregon and to encourage them to return to their point of departure.

In the fall of 1932, the State Relief Committee warned Meier that it would cost the state $6,204,812 to meet the relief bills anticipated for 1933. Meier, unwilling to accept such a cost, continued to tell the public that the state could handle its own financial problems. However, even as he was espousing optimism, Meier was wiring Hoover to tell him "We must have help from the federal government if we are to avert suffering ... and possible uprisings." Eventually, Meier requested funding from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. The RFC granted eleven counties $270,532 in loans by December 31, 1932. In 1933, the legislature enacted the State Unemployment Act, establishing the State Relief Committee, formalizing the already existing voluntary committee and moving Oregon
towards a more centralized means of handling relief funding in the state.

The committee consisted of the same individuals who were members of the executive committee of the State Relief Committee: Raymond Wilcox of Portland, chair; Paul Maris of Salem, secretary; Victor Moses representing the county courts; Kathleen Gabriel representing the women's organizations; Ray Gill from the Grange; Alex Barry representing the American Legion; Ben Osborne from the state federation of labor; and Elmer Goudy, later secretary and eventual administrator for the group. The committee's major power came from its legislative charge to dispense funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and State Emergency Relief Administration. Before applying for relief, counties had to justify to the State Relief Committee their financial need. The committee received the requests and then passed them on to the governor who made the formal application. Ultimately, Oregon received $2,798,290 in Reconstruction Finance Corporation grants.

FERA and CWA Programs in Oregon

In 1932 Meier began taking the first cautious steps towards meeting the relief needs in Oregon. In that same year, Franklin Roosevelt was elected president. One of the first acts of his administration was to urge states to take advantage of the funding available through the Federal Emergency Relief Act. Oregon's governor applied for assistance based upon recommendations of the State Relief Committee.
Under the terms of the loan, Oregon would match each $1.00 of federal funds with $2.00 of state funds. From mid-1933 to January 1935, FERA distributed $15 million to the state. However, both Meier and the legislature continued to be reluctant to support the increase in state funding required to meet FERA requirements. Finally, they recommended approval of a state sales tax which would help raise funds for relief support. The measure was overwhelmingly defeated: 64,677 in favor to 156,182 opposed.²²

The State Relief Committee noted in its interim report that because of the state's unwillingness to provide the required matching funds, there were never sufficient monies available to address adequately the relief needs in the state. The state continued to look to the counties to provide relief funds and those were soon exhausted. As the report noted "the resources of the counties have been entirely inadequate . . . [and] . . . the unemployed of the state have not received the full benefit of the federal program. This points to the necessity of the state's contributing its proper share of the cost of relief."²³ Or as Harry Hopkins angrily cabled Governor Meier, "You are respectfully reminded that so far the state of Oregon has done practically nothing to provide for the relief of its own needy citizens."²⁴ The following figures illustrate Hopkins' point. In the second quarter of 1934--April through June--local agencies had contributed 1.5 percent to relief; the state, less than one tenth of 1 percent; and the federal government, 98.4 percent. Nationally, comparable figures were: local agencies, 14.7 percent; states 11 percent; and the federal government, 74 percent.²⁵
While the governor and the legislature were struggling with Hopkins over Oregon's contribution to the state's relief programs, the governor was applying for CWA monies. Meier's request was approved and Oregon received $6,527,264 in federal funds. Administered by the State Relief Committee, CWA was established to fund work, not charity. CWA monies were used to fund over 1,826 projects. Since that figure does not include educational and service projects, the total contribution of the CWA to Oregon was greater than indicated by the construction projects. Of the 1,826 projects, the majority were for remodeling schools, building parks (including a series of major playing fields in Salem), and road construction. Funds were also allocated for sanitation projects, for repairing and repainting buildings other than schools, and for service projects, including those for women.26

While CWA's accomplishments in Oregon were many, it was viewed as a mixed blessing. An editorial in the Oregonian labeled the program too slow and riddled with graft. The not-surprising advice of the editor was to leave the business of stabilizing the economy to private enterprise.27 State Democratic leaders were upset with the program because it was dominated by Republican party appointees even though it was administered under the auspices of a Democratic president. That was a result of Harry Hopkins' constant but unsuccessful desire to keep partisan politics out of the administration of his work relief programs. As Forrest Walker has observed, "Charges that he [Hopkins] used the relief program for political purposes did not apply to the period of the CWA."28

When the CWA assistance ended in early 1934, Oregon continued to provide
relief through FERA. The projects undertaken by the state and county relief agencies were similar to those under CWA and were aimed at providing employment and maintaining the "self-respect and family morale for the relief client". In the interim between the end of the CWA and the start of the WPA, almost $12 million was spent on public work projects in Oregon. In January 1935 more that 61 percent of the workers on those projects were from the state relief rolls. The work projects were to be the last undertaken by the State Relief Committee. In 1935 Congress passed the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act which funded the Works Progress (Projects) Administration. For Oregon, as for all the other states, it meant that relief would be divided into two categories: direct relief administered at the state level through the State Emergency Relief Administration--SERA; and work relief to be administered through the state office of the federal Works Progress Administration--WPA.
CHAPTER IV

THE WORK PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION IN OREGON

The Works Progress Administration in Oregon incorporated much of the organizational structure of the earlier FERA organization. However, unlike programs in other states, the Oregon WPA did not take over the administrative staff of the State Relief Committee. Elmer Goudy, chairman of the State Relief Committee (in 1939 the name of this agency was changed to the State Welfare Commission) and former administrator of FERA and CWA, remained a part of the state's relief effort. His agency was charged with certifying workers and determining eligibility for relief rolls. When the WPA was established in Oregon, Goudy continued to administer programs offering direct relief while new personnel were selected for the works program.

The Administrative Organization

Emerson J. Griffith was selected as state administrator for Oregon. Griffith, a former newspaperman, had been president of the Roosevelt-for-President League in Oregon and had also served as state treasurer for the Democratic party. As a reward for his work during the election, he was selected to head the Housing Administration in Oregon. According to the Oregon Voter, Griffith was given the
position with the assumption that he would use it to reward party favorites with jobs. Griffith had barely been on the job when he was tapped by Democratic party leader James Farley to be in charge of the Works Progress Administration in Oregon. After numerous conversations with Harry Hopkins concerning the possibility of continuing his position as director of the Housing Administration, Griffith accepted the WPA appointment. Griffith served as WPA administrator until February 1942, when he was replaced by Harrison Devereaux who remained with the program until it was phased out in 1943.

Griffith was aided by an assistant administrator, John Albright (from the Union Pacific Company), and a director for personnel, James Redmen (from the Portland office of Pacific Telephone). Later appointees included a director for the projects division; a director for the labor management division; a director for the finance division; and a director for the service division. That latter division included responsibility for programs for women and for professional and clerical workers. In an early reorganization, the labor management section was merged with the division of employment and the personnel division was abolished. Personnel duties were divided between the employment division and the state administrative office.

The district offices paralleled the state organization. Each district had a director and an assistant director in charge of the district divisions. All district appointments were subject to approval by Griffith's office. After a year, in an attempt to provide greater centralization and efficiency, the district offices were eliminated. In the new structure, planning was done at the state level but project
supervision and site visits were done in the field by the field engineers and projects superintendents. In this arrangement, the state office began to lose touch with the projects in the local communities. Project supervision was too remote and it did not allow for ongoing contact with local project sponsors. By 1937, district offices were re-instated but the number of districts was reduced to four.

The four districts were divided as follows: District 1, with headquarters in Pendleton, included most of the eastern portion of the state; District 2, with headquarters in Portland, included Clatsop county in the north and Crook county in the east; District 3, with headquarters in Salem, included the Willamette corridor along with the coast counties north of Douglas county; and District 4, with headquarters in Medford embraced the rest of the state. Administrative duties and responsibility for projects were handled, whenever possible, at the district level. District managers were responsible for coordinating projects with the Portland office. In addition, the district manager was the field representative of the Projects division (later renamed the Engineering and Construction division).

Once district boundaries were established and the organization was in place, Griffith's office faced the task of developing work projects. The first ones by necessity had to be those that would bring about immediate employment. The goal of the program, according to Griffith, was "to remove a maximum number of persons from the relief rolls to work in the shortest time possible." Each jurisdiction receiving funding under the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act was required to send to Griffith's office a list of the employment skills needed and of the projects it
was planning to undertake.

Each project was to be useful to the public and, at the same time, provide employment for as many workers as possible. In addition, projects were to employ workers at jobs that were comparable to work they had been doing before they became unemployed. In order to accomplish that goal, the Portland office needed to identify prospective sponsors, to identify a pool of workers available for employment, and to obtain adequate equipment to accomplish the work.

*Project Implementation*

The first step in implementation was to identify a project and a local sponsor. Sponsorship could be under the auspices of any public agency such as the state, county or city, a school board or a similar jurisdiction. The pre-requisites for a project were that it provide jobs for those currently on the relief rolls; be located in areas reasonably close to where those needing employment lived; start immediately; and be useful. The last point was a focus of controversy during the existence of the WPA. Griffith noted in an early edition of the WPA monthly bulletin, "Before we pass judgement . . . on the merit of any particular project, we should consider the fact that people have different opinions as to value."

Although public agencies were eager to sponsor projects, they were cautious because of the uncertainty of ongoing federal funding. The continuation of the WPA depended on annual Congressional approval of funds. For that reason sponsors were
reluctant to undertake any project that required long-range planning. Later, as sponsors' contribution requirements were increased, it became more difficult for jurisdictions to budget for projects. Oregon had, at that time, a 6 percent tax limitation law that made it difficult for public agencies to find additional funding for work projects. Sponsorship of a project also meant that the jurisdiction, in conjunction with the district manager, would plan the project. Plans were submitted to the state office and from there to the regional center and finally to Washington, D.C. Once approved, the plans were sent back to the district for implementation, a practice that was time-consuming and discouraged quick action. While many of those involved with the WPA criticized the procedure, it remained in place throughout the program.

Local sponsors were encouraged to monitor the daily progress of the project and to make adaptations to local conditions whenever necessary. Occasions arose when the same equipment was needed for more than one job. In those situations, the sponsor was allowed to remove the equipment while project work was either slowed or temporarily suspended. Sponsors also agreed to complete the project or a major unit of it if, for some reason, WPA funds were withdrawn. In general, most local jurisdictions were glad to have the opportunity to sponsor a project. As long as the state and local governments were required to fund direct relief, it was in their interest to move those on relief to a federally-funded project and off relief rolls.

A difficulty confronting the Oregon WPA was that most of the state's unemployed population clustered around the Portland metropolitan area. The
problem was in finding enough projects to provide work for them and at the same time benefit areas of the state that did not have a sufficient number of people on relief to qualify for large projects.

Griffith's office solved this by having several jurisdictions cooperatively sponsor a project. That had the benefit of providing more state funding, and it allowed the less populated areas an opportunity to participate in WPA. An outstanding example of this was the construction of the Wolf Creek Highway (Highway 26) and the Wilson River Highway which provided direct access from the Portland area to the coast. The project, while under the leadership of the Highway Commission, involved WPA sponsorship in five counties.

The state administrator's office compiled a backlog of projects and had at hand a list of projects that could be quickly put into place. The level of backlog was kept at approximately 50 percent more man-months than was necessary to meet the state's employment quota.

Once a sponsor and a project had been selected, workers had to be identified who met eligibility standards. In most instances, that was the job of the State Relief Committee. Committee employees would search the relief rolls for qualified workers who were currently unemployed and suggested them for WPA employment. In the early days of Griffith's administration, the largest pool of available workers were those classified as unskilled. There were two reasons for that classification. Under FERA, most jobs available were for unskilled workers. Although the WPA was organized to employ workers with a variety of talents, most applicants chose to check
"unskilled" on the work application because they believed that such a classification would make them more employable. Once the service projects were established, many of those workers were transferred to projects that required clerical or professional expertise.9

The final hurdle to overcome in planning a project was the availability of equipment. Because of the seemingly temporary nature of the WPA, there was a reluctance on both the state and local level to invest in heavy equipment. As the depression continued, and as more districts were requesting large scale projects, state officials established a warehouse and supply unit. Project sponsors were able to rent heavy equipment on an "as needed" basis. By establishing the unit, the state office was able to spread equipment costs over the entire state.

With the first stages of the organization completed, Griffith's administration began the transfer of individuals from relief programs to WPA projects. In June 1935, nearly 18,000 workers were transferred.10 As was the case at the national level, the early assignments were not well conceived, and workers were thrust into work situations for which they were unprepared. According to the Oregon Voter, many of the WPA work assignments were made "in haste, most of them unadapted to individual fitness, most of them outdoors under conditions which cannot be faced without heavy clothing and boots."

Eventually, those early logistical difficulties were overcome. Two problems which continued to plague the Oregon WPA throughout its existence were the labor
unions and the quota system. In an article in the Oregonian, labor leader Ben Osborne assailed WPA wage scales saying that they averaged 60 cents an hour, far below the prevailing scale. Although this was true, WPA wages were higher than relief payments. The unions feared that WPA wage scales would drive down wages for non-WPA employees. Griffith, repeating the position of the Roosevelt administration, said that WPA workers were on jobs created for them and that they should be content with subsistence wages. He remarked, "We have a limited amount of money to pay the wages of a great number of men and women and we can't spread it around the way we intended unless a subsistence wage is paid." The issue of prevailing versus subsistence scales was never entirely resolved during the lifetime of the WPA in Oregon. The district offices, at times, objected to the policy of paying less than prevailing wages because it added to their difficulty in hiring experienced project supervisors. Later, Oregon administrators recognized the problem and made accommodations whenever necessary to get around the provision.

Unions also objected to using unskilled workers on projects requiring highly skilled labor. According to the unions, such practices deprived skilled workers of jobs and forced them onto the relief rolls. In reality, work was available because the sponsors were receiving WPA funding. Without that funding and the requirement to use it on the unemployed, the projects would not have been undertaken. The unions' arguments were similar to those made throughout the depression by the business community. Business claimed that the federal government was taking money away from the private sector by financing building projects. Yet,
without federal aid, most of the projects would not have been built.

Another ongoing difficulty for the Oregon office was the quota system. Quotas were assigned by the national office and changed regularly. The state's employment quota was based on its total population and on the proportion of its families on relief. Because the WPA was never intended to replace private sector employment, quotas fluctuated according to the strength of the marketplace.

The quota system was harmful to Oregon because of its impact on seasonal employment and the consequent pitting of the agricultural sector against the WPA. As the time for seasonal employment approached, farmers demanded that quotas be reduced in order to create a pool of unemployed labor. In response, the WPA urged workers to leave WPA employment in order to accept agricultural employment. Many WPA workers did so with disastrous results for themselves and the state relief agency. As winter approached and the demand for seasonal workers was reduced, those workers once more sought jobs with the WPA. They were refused re-employment because summer quotas continued to be in place. Needing assistance, they turned to the State Relief Committee at a rate of 50 to 100 people a day, resulting in a financial crisis for that body.

In 1936, when once more they were urged to apply for seasonal work, many WPA employees refused to leave the federal project and risk jeopardizing their WPA status. Leaders in the agricultural community decried the situation and the Oregonian carried stories of outraged citizens who saw crops not getting harvested while WPA employees continued with government work. The response of the
national office was to reduce state quotas from 19,850 in March to 15,850 in June. After announcing the reduction, national administrator Harry Hopkins commented, "In establishing these employment figures for your state, consideration was given to such factors as seasonal employment, farm employment and work opportunities." The Oregon Voter worried that private industry would be unable to absorb the number of workers laid off from WPA work and that those workers would once again flood state relief offices. Finally, in 1939, Griffith ruled that WPA employees who left the organization for work would be given preferential treatment should they elect to return to the WPA.

The quota system also worked against sponsors of projects since they could never be sure if there would be an employment pool available to them. In 1939, federal WPA officials threatened to slash overall quotas by 400,000. Oregon's share of the cut amounted to 2,700 workers, meaning that number of people would be removed from WPA employment even though they had no other jobs available to them. In most cases, the likely projects to be shut down were in smaller towns, where other means of employment were doubtful. When the final congressional appropriations for 1939 were passed, Oregon lost 1,420 workers from WPA rolls. The purpose of quotas was to have a system that would ebb and flow in tune with the economy; the result was to make ongoing planning extremely difficult. The quota system plagued the Oregon WPA throughout the program's existence.

In addition to employment quotas, there were financial quotas, based on the state administrator's estimate of the money it would take to fund the work projects.
In the beginning of the program, it was difficult for Griffith to make more than an educated guess on costs since the state had no previous financial history of funding public works. The result was projects that were started without any indication of when funds would be available. If no funds become available, workers were either laid off or reassigned to other projects. Eventually, funding became more predictable. Instead of learning in the beginning of the month what was that month's allotment, state administrators were provided with three and four month's notification. In turn, the state administrators developed a backlog of projects that gave them a better basis for making budget predictions.

*The WPA and the Politics of Oregon*

At the time that Griffith was attempting to establish an effective organization to administer the WPA programs, he was working in a political environment which seesawed between support and hostility. Governor Charles Martin, a Democrat elected on Roosevelt's coattails, began his tenure as governor in support of the administration's policies. But he quickly established his opposition to most New Deal programs by commenting that WPA monies should not have been allocated to the states because "democratic nations have lost their moral force through pampering their people." Later, he remarked that Harry Hopkins could "keep his money out of Oregon."19 Throughout his term as governor, Martin continued to oppose both federal and state spending programs. Martin believed that those seeking relief
should be able to live comfortably on $10.00 a month. He, of course, did not follow this practice, having the financial comfort of his salary as governor of Oregon and his military pension.

Griffith also faced opposition from other Democrats who criticized him for his unwillingness to use the WPA as a means for delivering patronage to Roosevelt supporters. On the administrative level, the Oregon WPA was well-organized and reasonably free from partisan politics. Unlike programs in other states which were rampant with corruption, Oregon's program was viewed as being almost too non-partisan. In a letter to James Farley, Chairman of the National Democratic Committee, Fred Kelly of the Jackson county Democratic committee complained that Griffith acted against party interest by being too non-partisan. Kelly was angered that Griffith was hiring both Republicans and Democrats in the state organization. Kelly was also upset by a memorandum issued through Griffith's office that instructed administrative employees to maintain a non-partisan attitude within the workplace and to refrain from political activity outside of the organization.

Throughout his tenure as state administrator for the WPA, Griffith struggled with the ambivalent attitude of Oregonians towards any federal involvement in state affairs. As James Patterson has commented, "Westerners were already disposed to distrust federal bureaucrats [and] they came to regard the Roosevelt administration as an eastern, urban, indeed somewhat alien operation." Moreover, the state was already feeling overburdened by its relief debts. Of the $10 spent by the state and counties on relief, only $3 came from federal sources. Oregonians wanted a
balanced budget even it meant fewer services and fewer federal dollars. In discussing the success of the WPA in Oregon, the Oregon Voter noted that the outstanding achievements of the program were not at unreasonable cost to the state.\textsuperscript{24}
CHAPTER V

WPA PROJECTS IN OREGON

In the rush to find jobs and to begin spending money, public agencies turned to the easiest projects they could find: those relying mainly on manual labor. Thus, most of the early projects were labor intensive, relying much more on human resources than on equipment. As with the Civil Works Programs, this is where some of the early accusations of "leaf-raking" and "boondoggling" originated.¹ In the 1930s both of those terms were used to describe unnecessary or wasteful work funded by the federal government. A description of a project on 39th street in Portland is indicative of some of the hostile attitudes towards WPA work projects: "there were about fifty men graveling the side of the road, working with shovels and rakes. There were too many men working in the space available. They lacked elbow room. Some men continually tested the strength of their shovels by leaning on them."² Since there were more bodies than tools, large numbers of people stood around.

Another ongoing difficulty for WPA administrators was finding project work that would match the skills of those on the relief rolls. In the early months of the program most of those hired were assigned to do manual labor. However, following the pattern of the earlier Civil Works Program and the programs of the State Employment Relief Administration, the WPA began to use the skills of professional and white collar workers.
The Service Projects

Several such programs, especially the service projects, were successful. Those projects encompassed not only the art, music, theatre, and writers projects, but also less well-known endeavors. Among the latter programs were the adult education, the school lunch, and the sewing projects. In addition, there were numerous organizations throughout the state such as the State Planning Commission that took advantage of WPA funds to hire skilled clerical workers.

An advantage to the professional and white collar projects was that they frequently could be put into place anywhere in the state. Almost every community had need of small scale projects that would employ clerical or service workers. For example, the school lunch program was the type of project that required very little in the way of equipment and supplies and which was extremely successful. The goal of this project was to prepare and serve meals to school children. Participants could be involved at several levels, ranging from raising food in their gardens to picking and preserving fresh food. Interested persons could also serve the lunches. Clerical support was used to organize the program and to keep daily records of the services. According to a WPA report, the school lunch program was developed in response to a demand from school officials and others that school children be fed. At its close, 90 percent of the "schools throughout the state were serving complete meals without cost to the child."

Another important service project in Oregon was the sewing project whose
purpose was to employ unemployed and unskilled women who had no previous work experience. The projects were sponsored by the county relief agencies and were established wherever space and equipment were available. Although early projects were labor intensive, the work was later centralized and organized on a state-wide level.\(^4\) Up until World War II, clothing and other articles produced by women on the sewing project was distributed to hospitals and needy families throughout the state. Once the war had begun, the majority of women on the sewing project were absorbed into the war industry. By June 1942, approximately 2 million garments had been produced by the project.

Service projects played a major public relations role for the WPA because they often brought together officials who planned the project and local communities. In many small cities and towns, this contact might be the only one residents would have with a federal agency. Representatives of the community were able to learn about the WPA, and the WPA was able to hear what the community thought about their programs.\(^5\) Often programs were continued by the community when WPA funding ended. In many areas, the nursery school and library programs were continued by volunteers and financed by local contributions. Service projects continued to be a major public relations channel for the WPA throughout its existence.
Federal Project No. 1

The cultural projects unlike the other service projects were not administered by Griffith's organization. Those projects were designated, "Federal Project Number 1". They included the arts, music, theatre and writers projects and the Historical Records Survey. Unlike other programs that were initiated at the local level and referred up through the hierarchy, the four cultural projects and the records survey were sponsored and funded by the national office of the WPA. Federal WPA administrator Harry Hopkins reasoned that most states would be unlikely to fund projects that did not have an obvious financial payback to the local communities. Centralization also guaranteed a uniform approach and structure to the projects. Each cultural project had its own national and state administrator who was not responsible to the state WPA administrator. However, since the administrator of the cultural projects often relied on the state WPA machinery to carry out their programs, the cultural projects which were most successful were the ones in which the two administrators worked cooperatively. While local sponsors were not required, local cooperation was usually necessary because most projects required the use of local facilities.

Of all of the four cultural projects, the best known and most successful in Oregon was the writers' project. It was supported well on the state level because WPA administrator Griffith, a former journalist and fiction writer, believed in the federal funding for the cultural projects. He was active in leading the search for
an administrator for the program and recommended the hiring of Alfred Powers for the post. During the seven years of its existence, the writers' project was responsible for numerous publications of both fiction and non-fiction. Unlike some other states that had several well-known or soon-to-be well-known writers working for it, the Oregon Writers' Project did not produce great and/or controversial works of art. According to one writer it had a "penchant for undertaking a variety of trifling activities." While that may be true, the Oregon Writers' project was responsible for compiling one of the most fact-filled books on Oregon history, the Oregon Guide. The state guide which was part of a major WPA project, the American Guide series, was a great success for the Oregon Writers' Project. Years after its publication, the Guide continues to be a fount of information on the cities and towns of Oregon.

While the Federal Arts Project for Oregon was not as well known, it too, has left an enduring legacy. The interior decoration of Timberline Lodge (the entire lodge was a major construction project for the Oregon WPA) is probably the best known of all of the Oregon WPA projects and the one that comes most quickly to people's mind when the WPA is mentioned. The art work on Timberline included paintings and handicrafts, pieces and furniture, relief carvings, and a variety of murals and glass mosaics. In addition to this work, the Arts Project undertook small projects throughout the state, including much of the ornamental iron work found on the campuses of the University of Oregon and Oregon State University.

The Music and the Theatre projects are not as well remembered today. Because music projects had been organized by FERA, they were put into place more
quickly than the other cultural projects. At the time, they provided employment for both amateur and professional artists, writers, and composers. Although most of the programs were performed in Portland, many of the smaller cities and towns had their local orchestras and band concerts in the park. One writer has praised the music program, saying that an advantage of that program and the other cultural programs was that they included people who were "drawn from pick and shovel work. Naturally, such work was very distasteful and a waste of talent."\textsuperscript{11}

Another major undertaking by the Works Projects Administration was the Historical Records Survey. In Oregon, the Historical Records Survey and the Writers' Project were both under the same state director. The primary goal of the Records Survey was to locate, arrange, and catalog historical records. Once this was completed, project workers prepared and published an inventory. Since most of the records were state, county, and city government archives, the Survey collected a wealth of information for present and future historians. The historical records survey was also an example of the way the WPA attempted to match workers to the work. Many unemployed clerical workers, teachers, librarians, and historians were employed in the task of compiling data for its surveys.

The service projects were popular and frequently, as with the sewing and the school lunch projects, provided necessary services. Yet, the major source of employment continued to be the works projects. They also presented major logistical difficulties for the Oregon WPA.
The Work Projects

Clearly, not all WPA projects could be located in a single geographical place. Yet, the main source of capital and the highest rate of unemployment was in the Portland metropolitan area. While the first year of the WPA was spent in finding projects that could create immediate employment, the second year focused on developing long range plans. These plans included major projects that would use workers from the Portland area but which would be located elsewhere. It benefitted those areas wanting to take advantage of the WPA monies but which did not have a sufficient labor pool—either in size or in skill.

Most of the projects developed for that purpose were either road-building or water works projects. In order to carry them out, workers were moved from their homes to the location of the construction sites, where housing and sanitary facilities were frequently inadequate. Before a project could be started, work camps had to be constructed. The Wilson River Highway and the Wolf Creek Highway projects were built by workers housed in camps. One camp on the Tillamook section of the Wilson Highway accommodated 150 workers, while Camp McNamers ten miles away was designed for 350 occupants.

Construction of the camps, most frequently undertaken by WPA workers, included bunk houses, kitchens, mess halls, and an infirmary. For the most part, the buildings were portable so they could be re-used. Once the camps were completed, they were staffed whenever possible by WPA workers. Thus, although the thrust of
the projects was to hire laborers, they also created jobs for white collar and professional people. The work camps provided many workers with housing, regular meals, and medical treatment. Although this was better treatment than most had had in months, the relocation of workers into work camps at times met resistance. An article in the Coos Bay Times describes the anger of workers who faced the choice of being laid off their WPA job or being transferred to Yachats and separated from their families. Some workers told reporters that they would rather stay at home and starve than be moved from their homes.12

A continual problem faced by the Oregon WPA was the lack of adequate equipment and materials. In order to provide work relief quickly during its early months, the WPA took over many of the projects being done under the auspices of the State Relief Committee. The only tools available at that time were those left over from the FERA and CWA projects—pickaxes and shovels. Frequently, WPA project leaders had to rent or borrow equipment from the sponsor in order to complete their assignments. Added to that complication was lack of a warehouse and supply unit. Without a central supply area, there was no way to make equipment available throughout a district, nor was there a place to store equipment not being used. After the first year of operation, a Works Projects Administration Supply Section was established that was responsible for purchasing equipment and materials and for supplying them to the districts. While the local sponsor was the major contributor in providing the equipment, the supply section insured that large projects could be undertaken with greater ease.
The unwillingness of the Congress to fund the WPA for more than a year at a time was another problem when the state attempted to undertake large projects. Frequently, sponsors were reluctant to provide support for big construction projects when there was no guarantee that funding would be forthcoming. Moreover, qualified workers from the private sector, who were needed to supervise projects, were reluctant to leave their jobs for what they viewed as a temporary situation.\(^{13}\) While Washington administrator Harry Hopkins generally received the total funding he requested, the amount distributed to each state would vary yearly.

By the end of the WPA in Oregon, the planning and implementing of major construction projects was a reasonably smooth process. For the larger service programs, particularly the sewing projects, logistics continued to be a problem. The primary difficulty was that those projects, too, required major equipment but, unlike the construction work, the equipment needed to be permanently assigned to an area. For example, the sewing project needed heavy-duty power machines in order to operate successfully. As long as a local community had a sewing project, the machines were required. In addition, many areas needed special facilities to house the workers when they were on duty. Ultimately, the responsibility for furnishing and housing equipment rested with the particular project.

As the United States began to prepare for war, many of the projects in both the construction and the service areas became defense-oriented. The work previously accomplished by the Oregon WPA also lent itself to the war effort. This was particularly true of the construction of major highways and civilian airport facilities.
The transition to more defense-related activities was also easy for those working in the writers' project. In fact, the first suggestion that the Writers' Project become involved in wartime propaganda came from T. J. Edmunds, the Writers' Project administrator who succeeded Alfred Powers. Writers on the project produced scripts and press releases for the armed services and put together a series of pamphlets describing Oregon's wartime resources. About one half of the fifty writers still with the project worked full-time for the United States Army's recruiting services.

As the United States moved closer to war, employment moved away from WPA projects and to war-related activity. When the WPA was officially ended in 1943, only eighty-seven persons remained on WPA projects.
CONCLUSION

The WPA was one of the many Roosevelt administration programs aimed at returning the economy to a productive level. Because Roosevelt and his advisors believed that work programs were morally better than direct relief, the emphasis throughout the depression was to find a program that would not bankrupt the government and that would create jobs. The WPA was one of those programs.

Because the local and state agencies were unable to meet the growing relief needs of the population, the work relief provided by WPA projects was a necessity in the state of Oregon. Yet, as James Patterson notes, "The West, long a stronghold of rugged individualism, faced only reluctantly the need for generous, long-term state spending for relief and welfare." That reluctance was demonstrated in the ongoing opposition of governor Charles Martin and other state elected officials to support legislation which would help in funding WPA and other federal programs. Nor did citizens appear willing to support more than basic relief measures. A 1936 sales tax that would have offered funding for relief and old age assistance was defeated by a six to one margin. Oregonians were, however, willing to accept federal funds. As Leonard Arrington shows in his statistical analysis of New Deal funding, Oregon ranked eleventh among the states in the amount of per capita expenditures spent by the WPA in the state.

The depression of the 1930s accelerated the shift in the balance of power between Oregon and the federal government. The obvious manifestation of that shift
was the increase in federal funds and federal regulations that accompanied the relief and work programs of the Roosevelt administration. Programs of both the Civil Works Administration and the Works Progress Administration were federal overlays on the state government. Administrators in those programs were federal employees who were bound by national regulations and who were loyal to them, not the state government. A more tangible sign of that shift was reflected in the change of the state's infrastructure. Under the auspices of the WPA, the physical appearance of Oregon was significantly modified. WPA workers constructed 4,934 miles of highways and roads, built 306 bridges and remodeled 124 older ones, installed 340 miles of water mains, drained 22,383 acres of land, and built or improved 324 playing fields and parks. Although many of the major construction projects were in the Portland metropolitan area, the Service and Art projects were implemented throughout the state. The program's major construction project, Timberline Lodge, stands as a magnificent symbol of the WPA's legacy and continues to this day to be a major attraction. The Oregon Writers' Project's major undertaking, Guide to Oregon, has been updated and is still considered a useful source for Oregon historical and travel information.

In terms of organizational structure and administrative difficulties, the Oregon WPA was fairly standard. It replicated other states in its organization, building onto the structure of the earlier FERA program whenever possible. The problems faced by Griffith and other WPA administrators were primarily due to federal restrictions. Uncertainty over funding and employment quotas made long-range planning an
impossibility. That, in turn, made local sponsors wary of supporting large projects that might be cancelled if funding were withdrawn.

The unwillingness of the Roosevelt administration to commit to a viable federally-funded work relief program also harmed the state program. Reliance on a means test, the ability to pay only subsistence wages, and the insistence that a labor pool be available for summer and fall crop harvesting all worked against the Oregon program. These barriers reflected the opposition of powerful interests in state politics and the political conservatism of the people of Oregon.

Robert Burton in his essay on the New Deal and Oregon explores the possibility that the depression could have altered the political climate of the state. The conditions caused by the depression and the programs of the Roosevelt administration, along with Oregon's history of political experimentation, offered Oregonians an opportunity for an innovative approach to solving the relief needs of its citizens. In theory, Oregon leaders might have taken advantage of the funding programs of the thirties to develop a new method for providing for the state's unemployed and needy. "Oregon's relief committees prepared the state well in terms of familiarizing Oregonians with work relief ideas." Yet, Oregonians did not take that creative step. Throughout the thirties, fiscal cooperation with the federal government came slowly and grudgingly.

There were some Oregonians including Governor Charles Martin who believed that the WPA was a step towards socialism. That was certainly not the case. Neither on the national nor the state level was the WPA intended to supplant private
enterprise. In his study of the work relief programs of the New Deal, William Bremer writes that the "WPA conformed to the unwritten, conservative rule that prohibited government interference with an ongoing capitalist economy." In retrospect, the WPA provided the people of Oregon with work relief and with an improved infrastructure. It started a pattern of change in state-federal relations by showing state legislatures the benefits of federal funding. It also led to a permanent structure for providing relief benefits to the unemployed. Philosophically, however, nothing was changed. Oregonians for the most part viewed the WPA as a stop gap program that, had the economy functioned as it was supposed to, would not have been necessary. State authorities continued to congratulate themselves for getting through the financial crisis of the thirties with a minimum of state support. In the political arena New Deal programs such as the WPA did not usher in an age of Democratic party rule. In the 1938 gubernatorial elections, the coalition candidate State Senator Henry Hess was defeated by Republican Charles Sprague. As the economy of the state improved and workers left relief work for defense work, the concern for finding appropriate ways to provide relief funding were replaced with concerns for winning the war. Burton describes the effect of the WPA in the state when he writes, "Although the New Deal certainly left its mark on Oregon, it did not prompt a revolution in habits of thought . . . the force of tradition has remained strong in Oregon."  

Oregonians like most of the people in the West continued to view themselves as rugged individualists who were able to succeed in spite of interference from the
federal government. They have, when convenient, refused to recognize the relationship between federal monies and the opening and the growth of the West. Whether that relationship meant using United States Army troops to eliminate Native Americans in order to pave the way for settlement or the use of Congressional support for the development of a cross continental railroad, the federal government has had a major role in the shaping of the West. To refuse to acknowledge that role is to weave, in the words of Patricia Limerick, "a net of denial" when contemplating their relationship with the federal government.⁸
NOTES

INTRODUCTION


THE DEPRESSION


2. Ibid., 1.


10. Ibid., 70.


14. Ibid.


19. Ibid., 130.


23. Ibid., 71.


CIVIL WORKS ADMINISTRATION AND WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION


21. Ibid., 133.


24. Ibid., 9.

25. Ibid., 84.

THE DEPRESSION IN OREGON


8. Thomas E. Graham, "Administration of Unemployment Relief in Oregon, 1930-1936" (Bachelor of Arts thesis, Reed College, 1936), 49.


16. "Confidential Report and Recommendations to Executive Committee, Governor's State-Wide Relief Council, 1932" (Eugene: Oregon Collection, University of Oregon), 18.


18. "Report of the Committee Appointed by Paul V. Maris Director of Extension, Oregon State College, as Authorized at the June 30 meeting of the Executive Committee of the Governor's State-Wide Relief Council, 1932" (Eugene: Oregon Collection, University of Oregon), 2.


20. Report of Executive Committee, State-Wide Relief Council (Salem, Ore.: State Printing Department, 1933), 17.


30. Ibid., unnumbered pages.

THE WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION IN OREGON


3. Ibid., 2.


8. Ibid., 8.

9. Ibid., 19.


17. Ibid., 40.


WPA PROJECTS IN OREGON

1. The expression "boondoggling" was attributed to Robert H. Link, a scout master, who used it in 1925 when referring to the crafts made by Boy Scouts. James S. Olson, ed., Historical Dictionary of the New Deal: From Inauguration to Preparation for War (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 56.

2. Thomas E. Graham, "Administration of Unemployment Relief in Oregon, 1930-1936" (Bachelor of Arts thesis, Reed College, 1936), 142.


7. Ibid., 86.

8. Ibid., 162.


15. Ibid., 115.

CONCLUSION


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