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The Great Depression In Coles County, Illinois, 1929-1939

David E. Carpenter

Eastern Illinois University

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CARPENTER, DAVID E

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by

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THE GREAT DEPRESSION IN COLES COUNTY,

ILLINOIS, 1929-1939

(TITLE)

BY

David E. Carpenter

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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Raymond L. Kozh

ADVISER

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DATE

Robert Hennings

DEPARTMENT HEAD

PREFACE

References to the Great Depression still stir dichotomous reactions in the hearts and minds of many Americans. Accounts of the national reaction to the hardships and the panaceas of the 1930's abound, but the analysis of the national trauma from local perspectives has been largely skirted. Yet only through such component research can the veracity of essential national generalizations be attested. In fact, were suicides of economic impetus limited to urban areas? Were the voters attracted to Franklin D. Roosevelt more than to the local Democratic Party? How much did local politics and personalities actually blunt and impede the intent and functioning of federal relief and recovery programs? In fact, were the rural areas of the nation so destitute that federal aid was essential? And to what degree did local values and ideologies evolve under economic duress? Such questions need to be answered at the local level to better corroborate the national profiles of the 1930's.

This work will attempt to examine an atom in the cosmos of the Depression--the rural Illinois county of Coles--and assess one locale's response to the nation's worst economic crisis. When such works are contrasted and amalgamated, perhaps an even more accurate and comprehensive panorama of a key historical watershed will result.

For their encouragement and cooperation in the compilation of this work, I am indebted to those citizens of Coles who so graciously allowed themselves to be personally interviewed. A debt of gratitude is also owed to the public servants in the Coles County offices of the Circuit Clerk, County Clerk, and

Farm Advisor. Dr. Raymond Koch deserves special recognition not only for his support and suggestions in the writing of this paper, but also for his stimulation of classroom interest in the Thirties and historical writing.

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CHAPTER I

THE LULL AND THE STORM, 1929-1932

National industrial booms and depressions seldom quickly touch an agricultural region such as Coles County; but very often the time filter does little more than retard the arrival of an almost equally abrasive form of rural despair. Although Coles residents in the 1930's were unfamiliar with skyscrapers and the suicidal penchants promoted by such urban monuments to more prosperous times, they could hardly bank on the "moat of land" to shield them from so profound a crisis as the nation encountered in the decade begun in 1929.

To be sure, Coles clans were no strangers to the plummeting of agricultural produce values and such urban phenomena as bank failures and severe unemployment; and certainly many prayers and promises for prosperity revisited crossed the lips of aspiring but realistic citizens of this east-central Illinois county. But the deepest throes of the national depression were not found in Coles County. "Hard times" were just that, but they seemed hand-packed, not petrified.

In addition, avid community spirit and cooperative neighborliness helped to make the blows of the depression glancing ones. At the same time, the mettle of the time-honored self-help ethic appeared to gain merit. True, many looked to the national government and the New Deal, but as a last resort

and not to control their lives forever after; rather, Franklin Delano Roosevelt represented a change--a departure--from the cumulative stagnation of November, 1932.

The "Thirties" do represent a time of arrest in the economic life of Coles County. The first half of the decade was certainly the worst by far, as it was nationally. But decreasing farm income and increasing commercial inactivity did not mean the county came to a screeching halt. Life went on; people lived each day--sometimes it may have even seemed day by day--but basic optimism prevailed; its essence one of determination rather than glib bouyancy.

Following the national trend, Coles natives were more than ever before prepared for experimental government, and therefore promoted and cooperated with federal, state, and even local innovative programs. It was one thing to be optimistic and another to sit on one's hands. Yes, the government should act, and in areas perhaps heretofore tabooed; but, by the same token and as a precondition, the individual, perhaps in voluntary associations, must do his utmost to cope with the distressing circumstances of the depression years. But the Depression was, after all, not begun in this rural agrarian county, and, provincial as their natural inclinations might have been, Coles voters and thinkers did demand national action in 1932.

For the first real time since 1884 and only the fifth time in the county's history, the voters gave the Democratic Party the political nod. The only other national Democratic vote in Coles in the twentieth century was really a winning Republican vote, but split in 1912 between the more popular

Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, thereby allowing Woodrow Wilson a substantial winning margin. The first Coles Democratic vote occurred in its first national election in 1832 for Andrew Jackson, who ironically promised less federal involvement while his centennial successor promised more.

Of course much federal action was administered through a locally controlled bureaucracy not so politically overwhelmed during the Thirties. Occasionally, the local power structure compromised the objective of a program, but a high percentage of the people appreciated and cooperated with a majority of the federal efforts. Though he was highly reluctant in most cases to encourage further extension of any phase of government into his daily life, the Coles resident saw little alternative for reversing the increasingly severe economic trends in both Coles and the nation.

In 1929, life in the county was highly rural oriented. The lack of water transportation and the predominance of rich agricultural land had predestined the agrarian emphasis. A medium-sized county with 508.84 square miles of dark-brown silt-loam soils, ninety percent of Coles County was suitably arable and profitable. The brown rolling "Grand Prairie" to the north drifted into upland timber regions of yellowish gray soil at the southern border, creating an environment in which red-ribbon diversified farming flourished. The 1925 census figures hailed corn, oats, hay, broomcorn and wheat the leading production crops in that order, with corn the leader by far. It also listed swine, cattle, and horses as the primary classes of valuable farm animals, also in that

order but with a small margin separating them. Perhaps wheat's importance was underrated at fifth in 1924, but the list as a whole is not atypical of the farm production of the 1920's. Broomcorn, while not the leading crop, was highly significant in the county's production as Coles lay in the heart of one of the world's few broomcorn districts and often produced more than any other Illinois county. So, during the Twenties, the average Coles 160-acre farm focused on diversified farming, with cash-grain farming valuing about 1.5 times as much as livestock production.¹

× In 1930, the total population of Coles County was 37,315 persons; of these, 14,631 resided in Mattoon, 8,012 in Charleston, 1,036 in Oakland, and the balance of 13,636 in the outlying villages or on farms.² The moderate outlying village population was concentrated in Humboldt, Lerna, and Ashmore; lesser villages and hamlets included Cooks Mills, Dorans, Trilla, Janesville, Loxa, Fairgrange, Bushton, Rardin, and Hutton. In reality, only Mattoon approached an industrial town, both in size and manufacturing. Yet in Mattoon, as in Charleston, much of the industry was service or agriculture oriented. While the labor force for more manufacturing seemed available, there was certainly not an abundance of power. The water

¹University of Illinois, Agricultural Experiment Station, Soil Report No. 44: Coles County Soils, by R.S. Smith et al. (Urbana, Ill., 1929), pp. 1-4; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Market Data Handbook of the United States, by Paul Stewart (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1929), p.125.

²U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Distribution, Vol. I, Retail Distribution: Part I--Summary for the United States, and Statistics for Counties and Incorporated Places of 1,000 Population and Over (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933), p. 116.

supply was equally inadequate, and it remained a thorn in the side of the "twin cities" throughout the Thirties.

Transportation, however, was adequately provided for bulk shipping by three rail systems vital to the county: the "Big Four"(Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and St. Louis), running east-west through both Charleston and Mattoon; the Illinois Central, running north-south and intersecting the Big Four in Mattoon; and the Nickel Plate, running north-southwesterly and intersecting the Big Four in Charleston. Unfortunately, this adequate rail system was not complemented by an extensive highway or secondary road system. For example, Route 121-- then Routes 131 and 132--between Toledo and Sullivan via Mattoon was not yet completed in 1930, nor was Route 130 from Diona to Greenup or from Charleston to Urbana. The slab connecting Lerna with Route 16 and the Ashmore-Oakland slab linking the northeast side of the county with the southeast side were still absent. The key highways with hard surfaces in 1930 could be narrowed to Route 16--now Route 316--running east-west through the county, and Route 45 between Fairfield and Kankakee running through Mattoon; both of these systems were relatively recently constructed as part of the state's highway development program in 1924. Route 133 was completed in 1930 to link Oakland with Route 45 and Mattoon, though in a roundabout manner. So lighter industrial transportation to Coles was a relatively recent and restricted factor in the panorama of industrial development.³

³For a brief summary of the county's railroad history, see Willingham, Russell T., "The History of Railroads in

However, the above-mentioned limitations on Coles industry should not leave the impression that an industrial void existed in Coles which the national economic waves could not affect. Charleston's only real product industry in the Thirties was the Brown Shoe factory; almost all other businesses were service related. Mattoon, however, had several other industries in addition to a Brown Shoe plant of its own. It also boasted an ice cream and dairy, broomcorn buying houses and broom factories, three large bottling plants, a water works appliance and meter box factory, and a cone valve and stationary engine factory. In addition, the Big Four railroad shops and road crews were housed in Mattoon. And in 1932 Mattoon was able to locate the Kuehne furniture factory, providing more employment and an economic stimulus. The same could be said for the location of all but one of the Illinois headquarters of oil companies in Mattoon in 1937-1938.⁴

So Mattoon, in 1930 and later, seemed more inclined toward industry than Charleston. This may have been due to several factors: the intersection of two major Illinois railroads; the intersection of two valuable hard-surfaced highways; or perhaps it was due to the energy and drive of an ambitious citizenry, or Association of Commerce. Charleston's citizenry, although with some mixed emotions, enjoyed the solitude

Coles County," Coles Historical Series, No. 3 (July 7, 1974). A fair summary of highway transportation to 1931 is found in Mattoon's Daily Journal-Gazette, March 1, 1933, p. 1.

⁴Charleston's enterprises are synopsized in the Charleston Daily News, September 27, 1930, pp. 2-3. Mattoon's establishments are summarized in the Daily Journal-Gazette, February 22, 1933, p. 1.

and familiarity more akin to a smaller, farm-oriented community. Charleston seemed more content to rest on its laurels as county seat and home of Eastern Illinois State Teachers' College.⁵

But there remained other phases of rivalry between the neighboring "twins." With its larger population, Mattoon had felt since the turn of the century that the county seat belonged with it. In the 1890's, both had contested fiercely for the location of the Eastern "Normal School." And beginning in 1930, both struggled to gain a selfish share of the Lincoln National Memorial Highway at the other's expense. Naturally, there was the perpetual struggle to control county politics and the highly coveted "lion's share" of the county tax money. Occasionally during the Thirties, the competitive background resulted in relatively innocuous issues like sports or pauper relief serving as an unfortunate front for underlying motives or methods, but the decade was hardly supercharged with inter-city hatred.

In fact, both cities had quite a lot in common, despite their rivalries. At the very core of their sentiments was a provincial attitude buttressed by fierce pride. This was true of the rest of the county as well, and all would candidly query, "So what?" Sure, the big cities had industry; but

⁵Much of the credit for bringing the Kuehne Manufacturing Company and the headquarters of the various oil companies to Mattoon seems to be deserved by the Mattoon Association of Commerce. In both instances, extra leadership efforts were expended by prominent citizens. See October-November, 1931, issues of the Daily Journal-Gazette. The Association's attitude was also derived from an interview with Alf R. Thompson, an oil field developer for Carter Oil Company.

look at the tribulation which went hand in hand with the concentration of the urban hordes! Varying degrees of this metropolitan mistrust were expressed in the county's newspapers, but all the papers focused on vivid descriptions of Chicago drinking, crime, and moral laxity. The Capone-style criminal antics associated with Chicago during Prohibition were viewed with distaste and disdain as the logical end of urban life. Therefore, the natives surveyed the most dominant Illinois city with mistrust and repugnance: "a Chicago wop named Maggio who was ordered deported for murder two years ago is back in Chicago as a walking advertisement that officialdom there is a failure;" or, "It really looks as though gangsters and crooked politicians are in supreme control of Chicago, and that their strangle hold can not be broken."⁶

There seemed definite advantages to small town life. As a Charleston editor quipped: "a hick town is a place where you can move into another house and not smell the nationality of the last tenant."⁷ Coles nativism may not have been quite so strong as so intimated, but "foreign" elements and ideas were far from welcome in a county in which the Ku Klux Klan had been fashionable during the earlier Twenties. Some even went so far as to question the teaching of French in local schools when money was tight. By the same token and depending on their prices, chain stores were sometimes viewed as alien and less than desirable. And to be called a "Jew" implied

⁶Charleston Daily News, August 7, 1929, p. 1; Daily Journal-Gazette, July 22, 1930, p. 4.

⁷Charleston Daily News, September 13, 1930, p. 1.

much more than Hebrew origins. Nativism, Protestantism, and provincialism, then, were among the accredited beliefs in the county. Life was more uniform, but also more serene, and most seemed to like it that way.⁸

x A further standard ideology in Coles centered around orthodox economics. Conservative capitalism and hard work had stood the test of time, and they remained desirable doctrine. Yet circumstances were soon to place increasing stress on these local penchants. At first, the antics of Wall Streeters on Black Thursday of October, 1929, seemed just that to Coles residents--games played between the wealthy. After all, the most respected men in America issued the soundest of assurances, and local business seemed sound, though not at the optimum. But even local business shortly reflected the national scare, and staunch Republican faith began to waver. By April, 1932, three Coles banks had closed--two permanently and the other for two months of "readjustment"--and the county had had to request state relief funds in order to care for the unemployed that slackening industrial and commercial concerns had had to release.

It was Brown Shoe Company which reacted first to the national trend. Charleston's plant had paid \$20,247 in one week in September, 1929; but by December, it was operating at three-fifths of that level. Two months later, four janitors were dismissed and workers were instructed to do their own

⁸Interview with Morgan Phipps, July 24, 1975; and with Harold Davidson, July 29, 1975.

cleaning up. Simultaneously, the Mattoon plant was "temporarily" closed down. Production continued in this "normal" manner until November 18, 1930, when Charleston Brown Shoe resorted to a six-hour day. By now, some were complaining about the local condition: "The shoe factory is making 2,000 pairs of shoes a day and most of the hands work four days a week, making around \$8.00 a week on piece work. This leaves plenty of time to pray for Hoover and Prosperity."⁹

But the Brown worker was to experience much worse than reduced hours. Those lucky enough to be working in the Mattoon plant as 1931 began were welcomed to a new year with wages cut ten percent, effective January 5. The three hundred workers simply had to appreciate that the cuts were caused by competitors' price reductions. Charleston Brown Shoe seemed fortunate still to have a force of 1,050 in March, 1931, even if the payroll was only \$15,500. But after the usual October inventory, the plant resumed production with only one-third the number previously employed, and did not again reach the previous level until the week of Christmas.¹⁰

However, the payroll was hovering around \$12,000 by the next February. As orders slowly increased, the Mattoon plant was able to double its force to almost 800 employees by mid-year, and things seemed somewhat better for the local shoe laborer in 1932. But a summer rumor of a ten percent pay cut

⁹Daily Journal-Gazette, September 18, 1929, p. 8; Charleston Daily News, December 6, 1929, p. 1; February 20, 1930, p. 1; November 18, 1930, p. 1; November 19, 1930, p. 1.

¹⁰Daily Journal-Gazette, December 31, 1930, p. 1; March 25, 1931, p. 1; Charleston Daily News, November 3, 1931, p. 1.

nearly caused a strike by the finishing department in Charleston. Perhaps it was the threatened strike which averted the cut. All in all, 1932 wasn't "normalcy," but it seemed a better year than 1931 for Charleston's "sole" factory, and the same applied to Mattoon's Brown Shoe.¹¹

Mattoon's other large industry before 1933 was the railroad industry. Naturally the state and national economic lag was to affect the transportation industry, and Mattoon's rail crews were no exception. Beginning in 1930 and lasting through most of 1932, as high as one-half the labor force of both the Illinois Central and the Big Four were periodically laid off. The I. C. tended to consolidate its services, creating a more permanent unemployment. But both were forced to lay off whole departments--like the maintenance and locomotive departments--at a time.

One bright spot in Mattoon's labor market, though not until mid-1932, was the construction and opening of the Kuehne Manufacturing Company's furniture plant at South Nineteenth and Olive Streets. The site and partial funding of the six hundred by seventy foot plant was donated by the Mattoon citizenry at a cost of about \$65,000, raised through the contributions of many citizens and merchants. In exchange, Fred Kuehne contracted to employ two hundred men within six months and repay Mattoon's investment via the payroll twenty times over before ceasing to manufacture in the city. Mattoon's leaders viewed the addition of the plant as highly desirable

¹¹Charleston Daily News, January 28, 1932, p. 1; March 29, 1932, p. 1; July 7, 1932, p. 1.

in order to prevent unemployment requiring charity--unemployment insurance, so to speak. In August, 1932, the plant was complete, and production under way. Only one hundred workers were on the job by December, but the period of training and adjustment had been unavoidable. Probably eighty of the employees were from Mattoon and their average pay of nearly \$17.00 per week was more than welcome to the city as a needed shot in the arm.¹²

Things were never, however, all that comfortable Coles-wide between 1929 and 1933. Attempts were made to rationalize the stock crash and the depression away, but they seemed a somewhat sluggish ritual with questionable success. "The aftermath of the stock market debacle is bringing a series of stories telling about banks closing, suicides, fortunes wiped out and other evidences that it rarely pays to try to make money too fast, especially when you are fooling with forces that you do not understand," quipped a Charleston editor.¹³ Mattoon's editor also offered his mellower observations: If the depression forces intellectual activity to catch up with other, more mechanical advances, then perhaps good can come of it all; apparently "the chief trouble in nearly every line of business, from agriculture to the manufacture of automobiles, seems to be over-production. We have brought forth more wheat, more automobiles, more bricks, more suits of clothes than could be sold." Unemployment and the farm sur-

¹²Daily Journal-Gazette, November 17, 1931, p. 1; July 12, 1932, p. 1; December 9, 1932, p. 1.

¹³Charleston Daily News, November 30, 1929, p. 1.

plus were interrelated by a technology fostering the ability to produce in larger quantities.¹⁴ Later, the Charleston paper would pluckishly proclaim:

Of course there is nothing really the matter with this country. Everybody has a radio or a car; nobody wears patches and nobody starves. As soon as the stocks of materials run out there will be a wild scramble to manufacture everything and the money now in savings accounts will be turned loose for a new whirligig.¹⁵

The cold facts, however, dictated that money was required to deplete stocks from the shelves or warehouses. There were many cars, but they tended to be older; and in many cases, "near-patches" represented small comfort. Coles was close to the earth so real starvation seemed not to be a problem, thanks to gardens, friends or relatives.¹⁶ But getting the money into circulation proved a serious problem which local merchants first, and later the general public, found difficult to solve. Merchants depended on semi-annual "Dollar Days" sales to move stock which was not on the common necessity list. Special one-quarter to full page ads were often run in the prosperous Charleston Daily Courier, and Mattoon's Daily Journal-Gazette; the Charleston Daily News always had trouble attracting advertising due to the free-thinking of maverick editors.¹⁷

¹⁴Daily Journal-Gazette, August 5, 1930, p. 4; September 26, 1930, p. 4.

¹⁵Charleston Daily News, June 17, 1931, p. 1.

¹⁶None of those interviewed recalled anyone starving to death; nor was there a fatal case noted in the newspapers, although severe hunger was experienced in a few instances when pride prevented a family from asking for help.

¹⁷The Charleston Daily News, published first by Claude S.

Collecting checks written was not always the easiest task either; an informal survey of Charleston merchants on the square in the first week of June, 1930, revealed that each had at least one bad check, and one had \$1,100 worth in denominations from one dollar to one hundred. But most merchants realized successful business lay in selling in the future, not lamenting sales problems of the past. Consequently they continued to advertise, and the newspapers lent their utmost support by launching "buy at home, and now!" campaigns. After all, 97% of all one needs can be found locally, and cheaper than elsewhere with service to back the product. And once the depression psychology is broken and the economic cycle has again begun to circulate, the business slump will soon be over. To begin the cycle, the newspapers cooperated vigorously with President Hoover's Emergency Committee for Employment in its "War Against Unemployment" and later "War Against Depression." At least a half dozen full-page ads were donated by the Daily Journal-Gazette during November, 1930, in the former campaign; and an equal number of major ads were run in the Charleston Daily News in the campaign of March, 1932.¹⁸

Rardin and later by his son John B. Rardin, never achieved the respect and prosperity of its rival Charleston Daily Courier, published by Benjamin Weir. The former paper was fiercely and partisanly Democratic while the latter was staunchly non-partisan, though perhaps Democratic. In Mattoon, H. F. Kendall's Daily Journal-Gazette, like the Courier, practiced more professional probity and was equally successful in advertising.

¹⁸Daily Journal-Gazette, June 7, 1930, p. 6; May 16, 1931, p. 8; Charleston Daily News, September 27, 1930, pp. 2-3; November 8, 1930, p. 1.

Nevertheless, the "hire a neighbor" newspaper campaign did not personalize the economic stagnation problem enough to fill the stores or the pockets of local merchants. So, during July, 1931, the newspaper and banks of Mattoon, in conjunction with the merchants, launched a novel "Prosperity Check" program. The effort lasted only thirty days and was designed to convince the citizenry that money was circulating and business was sound enough that there was no need to hoard money. The "prosperity check" had thirty dated spaces on the back for endorsement, and the stipulation was that a name had to be signed every twenty-four hours--thirty by the end of the month. At that time they were redeemable at the two banks and, if necessity dictated, the Daily Journal-Gazette would cash the one-, two-, three-, and five-dollar denominations. In the meantime, friends and neighbors would feel a loyalty to spend and would see plenty of familiar names who were also spending. It was hoped that the cumulative effect would stimulate business in a manner extending beyond the program itself, but the dubious success of the campaign was not unexpected in light of the lingering panic caused by the closing of area banks. Nevertheless, it did typify local spirited attempts to cooperate to undermine the "depression psychology."¹⁹

Overcoming the fear brought on by area bank failures was bound to be a difficult task because this was a "close-to-home" phase of the depression. Coles had experienced an early bank failure in December, 1926, when the First State Bank of Mattoon closed for the second time in two years.

¹⁹Daily Journal-Gazette, June 26, 1931, p. 1.

When it voluntarily liquidated, depositors found they were to be repaid in full; but when the stockholders finally received their "share" in July, 1932, only \$2.00 of their \$125 per share investment was refunded.²⁰ But Coles was to experience more monetary mishaps when the depression hit. A March 7, 1930, special afternoon edition of the Charleston Daily News brusquely broadcasted the shivering news that the oldest Coles bank, Charleston's First National, was folding after seventy-five years. Stock market rumors, war price loans on farms, and poor management--all were blamed for the failure. The other city bank, the National Trust Bank, was to liquidate the assets, among which were rumored questionable loans on 2,500 acres of farmland. The doubtful assets were to be "culled" and left under the trusteeship of First National stockholders. Rumors ran wild, especially ones indicating that stockholders would lose all. But depositors were thankful to learn that because the National Trust Bank was stepping in, they could:

. . . . just continue to write their individual checks and carry on business just the same as before.

This will make the National Trust Bank the largest and strongest bank for many miles around. A continuation of the conservative, banking principles that have characterized this bank will still be in force.²¹

As a result, normal consumer traffic was not entirely deranged. But the stockholders' fears were realized, and this distaste spilled over to the general public.

²⁰Ibid., July 28, 1932, p. 1.

²¹Charleston Daily News, March 8, 1930, p. 1.

In addition, more bank closings were to follow which contributed further to Coles' financial anxiety. The neighboring Westfield Bank closed for good in November, 1930; and in December, the First National of Kansas, Illinois, closed, following withdrawals triggered by local bankruptcies. Then, during the first week of January, 1931, the Citizens' State Bank of Oakland was unable to open. Attempting to assure the public of its stability, the Charleston National Trust Bank was obliged to run a full-page newspaper ad during the first week of 1931. Sixty-five prominent leaders or citizens lent their signatures as endorsement of the soundness of Charleston's remaining bank. Whether or not local citizens were really convinced or had little other choice is unclear; but by July, 1931, over fifty new deposit accounts had been opened here by residents of Westfield and Kansas, where they had been repaid from 40-50% of their deposits. In the meantime, postal savings deposits in the Charleston post office increased from \$4,498 in fifteen accounts as of July 1, 1930, to \$38,308 credited to seventy accounts in mid-January, 1932. Since Mattoon's postal savings volume did not simultaneously increase proportionately--its office registered only \$5,304 in mid-January--it appears Charlestonites were edging toward security on their deposits, if not their checking accounts.²²

But mid-January of 1932 brought more dismay to those of financial substance in Coles. On January 19, 1932, word arrived of the closing of two Champaign banks--the First National and the Commercial Bank--for reorganization, with the latter

²²Ibid., January 1, 1931, p. 2; July 2, 1931, p. 1; December 16, 1930, p. 1; January 16, 1932, p. 1.

more or less closing to prevent scared depositors starting a run as a result of the former's closing. But four days later, Mattoon's Central Illinois Trust and Savings Bank was ordered closed for adjustment by the directors, and some locals even argued Champaign's closings had caused scared withdrawals necessitating the closing here. As odds were laid on the safety of deposits, Mattoon's remaining bank, the National Bank, buttressed its financial reserves for a run in turn.²³

By this time, resident commercial interests and investors were clamoring for some security, and area bankers decided to go to the issue collectively, rather than wait further for it to come to them separately. Therefore, on January 26, 1932, the Coles-Cumberland Counties Federation of the Illinois Bankers' Association met in Charleston and adopted a plan tried successfully in Lawrence County. The following day, notice of the proceedings was posted as follows:

Until further notice, all time Certificates of Deposit, savings accounts and dormant accounts shall be retained intact and no payments made. General accounts subject to demand check shall be available as usual except that a supervisory action may be taken if necessity requires.

However, any and all deposits made after January 26, 1932, shall not be subject to any restrictions whatever and will be payable as desired.²⁴

Federation President F.W. "Jack" Claar of Charleston and his fellow bankers hoped thereby to reinsure confidence and prevent

²³Ibid., January 19, 1932, p. 1; Daily Journal-Gazette, January 23, 1932, p. 1.

²⁴Charleston Daily News, January 27, 1932, p. 1; Daily Journal-Gazette, January 27, 1932, p. 1.

runs resulting in a "domino effect" on secure banks. They feared repetition of the Mattoon trend--a withdrawal run on the Central Bank netting an estimated \$125,000, but with only \$7,000 being redeposited in the National Bank there. Industry, commerce, and farming were certainly not going to be benefited by buried tin cans in the backyard or hidden stuffed socks. Therefore the new policy was effective immediately.

The day after the posting of the new policy, twin city merchants registered their support for the plan of restricting withdrawals in special morning meetings of their respective Chambers of Commerce. Their support appeared warranted, as no more banks were closed in the county until the Horner-Roosevelt "banking holiday" in March of 1933. Meanwhile, it was soon determined that Mattoon's Central Bank was to reopen, and it once again resumed circulation on March 28, 1932. The much desired reopening was not without pain: approximately 75% of the 1,000 stockholders had to subscribe 75% of their stock; and at least 999 depositors in the Central Bank signed pledge cards waiving 20% of their deposits for two years. In addition, withdrawals on the remaining 80% were restricted to 10% per month.²⁵ But even those terms did not seem so steep when the maxim of the day seemed, "when a bank reopens, that means you still owe it what you borrowed, but it no longer owes you what you deposited!"²⁶

But vows of commerce associations and bankers--waivers

²⁵Daily Journal-Gazette, February 18, 1932, p. 1; February 24, 1932, p. 1.

²⁶Charleston Daily News, June 9, 1931, p. 1.

and pledge cards notwithstanding--would not restore all public confidence. Stories of hoarding money continued to be common. Mattoon merchants reported the instance of a daughter requesting that several hats be sent to her mother's house for trying on because she would not leave her entire withdrawn savings of \$700. Another report of an elderly woman paying for groceries from a pocketbook containing \$500 in varied denominations was equally indicative.²⁷

From a general perspective, it appeared by mid-1932 that the banking phase was only one aspect of a larger, and perhaps even more dismal, economic picture in Coles. The above-mentioned difficulties of the Brown Shoe factories and the railroads indicated the generally snowballing unemployment problem in the most populous areas of the county. Meanwhile, farmers were not enjoying the most pleasing trend either. They had been experiencing the futility of ever-increasing production in a glutted market for several years. Livestock prices had fluctuated erratically in the years preceding the depression, but the grain prices, essential to Coles, had declined almost steadily. The farm parity ratio, a blanket indicator of the health of agriculture, had hovered well below acceptable standards since 1920. As a result, Coles farmers were strained already when the industrial crash came. Many speculative farmers in northern Coles who had purchased land before the war prices had deflated had already found foreclosure a threat or even a reality in the latter Twenties.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., March 1, 1932, p. 1.

²⁸See Table I; also based on an interview with Morgan Phipps, July 24, 1975.

The 1929 crop year did not ease the burden in the county either. Spring floods and a parched summer meant that local farmers were unable to take advantage of the resultant respectable prices. Conditions drastically and steadily worsened over the next three years as farmers saw their real income even further decline by a third. The value of corn and wheat dropped by two-thirds and beef and pork prices slumped by one-half. These prices brought the reality of the depression to almost every resident of the county.²⁹

Under such circumstances, Coles farmers could no longer avoid frustration. President Herbert Hoover's Federal Farm Board seemed only to talk the issue to death. Board Chairman Alexander Legge's "don't grow so much" advice appeared to shed little light on the surplus-price dilemma, and the farmer figured he could commission himself to accomplish that much by burning his corn, if necessary. In short, "of course there is an overproduction of farm crops. Everybody knows that without hiring a lot of farm board wild jassacks to tell it again. What is needed is a market for the crops."³⁰ Nor did the prices seem to respond positively to government purchasing of market surpluses. By mid-1930, there seemed few bright spots in the local farmer's purvey. Eggs were down to fifteen cents per dozen, due apparently to working class unemployment prompting underconsumption. The grain market was less and less heartening due to the previous year's surplus and increasing foreign production. The beef market was swamped with grass-fed cattle,

²⁹See Table I.

³⁰Charleston Daily News, February 7, 1930, p. 1.

leaving only hog production as most promising in a very slow field. It was a hollow chuckle resorted to when a "philosopher" explained the rock-bottom 1931-1932 prices provoked by the surplus as the unfortunate result of not anticipating that "tractors don't eat."³¹

The Coles farmer's "solutions" to his problems were mostly non-violent; from 1929 through 1932, there were no riots--it was too difficult to figure out whom to riot against. Perhaps one suicide was prompted by financial difficulties, but ill health entered into that motive as well.³² More often, the farmer treaded water quietly and legally, sometimes drowning in the undertow of a foreclosure or tax sale. Bankruptcy was a not uncommon alternative. So many were considering this avenue in September, 1931, that a conference was held in Charleston to explain how bankruptcy proceedings worked, and at least eighteen farmers were in attendance.³³

But some farmers felt an active rather than a passive role was called for in 1931. Therefore, as harvest began, Coles farmers began to imitate counties to the west by organizing a producer's union to cope with the farm income tail-spin. On October 12, 1931, over 500 Mattoon area farmers attended the formation of a local chapter of the Illinois Farmers' and Producers' Association. President Gus Meyer's

³¹Daily Journal-Gazette, July 12, 1930, p. 1; also see Table I for the average Illinois price, from which the Coles price would not substantially vary; Charleston Daily News, May 8, 1931, p. 1.

³²The only farm suicide in that period was Joe Kerans, a Kickapoo bottom farmer, who shot himself on May 16, 1930.

³³Charleston Daily News, September 23, 1931, p. 1.

organization hoped to raise the corn price, at its lowest in over twenty years, by storing their corn and encouraging elevators to do the same until the market turned upward. Two days later, Charleston area farmers did likewise; and on November 27, about seventy-five Fairgrange farmers signed pledges to hold their corn until prices raised.³⁴

Despite these efforts, and those of the national Farm Bureau after its December convention in Chicago, the outlook wasn't too much brighter as the 1932 crop year began. So many difficult years back-to-back were now taking a cumulative toll. At an organizing rally, an Oakland man described a farmer this way: ". . . in 1930 he lived on Faith; . . . in 1931 he lived on Hope; . . . in 1932 he is living on Charity-- but . . . he can't figure out yet what he will do in 1933."³⁵ Like many others, he had arrived at the only hope for farmers short of a farming president--cooperative organizations.

In late July, 1932, Hoover recognized the seriousness of the farm situation and suspended the Chicago Board of Trade for two months in an attempt to stabilize farm prices. But as the election approached and slid by, Coles and surrounding counties still had corn instead of money to burn. Though burning corn for fuel was the exception in the area, it did occur as corn prices reached their nadir.³⁶ The Coles grain

³⁴Daily Journal-Gazette, October 13, 1931, p. 1; Charleston Daily News, October 15, 1931, p. 1; November 27, 1931, p. 1.

³⁵Charleston Daily News, March 26, 1932, p. 1.

³⁶Interview with Edwin Niemeyer, July 14, 1975; see also Charleston Daily News, January 14, 1933, p. 1.

farmer simply could lay claim to nothing resembling prosperity in the period from 1929 to 1933.

Nevertheless, the farm population increased slightly in 1930, and more in 1931 than any of the previous ten years. Perhaps such a demographic trend was indicative rather than surprising. Since seven of the ten years preceding 1931 had seen annual decreases in the farm population, the availability of basic foods on the farm must have made it more attractive than it had been for years.³⁷ In addition, the city was less and less attractive as the depression ushered in increasing unemployment. Above noted were the labor force reductions in local factories following the national trend. Retail employment undoubtedly suffered during the period as well. It is also likely that service and construction industries suffered considerably in Coles. In Charleston, a realtor reported in mid-1931 that there were eleven empty store rooms and fifty-eight empty houses. In Mattoon, public and private improvements had totaled \$704,000 for 1930; in 1931, this figure fell to \$500,000, with \$221,000 of it going for a reservoir and highways.³⁸ The reservoir, although certainly needed, represented, in its timing, an attempt to cope with the unemployment problem. And the state highway projects approved in 1931 and 1932--including the Lerna road and portions of Routes 130 and 131-132--seemed oases in a desert of unemployment.

Certainly the county was not prepared to meet the increasing strain of relief. In the summer of 1929, the Coles

³⁷Charleston Daily News, July 20, 1932, p. 1.

³⁸Ibid., July 11, 1931, p. 1; Daily Journal-Gazette, November 29, 1930, p. 1; December 5, 1931, p. 4.

treasury was "near busted," and soon slipped \$45,000 into the red. By mid-1931, the red ink had run to \$120,000, and yet the economic strain on real property owners was so great that the Coles Board of Review felt it necessary to cut the farm assessed valuation by 20% for 1932. Coles then had to anticipate the next year's taxes at the legal maximum 75%. In setting the 1933 levy, the Board again cut the farm assessed valuation by 10%, and also added a 20% cut for the Charleston and Mattoon city taxpayers.³⁹

Naturally, city employees and teachers fared poorly while the public bodies were in such financial straits. Mattoon was deep enough in debt in April of 1932 to slice ten percent from the pay of the city employees. Some noted, however, that ten percent of nothing was nothing; city police had not been paid since the preceding October, firemen since the preceding November, and no city employee since early January of 1932. Survival in such circumstances depended on the willingness of neighborhood groceries and the Central Illinois Public Service Company to "carry" them for as long as six months, and they obliged in many instances. When the 1933 assessed valuation was reduced, the schools, to which half the taxes went, were consulted, and the Charleston schools reduced most employees' salaries by ten percent. Nevertheless, the public schools generally remained in much sounder condition than the cities of Mattoon and Charleston, or even the county. Mattoon, especially, found itself in serious financial difficulties, and

³⁹Charleston Daily News, August 26, 1929, p. 1; December 4, 1929, p. 1; June 10, 1931, p. 1; and Daily Journal-Gazette, July 22, 1931, p. 1; September 26, 1931, p. 1; August 22, 1932, p.1.

again had not paid its employees for six months by March of 1933.⁴⁰

So by 1931, local governments were not in a healthy position to care for an increase in the indigent case load. But the increase came, and the slack had to be taken up somehow. Naturally the trend was lamented and resisted, with concern sometimes sacrificed to economy. But from Christmas of each winter through May, the urban supervisors especially had to ask for more liberal donations from the Coles County Board at a time when its revenues were already becoming less and less adequate. Where "retrenchment" became the public watchword, the only alternative for the needy was to turn to private organizations. In Charleston, the Charleston Welfare League was the most active charity, with the Red Cross lending assistance; in Mattoon, the United Charities was the county's most successful private charity, but the Red Cross and Salvation Army made a needed contribution. In both cities, the northern section of town represented the hardest hit of the needy.

In Mattoon's Grant Park, fifteen families were reported in "dire need" in January, 1930. The United Charities, under the direction of the conscientious but frugal Mrs. Thomas Walkup, launched a free hot-lunch program for needy Grant Park school children to be cooked and served by weekly-alternating city church groups. During the month preceding February 26, 1930, 1,985 such meals were served the children for a cash outlay \$157.56. During the same period, the same children

⁴⁰Daily Journal-Gazette, April 20, 1932, p. 1; Charleston Daily News, April 21, 1932, p. 1; March 2, 1933, p. 1; and an interview with Morgan Phipps, July 24, 1975.

were dispensed \$300 worth of clothing by United Charities; this special catering to school children was a favored task the United Charities met each year. But altogether, during the decade beginning in 1930, \$11,924.08 in cash was expended, exempting other dispensations in kind which had been donated to the United Charities. By far the peak years were 1930-1933, with the heaviest expenditures in 1931 totaling \$2,788.92.⁴¹

As the holidays approached in 1931, Mattoon registered over 400 unemployed, and the United Charities felt it could no longer hope to hold its own, anticipating declining receipts and increasing expenditures. But Mattoon's "Governor's Commission," appointed by Governor Louis L. Emmerson in October of 1930 to cope locally with unemployment and relief, had not functioned since urging the Lake Paradise reservoir construction earlier in the year as employment for Mattoon's surplus labor. Nor did the township supervisor have much leeway in his funds. But needs like those of a "north end" family of six, which was starving but too proud to ask for aid, had to be met, nevertheless. Only donations like that of \$100 by the American Legion in November of 1931 helped the City Hall headquarters of the United Charities pull through till the following spring, when it temporarily closed for lack of funds.⁴²

Mayor Robert D. Bills, as chairman of the "Governor's Commission," had proposed a two percent public subscription

⁴¹Daily Journal-Gazette, January 24, 1930, p. 1; February 26, 1930, p. 1; also see Table II.

⁴²Daily Journal-Gazette, November 12, 1931, p. 1; November 11, 1931, p. 1; November 14, 1931, p. 1.

plan to be used for public works by the unemployed, and this was functioning in a stopgap fashion the last week in 1931. By April 26, 1932, 1,891 total man-working days had been provided on civic projects such as Kinzel Field (for high school football and track) and Lytle Park. Governor Emmerson had donated \$600 to the cause, but most monies came from a previous balance and \$100 donations by twelve Mattoon men. However, this work had been spread among 315 different unemployed persons, and each therefore could not have accumulated much at \$2.00 per day.⁴³

Charleston accomplished considerably less through Chairman A. C. Alexander's Charleston Welfare Association. The Association faced the same problems on a smaller scale, since less than 300 unemployed were registered in Charleston in late November, 1932. Donations were the usual source of revenue; but some limited funds were raised in October, 1931, through a charity ball game between the Charleston Merchants and the Charleston All-Stars. However, the Association seemed not as active as Mattoon's, even after additional state funds began arriving. But the Charleston Township supervisor was able to cope with the problem better than Mattoon's, as his funds were not so relatively lacking.⁴⁴

Transients also began flooding into the cities in 1932. Thirty "Hoover tourists" were fed by the Odd Fellows at the Charleston city jail on March 1, 1932; more than 800 "knights

⁴³Ibid., December 29, 1931, p. 1; April 27, 1932, p. 1.

⁴⁴Charleston Daily News, November 21, 1931, p. 1; October 8, 1931, p. 1; August 25, 1932, p. 1.

of the road" checked into the Mattoon City Jail "inn" during three weeks of the same month. Mattoon was harder hit with the transients, and aid granted was usually from the Salvation Army or, perhaps more often, from volunteer food donors upon back door solicitation.⁴⁵

But local public and private charities were drying up in the first quarter of 1932. The parallel trend statewide, especially in Cook County, prompted the General Assembly to create a "temporary" Illinois Emergency Relief Commission (IERC) with an appropriation of \$20 million. By April, 1932, only sixteen of 101 downstate counties--downstate meaning outside Cook County--had received funds. Coles was added to that list in April, with its initial allotment totaling \$3,211. In August, another \$4,000 was received, and by February, 1933, the IERC had contributed \$21,384. In addition, Coles was given 75,000 pounds of federal surplus flour in April. The monies and flour were initially apportioned by the County Board and distributed through existing relief organizations in the cities. During the summer of 1932, control of the state funds passed from the County Board to a Coles County Emergency Relief Committee of five members with dual headquarters in Charleston and Mattoon.⁴⁶

For its part, Coles had actually lowered its relief tax levy per \$100 assessed valuation from 14.9¢ in 1931 to 14.2¢

⁴⁵Ibid., March 2, 1932, p. 1; March 24, 1932, p. 1.

⁴⁶Illinois Department of Public Aid, Public Aid in Illinois (Sesquicentennial Issue), Vol. 35, No. 3 (Springfield: March, 1968), p. 11-12; Daily Journal-Gazette, April 28, 1932, p. 1; Charleston Daily News, April 5, 1932, p. 1; August 8, 1932, p. 1; and see Table IV.

in 1932, partly due to a transfer of some of the relief responsibility to the townships in the spring of 1931. Of \$94,900 expended for total Coles relief in the year ending September 30, 1932, 33% was paid by the townships; 28% by the county; 16% by private contributions; and 13% by the IERC. Of the total, 58% was for unemployment relief, and all the IERC allotment was in that category. Unemployment relief was being reluctantly established, though local funds still comprised the majority of relief.⁴⁷

Coles was hardly a county to turn lightly to the federal or state governments for help, if it could be avoided. The county had a very strong Republican majority in the 1928 general election. And the Coles Democrats who had made a strong showing in the 1930 mid-term election were, for the most part, aligned with the conservative state's rightist faction of the Democratic Party. Neither local party desired extensive government interference or planning, by instinct or ideology. But the local condition of agriculture, industry, banking, commerce, and unemployment was a force reckoning for change, not more of the same. Franklin Roosevelt certainly represented nothing radical to local voters. He could ride the political and economic mainstream as well as any other politician, and therefore appeared anything but revolutionary in Coles. He seemed a charismatic middle-of-the-roader, but, above all, a man of action. By mid-summer of 1932, the economic and philosophic doldrums had prepared Coles for the endorsement of such appeal.

⁴⁷Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, First Annual Report (Chicago, 1933), pp. 127-130.

It certainly had not always been so. President Hoover and his Republican running mates for Illinois and Coles had coasted into office by two-to-one majorities in the 1928 contest. As recently as two years before, Republicans still controlled four-fifths of the key offices on which Coles voters voiced themselves. True, the lack of a national leader at the top of the ticket and the beginnings of discontent had made the winners catch their breath as bare pluralities were tallied, but the fact remains that the Democratic Party was hardly feared for its clout in county contests. In 1930, thirteen Republicans dominated the six Democrats on the County Board; with the 1931 spring elections, this grip was tightened to a fifteen to four margin. Occasionally, the Democrats would make a strong showing in Mattoon and Charleston Townships, or in the cities themselves, but the Republicans usually recovered the losses in the succeeding election. Political hay, it seemed, could be made out of heated but temporary city issues such as Sunday shows, gambling, or ordinances. The Democrats were erratically gaining a foothold on the more urban areas of Coles. But the impact on the total county was far from a strong Democratic trend.⁴⁸

Franklin Roosevelt had not attracted the Coles Democrats at his first presidential soundings in 1930. He appeared too pro-alcohol; it was one thing to sip from the flask and another to make an election plank of it. He also sounded a bit too "citified"--perhaps prone to pander the urban population. But

⁴⁸See Table III; Daily Journal-Gazette, April 8, 1931, p. 1.

by the time Roosevelt launched his campaign in the first week of 1932, many local Democrats felt he was the only Democrat who had a chance. Perhaps it was his lack of identity with the vested interests. Or it may have been a negative reaction to the Republican solutions for the economic chaos the country was wallowing in. Herbert Hoover had talked and talked and talked with well-lubricated "six-cylinder" words, but what action had he taken for the farmer, the laborer, the merchant--the common man? Where was the local evidence of aid by the Federal Farm Board, the Federal Land Bank, and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation? Either it was too little too late, or it didn't filter down. Where had any humane aid been administered, in the form of work or not? Why were "Bonus Boys" denied their due, even if it was a premature payoff, while urban banks, railroads, and insurance companies helped themselves to the R. F. C. till? After all, they were neither "reds" nor bums, but patriots who had served America while the corporations enjoyed war prices, and then came home to "no help wanted."

It seemed a combination of paradoxical provincialism and economic desperation which repelled Coles from Hoover and attracted it to Roosevelt. Likes seemed to repel--Hoover, the self-made Iowan, was now distasteful to a grain-farming county of pioneer stock; Roosevelt, of the aristocratic patroon stock motivated by noblesse oblige, now promised a different kind of diligence for even rural middle-Americans. The Coles resident really didn't want government further extended into the county, but he did want something done. America's stagnation, like that of the European nations, was fathering a demand for action.

But the action was to be within the current institutions; surely they just weren't being used properly. Hoover probably failed to appreciate the irony of such a call for better management. But as a Jeffersonian Democrat editor put it, "the economic machinery of the country is in deplorable condition, and the ministrations of the 'great engineer,' as they may be said to have had any effect, have only aggravated the defects."⁴⁹ But Roosevelt offered hope and a new deal.

As local Republicans recognized Hoover's liabilities and Roosevelt's vigorous freshness, they resorted to hoping to salvage their gubernatorial candidate, Len Small. Quite a number of them even joined the Roosevelt trend themselves. One rural Republican was rumored to have said the day of Roosevelt's nomination: "I voted for his 'father' and by gum I'll vote for him."⁵⁰ But for much more solemn reasons, local voters of both sects began to see Roosevelt in a positive light. Mattoon's active Young Democrats, Charleston's more conservative Democrats, and a growing faction of moderate Republicans looked forward to a rumored stop by Roosevelt's train as it passed through in August, 1932. Roosevelt did stop in Mattoon for ten minutes on September 14, 1932, and the visit did him no political harm. Meanwhile, the Democrats went about raising local funds more optimistically than in many years. Charleston's C. C. Lee held a Democratic rally's attention with ease in August, thanks to the general trend.

⁴⁹Charleston Daily News, July 9, 1932, p. 4.

⁵⁰Ibid., July 2, 1932, p. 1.

The unemployment, disastrous crop prices, and general economic picture were undoubtedly the main factors in Coles support for the New Yorker, more than the efforts of any local men or factions. The Coles resident had determined to survive the depression, but that didn't mean suffering needlessly. Economics, or the lack thereof, dictated a change. Consequently, on November 8, 1932, Roosevelt polled nearly as many Coles votes as Hoover had at his popularity pinnacle in 1928. In addition, all but two of his running mates in Coles won with substantive margins. In the process, at least 2,000-3,000 more voters participated than even in 1928. In townships where the Democrats had had some previous success, their candidates were solidly bolstered and majorities for over half the key offices were tallied. Even in Republican Hutton Township, the Democrats stole the show by outvoting the Republicans for the maximum eight of nine offices. But Roosevelt's personal majority approached 4,000, while his running mates averaged roughly a 2,000 vote margin. It was obvious who the strong candidate was.⁵¹

Once the election was over the "waiting game" continued for four more months, which was small consolation to the unemployed or nearly bankrupt. "Anyhow the Democrats have been put on the spot and must either make good or go away back and sit down for another twenty years."⁵² Twenty years later, there could be no denying that the Democrats had not "gone back to

⁵¹See Table III; also see Table IV, and Figure I.

⁵²Charleston Daily News, November 10, 1932, p. 1.

the corner;" some disagreement over what good had been done in the center of the ring was possible, but all agreed the Democrats had not "sat it out."

CHAPTER II

THE ALPHABET VS. UNEMPLOYMENT, 1933-1939

The Democratic mandate of 1932 was expected to result in effective aid even in Coles. The alphabetic babbling of the "First Hundred Days" was hardly immediately noteworthy locally, but most residents were beginning to cringe at unemployment approaching 12% in their county in April, 1933. Of the 9,900 Coles families, 1,157 were on relief in April, and the outlook for the near future seemed far less than bright.¹ Coles farmers were still enjoying some record low prices, and industry and commerce were still lethargic, a condition not instantly encouraged by the reopening of readjusted area banks. Yet no one was sure that a four-letter (or less) bureaucracy of the federal government could, even if local consent was implied, do much humanely and quickly to alleviate the local crisis.

As noted, the state had already been attempting to aid in the local relief dilemma as early as the previous April. But the state's agent, the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, was handicapped by two things--a lack of money and confused or conservative local administration. IERC had been forged from Louis Emmerson's "Governor's Commission" in February, 1932, with an initial appropriation of \$20 million

¹Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Second Annual Report (Chicago, Ill.: 1934), pp. 186-187.

which lasted only until August instead of for the intended thirteen months. "Solvency" was regained when the federal government's Reconstruction Finance Corporation allowed Illinois a three percent loan, and by January, 1933, 87.5% of IERC's allotments in reality was coming from Washington. But by March the RFC funds were exhausted, so a two percent retail sales tax was passed for relief purposes in June, and it was later raised to three percent in May, 1935. This, however, became inadequate by 1936 when the Illinois General Assembly failed to appropriate the requisite amount of \$3 million per month to qualify for federal direct relief grants. The General Assembly did make large appropriations, financed by the sales tax, from 1937 until it was phased into the Illinois Public Aid Commission in July, 1941, and thus was able to continue aiding Coles and other counties in some quantity nearly every month throughout 1933-1940.²

Acquiring the money was one problem; administering it was yet another. Public relief in Illinois had been increasingly the fiscal and administrative responsibility of the county since the turn of the century; previously, the authority had rested with the township. By 1931, most counties could no longer adequately provide for the unemployed due to a statutory limitation on the general tax levy and also to increasing tax delinquency. Coles was reported to be nearly \$120,000 in the red by mid-1931; such a debt was hardly uncommon. In June, 1931, rather than raise the statutory tax levy limit for the county,

²Illinois Department of Public Aid, Public Aid in Illinois (Sesquicentennial Issue), Vol. 35, no. 3 (Springfield, Ill.: March, 1968), pp. 11-18. Hereinafter cited as Public Aid in Illinois.

the General Assembly passed the Finn Bill which reversed the trend toward increasing centralization and standardization by again placing much of the relief responsibility with townships. The rationale was that the township had no statutory limitation, but the result was confusion and diversity of effectiveness when roughly 1400 tax bodies replaced the previous 102. The Finn Bill, unconsciously or otherwise, allowed rural Illinois townships to lower their rates, since fewer relief candidates resided there, and forced a greater tax burden on urban townships. But it was a pipedream to expect either urban or rural townships to increase their tax levies for relief or any other purposes in 1931-1932; like the county, they preferred the opposite trend. So, by the winter of 1931-1932, Coles relief was increasingly a problem, and the townships were decreasingly prepared to cope with it. Since no further help was to come from the "grass roots," local authorities began to turn to the higher level--the IERC.³

Therefore, Coles made contact with the IERC in April, 1932, when it was apparent the state had increased the agency's function and funding. The IERC, upon such contact, requested the formation of a county emergency relief committee for local supervisory administration. Initially chaired by A. C. Alexander of Charleston, the Coles County Emergency Relief Committee (CCERC) was composed of eight members active in charitable functions, and was charged with the local leg work or with the appointment of lesser bodies, public where possible, for the same. In June, 1933, CCERC was working principally through

³ Charleston Daily News, June 10, 1931, p. 1; Public Aid in Illinois, pp. 10-11; and Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, First Annual Report (Chicago, Ill.: 1933), pp. 82, 93.

the already functioning Charleston Welfare Association and the Mattoon Unemployment Committee, and through the supervisors in rural townships. State standards concerning food, fuel, supplies, and emergency shelter had to be adhered to by these directly administering agencies. In addition, legal residency had to be established, and a social worker had to visit the home. Direct relief was in the form of purchase orders, for which local merchants were in turn reimbursed by the CCERC. Staple ration boxes were used until 1935, and distribution of unbudgeted federal surplus commodities occurred fairly frequently in the earlier months of the IERC's existence. In early 1934, medical relief and minimal rent (\$10 per month) were added to the services the CCERC could provide. Outright cash payments were ruled illegal by the Attorney-General, except in some work (indirect) relief sponsored by the IERC.⁴

In September, 1933, J. J. Derkits was assigned by the IERC as the field staff administrator for Coles County, working in conjunction with the CCERC and subordinate organizations. Under his direction, Coles was divided into three regions-- Mattoon, Charleston, and Oakland. Mattoon became the central office, but each region was to have an office, a regional supervisor, and one case worker per 200 "reliefers." Such a structure, it was hoped, would enable monthly case investigations in order that need might be more efficiently monitored. The Mattoon central office was located on the upper (ground) floor of the Illinois Central building on Broadway in Mattoon.⁵

⁴Public Aid in Illinois, pp. 12-13.

⁵Daily Journal-Gazette, September 28, 1933, p. 1.

The Mattoon regional office and several Mattoon private relief organizations began cooperating in relief responsibilities in October, 1933, through the formation of a "Service Council." United Charities continued to attempt to supply clothing and children's shoes, and the Mattoon Emergency Relief Committee (MERC), replacing the Mattoon Unemployment Committee, agreed to complement circumstances which the United Charities would be unable to meet. The Salvation Army promised to continue caring for the transients, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society of the Catholic Church would do the same for Catholic folk on its roll. The American Legion offered its continued medical support for veterans from its Bogardus Fund, and the township supervisor was to supply other medical or relief needed when the MERC could not do so from IERC allotments.⁶

As of January 31, 1933, the IERC had contributed a cumulative total of \$21,384 to Coles County since beginning operations locally in late April, 1932. This represented in the neighborhood of 45 percent of all public relief administered in Coles during the previous three months. In March of 1933, when both the national and state relief loads were at their peak, the Coles case load was high, but not nearly so high as it would be in 1935. From a probable 12 percent in March, 1933, the unemployed rate would increase to nearly 23% in November, 1935. In comparison, the apex of the relief load in nearby Effingham County was only 7.8% in mid-1934. But the drastic Coles peak load throughout 1935 was no doubt the result of 1934-35 labor difficulties at the Charleston and Mattoon Brown Shoe plants

⁶Ibid., October 27, 1933, p. 1.

which resulted in lock-outs in both, and of the 1934 drought which plagued the county. By July, 1934, the cumulative IERC contribution to Coles relief was \$280,711; but by July, 1936, the figure had drastically increased, mostly in 1935, to \$1,296,308. As a result of this enlarged IERC role, the federal and state contributions to Coles were 56.8% and 37.9% respectively, and the county and townships had only paid 5.3% of the relief expenditures since IERC had begun operation locally.⁷

As of July 1, 1936, direct control of state aid was relinquished by the IERC, and financial and administrative responsibility passed to the townships. The IERC became only a mediator for federal funds, for the most part, and not such a good one at that, since the General Assembly would not for a time appropriate the prerequisite to qualify for federal funds. The townships generally discarded the system the IERC had established, and the result was inefficiency and a lack of uniformity in the distribution of relief. Disbursing orders again replaced the cash grants which had been introduced in March, 1936. Sample reviews of downstate units by the IERC for May, 1937, revealed a lack of basic case records, inadequate and unsystematized financial records, and duplicated services in many instances. The IERC felt more than half the cases

⁷ See Table V; also see Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, First Annual Report (Chicago: 1933), p. 104; ibid., Biennial Report (Chicago: 1936), pp. 172-176, 210; and Edward L. Allen, New Deal Programs and the Great Depression in Effingham County (Unpublished Master's Thesis, History Department, Eastern Illinois University, 1974), p. 21 (Hereinafter cited as New Deal . . . in Effingham County).

were undeserving.⁸

In 1938 the authority to withhold allocations was restored to the IERC, and standardization returned. By 1939 prosperity was also returning in both Illinois and Coles, and a gradual trend toward case load reduction which began in Coles in 1936 continued through 1939. In June, 1936, the case load was 1,234 with approximately 13.4% of the population on relief; but in July, 1938, only 776 cases, or 7.2% were registered. With the normal winter increase in January, 1939, 9.5% found IERC relief necessary, but a year later only 7.1% were dependent. A combination of improved economics and tighter review policies locally helped effect the reduction. Both Brown Shoe plants returned to production in 1936, and local Works Progress Administration projects began drafting large numbers from the relief rolls the same year. By 1937, the federal social security program for the aged was functioning, and the following year the re-authorized IERC enforced a stricter review policy which weeded out certain cases township supervisors had sustained. The case load was further lightened with the institution of an unemployment compensation program in mid-1939. Another trend, though somewhat misleading, was that the local funds were footing more of the direct relief bill; in the year ending June 30, 1939, \$221,999 were so expended, and 39.5% was locally funded. This is misleading in that the federal government was now directing large sums of money into indirect WPA relief, so the local percentage was bound to be higher. Even so, in the span of that

⁸Public Aid in Illinois, pp. 14, 18.

year more local money was expended than in the three-year period from April, 1933, to July, 1936. The Coles urban units were assuming more responsibility by the later Thirties, partially because the IERC made that a prerequisite to further aid.⁹

Naturally, the relief administration in Coles, whether controlled by IERC, CCERC, or the township supervisor was not without some controversy. Before the IERC stepped in to help, the townships had bickered over who deserved what amount for pauper bills, with conservatism and the "East side" versus the "West side" of Coles being consistent themes. Once the IERC began effective administration in 1933, pressure was often exerted by the unemployed on that body to provide aid more profusely and quickly. This was difficult because the IERC was itself at the mercy of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration's allotments or the whims and erratic appropriations of the General Assembly. The first local administrator, J. J. Derkits, was the object of some dissatisfaction and it was rumored that embezzlement in his office existed, but when the native-born Austrian resigned in February, 1934, no evidence had yet been discovered. Nor did it seem that he resigned over conflict with Coles residents; rather, his IERC district superior had previously been his inferior, and the resignation

⁹Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Biennial Report (Chicago: 1936), pp. 172-176; ibid., Monthly Bulletin on Relief Statistics, Vol. 6, no. 2 (Springfield, Ill.: 1940), p.28; ibid., Vol. 7, no. 2, p. 32; ibid., Vol. 6, no. 7, pp. 115-116; and see Table V.

was prompted by a conflict between them.¹⁰

A replacement was hired July 11, 1934, in the person of a Champaign social worker, Miss Frances A. Schmidt. The niece of a state senator from Savoy, she naturally was accused of "patronage competence." But the fiftyish peroxide blonde was highly trained and capable, though perhaps a bit demanding of some who worked under her and others whom her office served. She may have assigned too heavy a load to her case workers and clerks, and she once retorted to a work relief group demanding a larger food allowance, "Make yourselves bean sandwiches!" But those were largely the actions of a stern and "authoritarian" administrator on a limited budget. Throughout her tenure, she seems to have rationed fairly from often inadequate funds or food surpluses and in a systematized way.¹¹

Certainly, it was no easy job to announce that Coles would have to tighten its relief belt due to fund shortages. In April, 1935, when unemployment in Coles was close to its peak, Miss Schmidt had to announce that no longer would any coal, rent, or clothing bills be paid. In addition, all food budgets were cut 10% and all work relief (which meant cash payments) was stopped because it was too expensive. Even with the support of the CCERC, now chaired by Charleston editor Benjamin Weir, this seemed spitting in the wind. Soon the wind reversed, and the Charleston regional headquarters at First and

¹⁰Interview with Miss Lee Faught, July 9, 1975.

¹¹Ibid.; an interview with Miss Margaret Stump, July 8, 1975; an interview with Seneca Abell, July 24, 1975; and Charleston Daily News, January 28, 1935, p. 1.

Harrison Streets was "stormed" on May 28 by relief clients who charged unfair practices after fifty needy families had been unable to get relief. Miss Schmidt responded that shoe factory relief clients had been "let go" due to recent budgetary straits necessitating reassessment before reopening all cases, but that people were being taken care of as fast as possible. During the near riot at the Charleston Emergency Relief Committee (CERC) headquarters, five men were arrested for resisting an officer--his gun was taken away from him. The officer, Ed Warpenburg, and a fellow officer did eventually arrest Frank Percy, Otto Robinson, Roy Gilpin, George Metzler, Sr., and Charles Kirkendolf. No real physical harm came to CERC personnel or the officers, but they had been scared as the "rioters" had intended. All but Frank Percy pled guilty and were sentenced within a week to six months on the penal farm, but the sentences were suspended for one year's probation. Percy, it seemed, had been in dutech before--once paroled and once acquitted--and was blamed by local authorities for a broomcorn strike a few days before; moreover, he had helped to lead a work relievers' strike the previous month. So in September many citizens were not displeased at the example when Percy was found guilty of "rioting" after eight hours' deliberation and sentenced to six months on the Vandalia penal farm. His Chicago lawyer, Ira Silbar, was unable to raise funds to make an appeal, and the verdict stood.¹²

Throughout 1935, a feud brewed between Charles Crowder,

¹²Charleston Daily News, May 13, 1935, p. 1; May 29, 1935, p. 1; June 4, 1935, p. 1; June 5, 1935, p. 1; September 6, 1935, p. 1; October 15, 1935, p. 1; and an interview with Margaret Stump, July 8, 1975.

Charleston Township supervisor, and the CCERC, specifically Chairman Ben Weir. Even before the "riot" occurred, Crowder had called for Harry Hopkins, head of the federal agency, and U. S. Senator D. C. Dobbins to investigate the Charleston office. This was accomplished in June, and the office was characterized as "doing its best under stress circumstances." In early December, Weir charged that a recent amendment to the pauper law had stripped Crowder of all power in the area of relief. In late December, Crowder found occasion to retort. When an Oakland lady struck a relief worker in the Oakland office for not giving relief to a dead brother's children, Crowder was quick to verify the children's need. Crowder also charged the relief agency with not providing for a Mrs. Alvin Letner and her six children of Charleston, who had not eaten for over twenty-four hours and had had to borrow coal from the neighbors despite a three block proximity to the relief office. And rather than duplicating services intentionally, as Weir charged, Crowder insisted he was completing inadequate work by the CERC. The quick fingers of both parties seem to have been motivated by a shortage of funds overstretched by the highest unemployment rate Coles would experience. The fact was that more people needed direct relief money than they ever would again. Later, unemployment might still remain high, but additional programs and work relief would lessen the direct burden.¹³

¹³Charleston Daily News, June 11, 1935, p. 1; December 16, 1935, p. 1; December 18, 1935, p. 1; December 30, 1935, p. 1; December 31, 1935, p. 1.

But politics had become involved in the Crowder-Weir feud as well. Mattoon had been irritated by Charleston Township's larger demands for county tax money for paupers. In January, 1936, Crowder presented a dramatic speech, illustrated with a dilapidated shoe belonging to a reliefer, and challenged the Board to ask the 200 in the hall how they evaluated the CCERC relief program. The Board was apparently not persuaded, and in March hired Miss Cora Hoop of Mattoon as the Coles pauper head for four months. This relieved Crowder of his duties for a time, but relief responsibility was again returned to him and the townships when the IERC assumed the neutral donor role in July, 1936. When that happened, the CCERC relief staff was reduced, but Miss Schmidt continued to ration lesser amounts of money to the townships for distribution. As the case load had gone into a seasonal summer decline, and employment was on the rise, the Mattoon central office also decided in October to cease surplus food distributions.¹⁴

Supervisor Crowder, however, continued to stumble over the relief issue, and eventually Charleston lost IERC allotments due to controversies stimulating an IERC investigation of the Charleston supervisor's relief system. Popular at election time because of solvent road building programs, he continued to be re-elected, 1936-1939. Apparently, he did himself no political harm with his relief power either. When, in a 1937 attempt to gain larger IERC contributions to his township, he invited a Decatur office team to investigate, the

¹⁴Ibid., January 15, 1936, p. 1; March 11, 1936, p. 1; April 28, 1936, p. 1; July 2, 1936, p. 1.

results indicated that 130 of 284 cases on his rolls were not eligible. A fair conclusion seems double-edged: the IERC had fairly stringent standards, while Crowder took a less financial and more lenient view of relief administration, and pressed for outside funds where his own state-mandated pauper tax and the sales tax proved inadequate. After the IERC again resumed responsibility for relief in 1938, Crowder's May grants were suspended pending an investigation which eventually led to his replacement as Charleston Township relief administrator, but he retained the supervisor's post. In summary, neither the CCERC nor Charles Crowder admired the other's method of relief administration, especially since both were sorely pressed for funds. But despite the controversy in county politics, both provided a much needed service.¹⁵

In addition to its direct relief functions, the Coles County Emergency Relief Committee was called upon to administer other state and federal programs. The IERC staff served as agent for the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation, distributing thousands of pounds of flour, salt pork, oranges, and grapefruit to Coles residents between 1933 and 1936. The Mattoon central office also served as federal drought relief headquarters for Coles when the county was declared a part of the brown disaster area in the summer of 1934. Local IERC representatives also promoted a subsistence garden campaign. Organizations such as Mattoon's United Charities and the Association of Commerce aided the cause by providing plants as

¹⁵Ibid., June 5, 1937, p. 1; June 4, 1938, p. 1.

well as garden sites. Later, in 1936, the responsibility for such gardening was assumed by the Works Progress Administration.¹⁶

The IERC administrators also served as the U. S. Department of Labor's agent in the selection of the local Civilian Conservation Corps quota. And as work relief programs were developed by the federal government, the local branches of the IERC certified workers for participation in the projects only after they had registered with the National Re-employment Service, for which the local IERC office also served as an agent. Such assistance was rendered to the Civil Works Administration, Works Progress Administration, and the National Youth Administration. Even the Resettlement Administration was represented locally by the IERC staff. And "Re-employment Committees," in conjunction with the IERC staff, were able to place many skilled and unskilled, as well as professionals, in private employment.¹⁷

The IERC also eventually stepped actively into the work relief field by completing several Coles projects begun by the CWA but left unfinished as Roosevelt's fiscal conscience got the better of him. In the spring of 1934, the CCERC was authorized not only to finish CWA projects, but also to begin others.

New projects begun included improvement of the Teachers' College roads and tearing down its old heating plant, improve-

¹⁶ Public Aid in Illinois, pp. 14, 17; Charleston Daily News, September 28, 1933, p. 1; October 19, 1936, p. 1; Daily Journal-Gazette, December 9, 1933, p. 1.

¹⁷ Public Aid in Illinois, p. 7.

ment of the shoulders of 33rd Street road in North Okaw Township, and the repair of a line of tile along the same road in Mattoon Township. Other projects begun were the cleaning and repairing of tile in Humboldt Township, resurfacing a block of Mattoon's Lafayette Avenue, cleaning and grubbing fencerows in Pleasant Grove, Morgan, and East Oakland. Some men were also assigned to begin repairing the Charleston town branch sewer, to relay Oakland water mains at a greater depth, and to clean cross drains and the city dump in Ashmore. Both Charleston and Oakland Townships gained road improvement projects, and the streets were widened around the public square in Charleston and a new interior sidewalk installed. Oakland was given some new sidewalks, while Peterson Park in Mattoon had dead trees removed. Among the more novel projects were the distribution of drought relief seed and feed, the conducting of a survey to determine the potential sites and feasibility of wells in the event of another drought, and the establishment of a furniture repair shop in north Charleston.¹⁸

It did smack of "made work," but nonetheless it was better than no work. Heads of families, where employable, performed some service for their pay, rather than sitting and polishing their posteriors. In some cases, direct relief still served to supplement, if needed. According to IERC regulations, earning property was not considered in determining eligibility, but credit; savings, and relatives had to be exhausted first.

¹⁸Daily Journal-Gazette, May 29, 1934, p. 1; July 11, 1934, p. 1; Charleston Daily News, May 29, 1934, p. 1; June 11, 1934, p. 1; November 17, 1934, p. 1; January 4, 1935, p. 1.

And auto license plates had to be checked in at the regional CCERC offices during the period of relief.¹⁹

The work relief system was also not without controversy. As early as April 1933, when the program was in its organizational stages, CCERC officers encountered a lobby effort by the Mattoon Hod Carriers', Builders', and Common Laborers' union to establish a Coles "prevailing wage scale" of \$.65 per hour for common labor and \$.70 per hour for semi-skilled labor. The wage rate of the CCERC did not comply, however; instead, the common labor wage rate was set at \$.50 for Mattoon, \$.45 for Charleston, and \$.30 in the rural townships. During 1934, a sizeable number of work relievers in Mattoon and Charleston formed "unemployed unions" to press for higher wages. Existing local labor unions tended to support the effort but their success was limited. On May 19, 1934, the Mattoon "unemployed union" also insisted on a \$.65 rate, and members pledged to accept no work unless the wage committee of Ben Edman, George Miller, and C. E. Grace adopted their demand. But the relievers' solidarity fizzled, despite labor union support, and by June 15 a successful petition was circulating among the relievers to go to work for \$.50 an hour. But the issue cropped up again the following January when 200-300 relief workers staged a strike parade at the Mattoon office, demanding a lesser \$5 per month increase. The workers, who had voted to strike without the knowledge of their official spokesmen on the "service committee," were dissatisfied with budgets which they claimed allowed them only six cents per meal. It was at this juncture

¹⁹Public Aid in Illinois, pp. 12-13.

that Miss Schmidt, the relief director, had suggested that they carry "mashed bean sandwiches" in their dinner pails and had charged that a "radical group," led by a Herrin Communist named "Mr. Jones," was instigating the friction. Eventually, the work relief projects in Mattoon were discontinued and direct relief with purchase orders again resorted to.²⁰

In April, 1935, a sidewalk project in Charleston was interrupted by a relief workers' strike led by Frank Pearcy and George Hissong. Approximately fifty strong, the strikers demanded that house rent and coal bills be restored to the payments which the CCERC would make. They had been receiving \$45 per month plus medical expenses, but an IERC budgetary squeeze due to the increased case load had reduced that amount per work reliefer by 5-12%. Miss Schmidt's immediate reaction was that she would talk to no delegation of which the "radical" George Hissong was a member, and if the reliefers did not return to work, the Charleston relief office would again resort to purchase orders just as the Mattoon office already had in a similar circumstance. Apparently, though, compromise won out as the reliefers agreed to return to work within a week and the CERC agreed to pay rent on an emergency basis.²¹

Both cities' unemployed unions joined for an excursion to Springfield in May, 1935, to lobby for increased relief allotments, but they encountered the vagueness of political

²⁰ Charleston Daily News, April 5, 1933, p. 1; May 19, 1934, p. 1; June 15, 1934, p. 1; January 26, 1935, p. 1; January 28, 1935, p. 1.

²¹ Ibid., April 6, 1935, p. 1; April 12, 1935, p. 1.

polemics there. Two weeks later, the Charleston "relief riot" occurred, and their nerve was soon quelled by the legal measures. Seasonal employment that summer--such as broomcorn cutting--helped ease the tension as well; and later that fall, WPA employment was initiated in the county. The "unemployed" dissatisfaction did not again reach such acute circumstances, although some enmity arose over the phasing down of WPA projects in 1938.²²

In an attempt to complement each state's direct relief program, the federal government instituted the CCC, CWA, PWA, WPA, and NYA. Each of these work relief programs functioned in Coles, though naturally with varying degrees of impact. A minimal amount of unemployment relief was first provided by the CCC. In total, the CCC probably siphoned between 300-500 young men out of the local unemployment pool between 1933 and 1940.²³ Since they were required to contribute \$25 of their \$30 per month to their families, these young reforestation laborers undoubtedly considerably supplemented their families' income through their enlistments for a year or six months. But the program, by its nature, was a superficial form of work relief, at best.²⁴

The CWA was the first "extensive" effort of the federal

²²Ibid., May 16, 1935, p. 1.

²³This represents a fairly conservative estimate. News coverage of this aspect of the New Deal was not as consistent in Coles as might have been expected; but between May, 1933, and April, 1938, at least 266 were enlisted, according to irregular reports in the Charleston Daily News. The greatest quotas were assigned Coles in the 1933-1936 period.

²⁴Public Aid in Illinois, p. 17.

government to provide meaningful work relief that would preserve the human dignity of the unemployed who so desired, and at the same time feed much needed purchasing power into the hands of the most needy. Operations began in Coles on November 20, 1933, with an initial assigned quota of 972 men. Charles A. Petry served as administrative engineer for District 8, which contained Coles, and it was his job to examine and approve project applications to meet the original quota. These applications were prepared hurriedly by local governmental units or public bodies such as school districts. Because the federal program was hastily conceived and instituted, the local applications reflected the same urgency.²⁵

Though hurriedly done, the full employment quota had been met by December 20. At first, workers were assigned by need and number of dependents, and of course taken from IERC relief rolls. By January 1 reliance was placed on the National Re-employment office to provide both skilled and unskilled labor. Need was no longer the vital factor; proof of destitution by going on relief was no longer required. At its peak quota, CWA employed 1,547 persons--1,413 were heads of families and the rest were supporting only themselves. This figure represented 4% of the Coles population.²⁶

On January 12, W. Ed Millar of Mattoon and J. M. McGee of Chicago were appointed by Petry to supervise the quality

²⁵Federal Civil Works Administration for Illinois, County Reports, Vol. I, by Charles A. Petry (Springfield, Ill.: April 15, 1934), p. 118.

²⁶Ibid.

of applications, and the actual work once the project began. After the labor had been estimated, the application of the taxing or employing body was submitted to the Coles Chief Project Engineer who then evaluated its: (1) social value to the community; (2) ability to absorb available labor; (3) economic value to the community when completed; and (4) cost to the CWA. If approved, it then went to Petry, as District Engineer, and, if he approved, then the Chicago CWA office had to endorse it. Only about 4-5% were turned down. It became the practice of the CWA to require the local body to pay one-sixth the cost of the labor estimate on materials, and then the CWA would match that amount in materials itself. The purpose was to insure the inclusion of materials in the projects to assure the hiring of some skilled labor.²⁷

The initial CWA project approved for the county was a blanket road project to be supervised by the State Highway Department, chosen because of the need to get large numbers of men to work quickly. On November 20, 420 men began working for thirty hours per week on mostly secondary road improvement projects. Under the supervision of the Paris district state highway engineer, Charles H. Apple, Coles state-aid roads were widened, repaired, graveled, sloped, or graded. The Graham Bridge hill in North Okaw, the Lerna road banks, the east-west highway from Route 45 to Lake Paradise, the Lincoln highway, Mattoon's Western Avenue drain tile--all were among the first to be improved on the "west side." Shortly after, "east side" work

²⁷Federal Civilian Works Administration, District Engineers' Reports, District #8, by Charles A. Petry (Springfield, Ill.: April 15, 1934), pp. 116-119.

began on the following: a bridge abutment north of Oakland; the Airtight Hill grade north of Ashmore; the road east of Route 130's "5-mile house"; the Hall's Ford grade south of Charleston; a curve reduction on the U. of I. Trail; and a stretch of road south of the Charleston Country Club. Later, on both "sides," numerous other road projects were undertaken-- such as on the streets of Mattoon, Charleston, Lerna, Ashmore, and Fairgrange. Roadwork alone nearly allowed the filling of the original quota.²⁸

Other "slower" projects also became a source of much employment. Mattoon's Peterson Park occupied over fifty men in the construction of a limestone rock fence, reconstruction of a fish pond, resurfacing of four tennis courts, and the painting of the park pavilion and custodian's buildings. The Mattoon City Hall was redecorated, which required several men. The Coles Courthouse was cleaned, tuck-pointed, and repaired throughout for its first real maintenance since its construction at the turn of the century. Forty men were so occupied for four months. The Kinzel Field stadium and track project in Mattoon required over thirty workers for two months. This popular project, in which the school board's share of the cost was paid by public subscriptions, resulted in a modern oval and straight-away track of crushed stone and cinders flanked by wooden bleachers capable of seating 1,000. Electrical lighting made night football on the infield an avocation for already enthused

²⁸Daily Journal-Gazette, November 23, 1933, p. 1; December 8, 1933, p. 1; December 26, 1933, p. 1; Charleston Daily News, November 23, 1933, p. 1; December 15, 1933, p. 1.

Mattoon fans. The rapid completion of the project had been made possible by using two shifts of eighteen-man gangs.²⁹

Many other county schools also received attention, but not in such an efficient manner. Most of them had not had major painting and redecorating done for fifteen years. All the Mattoon elementary schools were undertaken, although many had to be finished by the IERC or the school board. Charleston High School, Mattoon High School, Miller School near Dorans, Rardin School, and the Ashmore School all received some degree of redecoration and/or safety maintenance. Major renovations were begun on the Humboldt School, including the addition of a basement and a second story. More uniquely, the pond at the Teachers' College received a needed dredging.³⁰

Over all, District 8 had 1145 projects authorized and work began on 870 of them. The vast concentration had been in four areas: city improvement, 141; drainage, 142; road improvements, 318; and school improvements, 133. 390 of these were 100% completed. In Coles, the percentages of undertaking as well as completion were better. One hundred fourteen projects were approved, and 93 were begun; by the closing of the Coles projects in early April, 1934, 47 projects were entirely finished in the county. Thirty-two were over 75% complete, which left only fourteen less than three-fourths finished.³¹

²⁹Federal Civilian Works Administration, County Reports, Vol. I, by Charles A. Petry (Springfield, Ill.: April 15, 1934), pp. 120-121.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., pp. 116-117; p. 51; and p. 47.

At the very least, CWA had left some footprints in Coles, many of them less memorable than the enumerated ones. But further evidence must be considered in evaluating such a federal program. Without a doubt, it was too hasty and too brief a program to prove itself conclusively. But there can be no doubt that over a quarter of a million dollars in payrolls alone were poured into Coles in a short five months. Nor can it be refuted that as high as 1,382 citizens found employment otherwise lacking in the county through CWA.³² In addition, the projects almost always served a very useful public social purpose, being "made work" only in the sense that they could not have been done otherwise. Early IERC work projects had been negligible, and certainly had ignored the skilled and technical groups which were beginning to suffer in late 1933. "Opportunity" teachers, for example, were hired by the Civil Works Education Service (CWES) to institute an early form of vocational and special education. Fourteen different unemployed but certified teachers were hired to offer such classes as adult education for those who were "behind in their studies," kindergarten, vocational rehabilitation, general adult classes, and home instruction for handicapped children. In cooperation with the IERC and the Home Bureau, one teacher even taught a low cost meal preparation course in Mattoon, a not untimely idea. In fact, the CWES in Coles proved desirable enough to continue for at least a month after all the other CWA projects had been phased out.³³

³²See Table VI.

³³Daily Journal-Gazette, January 29, 1934, p. 1; March 9

Economically, in addition to the payroll, the CWA had further stimulated the local currency by buying materials and equipment from merchants in the construction line. All CWA purchases had to be made locally, and the Coles construction industry had not been very healthy since 1930. There is no doubt that the rural townships benefited less from the expenditures as well as the payrolls, since rural work weeks were only 15 instead of 25 hours long, but the proof of the general support of the Coles citizenry and their leaders lay in their continued efforts to get more projects approved.

Fresh ground had been plowed as well in the area of Coles-federal cooperation. J. B. Schooley of Mattoon, the active incumbent chairman of CCERC during most of the CWA's activity, found the Chicago CWA administration hard-nosed and overburdened, but anxious to serve, rather than impose on, the local desires. The fact that the CWA was desirable was summed up as follows:

The program has made it possible for many public taxing bodies, whose funds were depleted from non-payment of taxes and shrinkage in the value of taxable property, to improve public works, highways, public buildings and a multitude of other projects of great social and economic benefit to the various communities.³⁴

In addition, no labor strife occurred during the short existence of the CWA, also indicating local approval of the program. The common laborers found J. M. McGee responsive when they presented

1934, p. 1; Charleston Daily News, March 2, 1934, p. 1; April 3, 1934, p. 1; June 5, 1934, p. 1.

³⁴ Federal Civil Works Administration for Illinois, District Engineers' Reports, District #8, by Charles A. Petry (Springfield, Ill.: April 15, 1934), p. 20.

their case for raising the common labor wage scale from \$.45 to \$.50 per hour. And, in general, it seemed no "soldiering" on the job occurred, as most men found the jobs an opportunity and a worthwhile task.

But other direct federal programs were not so fortunate with their labor. The Public Works Administration began operation in Coles somewhat simultaneously with the CWA, but its projects were comparatively minimal because of direction by the cautious and ascetic Harold L. Ickes, who really did not see the program as either a construction stimulator or a relief train. Rather, Ickes chose to enhance America, mostly through loans to local public bodies building meticulously planned and picturesque projects--mostly by private contractors. In Coles, the only two major projects implemented were improving and beautifying Route 45 within Mattoon, and the construction of two new buildings at the Teachers' College--the Health Education Building (later McAfee Gym) and the Science Building. The Route 45 project was the first undertaken in the spring of 1934. It was this project in which the Coles PWA labor difficulties were encountered. The contractors, Birt Brothers of Decatur, were paying only \$.40 per hour, and meanwhile common unorganized labor working for the CWA had been offered \$.45, but had asked for \$.50 and got it. This disparity in the two federal projects, plus the contractor's use of out of town labor, had caused Mattoon's Local #131 of the Common Laborers' and Hod Carriers' to picket and halt construction on 19th Street. They held out for \$.10 per hour more from April 5 through May 22, when CWA ended in Coles, and then

finally agreed to go back to work at \$.40 per hour. But the contractor agreed to use only Mattoon union labor, including a union foreman on each of the two shifts. So perhaps one undesirable aspect of the CWA was that it created labor difficulties for the PWA, both in Coles and elsewhere. But in an era of depression when purchasing power was crucially lacking, the fault should more reasonably be assigned to the administrative mechanics of the PWA.³⁵

The contribution of the federal government to the state's Route 45 project was not noted locally, but the \$800,000 building project at Eastern Illinois State Teachers' College was. The federal government eventually contributed \$172,800 toward general construction expenditures for the Health Building and \$112,950 for the Science Building.³⁶ The cornerstones for these buildings were laid May 8, 1937, and September 21, 1937, respectively. These projects also allowed the use of non-local labor, but in this instance no labor difficulties were encountered. It did seem to be a project area citizens viewed with pride, in that it would allow the expansion of a distinctive area institution. For Charleston, more students meant more market and more supportive service jobs down the road. But some lighter construction materials were bought locally.

³⁵Charleston Daily News, March 22, 1934, p. 1; April 5, 1934, p. 1.

³⁶Ibid., May 14, 1938, p. 1; for specifics see Charles Coleman, Eastern Illinois State College: Fifty Years of Public Service, Eastern Illinois State College Bulletin #189 (Charleston, Ill.: January 1, 1950), pp. 265-268.

A minor project in the summer of 1934 was in the form of extension of the Charleston waterworks. This hurry-up project, viewed thankfully by local officials as work relief, occupied a total of 125 men in five shifts several weeks in an effort to cope with the perpetual water shortages which plagued the city of Charleston. Area officials tried to get other PWA projects, but without success. A waterworks main extension and sewerage plant project was approved by the PWA but the bond issue was defeated in mid-1936, possibly because a large WPA-related bond issue had already passed in January. Generally, it seemed WPA grants were easier and quicker to institute in Coles, as they were in other east-central Illinois counties.³⁷

Overall, the PWA did not swamp Coles with purchasing power; the Works Progress Administration, however, was designed to flood the unemployed with dollars which would spill over into commerce and therefore industry. This later program, authorized by Congress in April, 1935, was Roosevelt's attempt to end the cancer of dependency which the dole could lead to. Consequently, WPA workers were offered less than the prevailing wage, but more than direct relief would have allotted. Harry Hopkins' leadership, tending much more toward vast and immediate work relief, directed the agency in spending that averaged over \$20,000 in Coles payrolls every two weeks from 1935-1937.³⁸ In latter 1938 and 1939, the payroll was drastically reduced,

³⁷Charleston Daily News, August 2, 1934, p. 1; July 8, 1936, p. 1; Daily Journal-Gazette, September 9, 1933, p. 1; E. L. Allen, New Deal . . . in Effingham County, pp. 36-37.

³⁸ See Table VII.

but by then the Coles economy was recovering from the nadir of 1934-1936.

The WPA program in Coles did not take shape until October, 1935. On September 25, Seneca M. Abell of Mattoon was appointed WPA project supervisor for Coles and three northern Cumberland townships. From his Mattoon headquarters, Abell, who had worked for over two years on the IERC staff and with the CWA, was to serve through 1939 and face many difficulties--mostly financial. As soon as the first project was announced in mid-October, Abell was faced with the threat of an "unemployed" strike against the wage scale rate that had been adopted. The \$.45 per hour was not what many had hoped for and was below the level CWA had paid, but President John Edwards of Local #131 in Mattoon denied that any members of his union were planning to strike. Abell warned that he had been authorized by the Decatur office to have anyone refusing to work on WPA projects dropped from the relief rolls. Either through fear of the consequences or the lack of consensus and organization, the strike never materialized.³⁹

By November, several projects had begun in Coles. Naturally, the earliest projects centered on road improvements, due to normal priority and the speed with which the projects could be begun. Charleston and Mattoon received extensive street and drainage work in the next four years. Of the rural road-work, Charleston Township probably received the most benefit from the projects, partially due to its proximity to the gravel pits of the Embarras (some were opened for the first time).

³⁹Charleston Daily News, October 25, 1935, p. 1.

By April, road commissioner A. O. "Ras" Hall had directed work for 30-70 men per week, and had already placed over 10,200 yards of gravel. Before the township had run the gamut of its WPA projects, almost no dirt roads remained where one could only pass with a good horse and wagon before. Several hills in the rougher southern part of the township were graded, numerous concrete culverts constructed, and concrete floors poured on at least five wooden-floored metal cage bridges spanning twenty-foot creeks.⁴⁰

Mattoon did not undertake so much township road work, due to a flatter terrain and the existence of some oil roads already. But Abell's initial allotment of \$425,000 paid for several other township road improvements from the 24 Coles projects already started by December 3, 1935. Included was extensive work in most of the rural townships; Hutton received a \$19,000 grant, Ashmore a \$22,000 grant, and East Oakland a \$29,000 grant, which was later supplemented with another \$8,000. The more populous of the rural "west side" townships were not quite so active, but were not far behind.

After the initial road projects had beefed up the work force, other varieties of projects were approved. In November, 1935, a \$20,000 grant was allowed for remortaring Old Main and repairing other buildings at the Teachers' College, \$21,000 for a Charleston city pool, and \$65,000 for extension of the Charleston sewer system. In December, \$85,000 was granted to Mattoon for construction of a street department

⁴⁰Ibid., March 7, 1936, p. 1; March 30, 1936, p. 1; and an interview with A. O. "Ras" Hall, July 9, 1975.

office and warehouse as well as repairs at Peterson Park. It seemed that Charleston was trying harder to take advantage of the grants, probably since it had less industry to restore employment. Most of the projects required that a local contribution be made toward the materials, but it was always well less than a third of the cost. Charleston voters accepted such a responsibility by voting four to one in January, 1936, for a bond issue to take advantage of the city pool and sewerage extension grant. After all, Mattoon had one of the most modern pools in the area in Lytle Park. The Charleston pool at the intersection of Division and Lincoln finally became a reality in 1938. Again in November, 1936, the Charleston citizenry voted nine to one for a \$100,000 bond issue to match a joint federal grant of \$160,000 by the WPA and the PWA for a sewerage plant, further water and sewer main extension, and dredging the Embarras River and raising the dam three feet. But the Mattoon voters had not been so anxious for the competition, as they had turned down the previous February a bond issue which would have made possible a grant of \$138,000 for a disposal system for their city. Perhaps their city's huge street and sewer project retarded their enthusiasm.

With another \$450,000 allocation in May, 1936, Abell's office was prepared for more project approvals. A federal grant was authorized for rebuilding the power plant of the Coles Courthouse and County Jail at 8th and Van Buren in October. The following April, a \$5,000 grant came for the repair of the tunnel between the courthouse and jail and construction of a two-car sheriff's garage. But the squeeze on Abell's

funds came again that spring, and the rolls were gradually reduced. Sparse project approvals filtered down from then through 1939. Three notable ones were a Charleston curb and gutter renovation project at \$167,000, a similar Mattoon project at over a quarter of a million, and a Hutton township road improvement package at \$21,000. Unfortunately, because bordering property owners failed to pay the local share as per the agreement, the Charleston project ceased after only about one-fifth completed.⁴¹

The operation of the WPA in Coles seemed to run as smoothly as a federal program of such volume could. There were uncertainties attached to financial matters as Congress or the administration bogged down. Red tape existed, but seemed minimal, relative to a later day; project approvals went through Abell to Decatur, then Chicago, and then Washington. Hirings and dismissals were strongly regulated by the budgetary barometer, but this did not stir up strong discontent until the failure of the 1938 street project in Charleston. Whenever the quota had to be reduced, Abell first dismissed those "least inclined to work," and his decisions seem to have been generally respected. The absence of much labor difficulty again indicates a general support for the operation of the program. Charleston seemed to be the center of the discontent and Frank Percy again led resistance which desired more hours, more pay, and more medical care. Again, some felt the root of the

⁴¹All the WPA grants noted above are rounded to the nearest lower thousand, and were gleaned from the Charleston Daily News for the period concerned; confirmation of most projects was made in an interview with Seneca M. Abell, July 24, 1975.

issue lay with outside agitation, but nothing tangible supports the allegation. The resistance was the exception rather than the rule, as the men were usually desirous of holding their three-four days per week job since relief allotments had become tighter from all government sources. Some political resistance from Democrats was encountered by Abell, as is indicated by John B. Rardin's labeling him a "de-horned Republican." But wherever there was opposition to Rardin, there was usually safety in numbers, and this case proved no exception.⁴²

Some flak for the "shovel-leaners" was undoubtedly encountered. There were no local immobile twenty-man queues to half-moon houses over man-holes, but some of the projects raised eyebrows. Clearing Charleston Township roads of snow, fighting grassfires west of Lake Paradise, sweeping and washing the streets of the Charleston square, sponsoring a storytelling contest for children in a public park, compiling a Vital Statistics Index for the Courthouse--all these projects no doubt smacked of "made work" to more established citizens and perhaps even to some WPA workers. But a strong case could be made that they were worthwhile, and might well not have been done otherwise. In addition, other "fringe" projects indicated merit. Educational opportunities first begun under CWES were again instituted and even expanded upon under WPA. Coles, Edgar, and Cumberland counties co-operated as a region where teachers offered adult classes four to five days a week in such subjects as woodworking, driver's education, auto mechanics, typing, and shorthand. The emphasis was obviously on vocational training. In addition, literature,

⁴²Interview with Seneca M. Abell, July 24, 1975.

adult literacy, and art were offered. One other "practical" class in adult education was "family living" in which child-care--hygiene, family relationships, and keeping the child in school--was taught. Teachers usually met in Charleston each Friday for a sort of "institute" to compare methods and plan for the following week and month. Since "adult" materials did not often exist, this was valuable time for preparing the "book" to be used.⁴³

The success of the program was apparent in the continued enrollment of students in the classes. Most communities--in Coles, Mattoon and Charleston--readily volunteered "classrooms," rent, and heat. In Mattoon actual school classrooms were provided for some classes, which helped to lend credibility and a business-like aura to the adult classes. Two minor drawbacks were that sometimes local school officials viewed the success with the "drop-outs" in the adult classes somewhat jealously, and all the teachers of adult classes had to "go on" relief before being employed by WPA. In addition, some were not certified teachers. But generally their work was competent, and some certainly found it extremely rewarding.⁴⁴

Another WPA program of merit in that it also gave women employment was the sewing room projects which were established in both Charleston and Mattoon. Both the IERC work programs and the CWA had largely ignored women, but the sewing projects allowed around 40-50 women in each city to be employed and self-supporting. This figure, plus the women teachers above,

⁴³Interview with Mary S. Reid, July 14, 1975.

⁴⁴Ibid.

would usually represent approximately 10% of the WPA's quota. In addition to sewing materials provided by the federal government into clothing articles ranging from training pants to men's work shirts, some of the women would be on call as "home-keepers" to serve as maids, midwives, or nurses in a home with illness. But most sewed, and the products were distributed to people on relief. Charleston's sewing room, at Ninth and Jackson Streets, and Mattoon's, at Twelfth and Dewitt Avenue, provided their own hot lunch programs at \$.10-.15 per lunch with some of the women being designated just to cook in the morning. The sewing rooms operated from December, 1935, to August, 1937, when the machines were locked up and stored, due to a lack of appropriations. Despite dual supervision over sewers and homekeepers, the projects seemed popular among the women, who made \$44 per month they would not otherwise have seen, and no controversy surrounded the sewing rooms.⁴⁵

Longer lasting, though far less expensive per year than the sewing rooms, was the National Youth Administration. The intent of the program was to enable high school and college students to remain in school by providing them with part-time jobs which would allow them an honest and respectable subsistence. Eligibility in such a program was naturally based on need, character, and ability, with determination being made by local school authorities. The age parameter was 16-28, and pay ranged from \$6 per month for a high school student to \$15 per month for an undergraduate. Since the Teachers' College was in Coles, the NYA served both classifications of students.

⁴⁵Interview with Ruby Moore, July 23, 1975.

By March, 1936, NYA was in operation in the area, and most students on its roll were working on streets in Mattoon and Charleston, which rightly implies that the majority were men. That month the Coles NYA head, Clarence Huffman, announced that most of the sixty students would begin working on trails, bird houses, and general beautification at the new State Park (Fox Ridge). Another project the students engaged in included canvassing for unused books and magazines to be rebound and redistributed to hospitals, poor and aged homes, and the Salvation Army. Street painting and street washing were also not out of bounds for the NYA student. In addition, by 1938, a residential industrial training school had been established in Charleston. Under the direction of Harry Anderson, some students lived in a large house on the southeast corner of Route 130 at Lincoln while working at repair and woodworking training. One of the workshops was located at the corner of Monroe and Third Streets, the activity there being refinishing and repairing furniture. Several students worked at the high school stadium building or repairing classroom furniture. At Lake Paradise, some Mattoon students learned mechanical skills in a shop established there. At least one student did odd jobs around the fire department in Charleston--making beds, cleaning trucks, etc. And at the Teachers' College, large numbers were employed as laboratory help, clerical aids, and in various other odd jobs.⁴⁶

Enough students were employed at the college--160--in December, 1936, to drive the Coles total to 297 for a total

⁴⁶Interview with Luther Dennis, July 6, 1975; and with Harold Dennis, July 10, 1975; also see Charleston Daily News, September 7, 1935, p. 1; March 25, 1936, p. 1.

payroll of \$2,814 that month. In February, 1938, 196 Coles students divided a payroll of \$2,807. The cores of student employment were naturally in the cities: ninety students were paid \$1,023 at the Teachers' College; twenty-eight Charleston students tallied \$101; forty-two Mattoon students earned \$148; and an Oakland fourteen drew \$40.⁴⁷ This represents a minor portion of the total work relief poured into Coles, certainly. Spread over four school terms, the NYA payroll approached \$100,000, which was hardly viewed as a drop in the bucket by either the students, their parents, or the school officials. But the benefit of NYA was much like that of the Federal Writers', Theater, Music, and Art Projects--it kept the students off the relief rolls. Incidentally, none of those artistic projects played a role in Coles County. But, as in the artistic projects, the success of NYA was difficult to measure, because its impact was mostly in the mind of the student. When Eleanor Roosevelt arrived in Charleston to open the guest speaker series at the Teachers' College on November 17, 1938, she felt strongly, after visiting the Charleston residential training school, that the same should be done for girls.

For Coles and the alphabet, it had been a long haul from 1933 to 1940. More than seven years of less than comfort had been confused and soothed by alphabetical lag and overlap. The IERC, CWA, PWA, WPA, and NYA--all had affected Coles and each other with varying degrees of success. Their intents and acceptance had varied, but, after all, they had increased purchasing

⁴⁷Charleston Daily News, January 19, 1937, p. 1; March 10, 1938, p. 1.

power, and therefore improved the local economy. The IERC had contributed between \$1.5 and \$1.6 million; the CWA's share was nearly \$.3 million, when materials were figured in; the PWA must have spent around \$300,000; WPA grants approximated \$1.5 million; and the NYA expended in the neighborhood of \$100,000--all of which without a doubt played a large role in preventing the local depression from becoming more severe, and slowly contributed to recovery.

CHAPTER III

BUSINESS AND THE "ROOSEVELT SHUFFLE," 1933-1939

The first awareness of the "rearrangement" of affairs in Coles came to the locals when Franklin D. Roosevelt declared a national "Banking Holiday," effective two days after his inauguration. Instead of numbing news, it was encouraging because it meant national action would be taken on an obvious problem. Illinois' Governor Henry Horner, in conjunction with the governor of New York, had already closed all Illinois banks for three days at 3:15 A.M. on March 4. Many who had supported Roosevelt wondered how he would be able to shuffle a "new deal" out of cards that had been running so badly. In fact, the New Deal would not be as effective in Coles' business recovery as it was in relief, but the program did help restore confidence in the business system.

The bank closings simply made painfully legitimate what was already happening in Coles--evaporation of cash flow. Helplessly, bankers from Charleston, Mattoon, Ashmore, Rardin, Oakland, Humboldt, Janesville, and Greenup attended a Mattoon meeting at the Hotel Grant in a futile attempt to decide what course to follow. After two meetings, the Coles-Cumberland Bankers' Federation could only resolve to await the U. S. Treasurer's instructions to open. In the meantime they provided local merchants with change so that business might

continue "normally." Meanwhile, Brown Shoe checks were not issued, since they could not be cashed, and the company sent \$22,000 in cash for the Charleston payroll. By March 15, 1933, the Mattoon banks had permission to reopen and it appeared the Charleston National Trust would be allowed to open its doors the following Monday. But many days were to pass before Charleston could again boast of local banking services.¹

On March 22, the Toledo State Bank reopened unrestricted; the Ashmore and Rardin State Banks followed suit on March 28. Finally on March 30, the government conservator, H. C. Eisenmeyer, dismissed five officers of the National Trust Bank indefinitely in an economy move, including President Frank Johnson. Two weeks later, after a Reconstruction Finance Corporation loan of \$77,000 had been repaid, only \$66,000 remained in cash assets, so it was announced that the owners' 2,000 shares were liable at \$30 per share. Such news was not accepted with restraint. Nor was the news, of the first week in May, that the National Bank was insolvent and would be liquidated, with deposits payable as loans and assets became available. Dissatisfied with that solution, a local delegation of bankers and citizens, led by F. W. "Jack" Claar, lobbied in Washington, D. C., for alternatives, and were promised an RFC agent would come to size things up locally. They hoped that reorganization would allow 50% to be paid on deposits, rather than the 30% through liquidation.²

¹Charleston Daily News, March 8, 1933, p. 1; March 10, 1933, p. 1; March 14, 1933, p. 1; Daily Journal-Gazette, March 15, 1933, p. 1.

²Charleston Daily News, March 31, 1933, p. 1; April 13, 1933, p. 1; May 3, 1933, p. 1; September 18, 1933, p. 1.

But months passed before that hope was realized. In October, a grand jury, at the direction of the state's attorney, was not given the opportunity to return true bills against any of the banking parties. In December's first week, the Ashmore State Bank was again closed for examination and adjustment. In the second week, stockholders of the National Trust were asked to help initially in the reorganization by buying shares of stock equal to 60% of the original stock share, and by giving a note for the rest in order to create an indemnifying fund for depositors and creditors of the old bank. They were promised that if the assets of the old bank covered everything, then the note would be returned uncollected. On December 12, the RFC did finally extend approval of a \$200,000 reorganizational loan. This boosted the effort, and as December was torn from the calendar, most of the needed 1,000 shares, which were non-assessible and priced at \$125 each, had been purchased, and many depositors had waived 50% of their deposits to spur the reopening of the bank. In mid-January, it was announced that Lewis Linder, a prominent business man with an anti-publicity predilection, had refused the bank presidency, yielding to the more gregarious and neutral Seth E. Thomas, head of social science at the Teachers' College. Finally, at 1:00 P. M. on Monday, February 26, 1934--one week less than a year after Governor Horner had first closed it--the reorganized Charleston National Bank opened to restore service to the Charleston citizens awaiting to "make deposits."³

³Ibid., December 11, 1933, p. 1; December 13, 1933, p. 1; December 29, 1933, p. 1; February 22, 1934, p. 1.

The service was to be somewhat restricted, but most agreed it was better than none at all. When the RFC loan finally arrived from the Chicago Federal Reserve Bank on opening day, the CNB, as it later was abbreviated, was able to pay anyone who so desired 50% of his deposits regardless of the account. Certificates on the remaining deposits could be used as security for short term loans, and were transferable. Meanwhile, the trustees were allowed three years to collect outstanding loans. Despite the institution of a service charge on checking accounts, the bank gained \$12,000 in deposits in the afternoon it opened; the fact that there were no substantial withdrawals was credited to good publicity of the holding of more cash and bonds than deposits.⁴

From then on, business continued as normally as possible for a bank and a community having been through a crisis of that proportion. But many had been "stung" and could not forget it. In 1933, small sums of money that had grown increasingly deflated represented good savings. When the suspension in limbo had come, it became possible to repay any overdraft but impossible to withdraw deposits until the bank reopened, and then only partially. Business hung in mid-air for a year; one man could not cash a check to make the first payment on a new car he had bought, and the loaning agency was unable to do it for him either, after insistently notifying him of his delinquency. By a stroke of lucky misfortune the Teachers' College payroll came late the first week of March, 1933, and nearly one hundred substantial checks could not be cashed at the

⁴Ibid., February 22, 1934, p. 1; February 27, 1934, p. 1.

sealed National Trust Bank.⁵ For the majority of Charleston area residents, it was more than a handicap for business-- it was hardship. Reluctant surrounding banks could only absorb some of the slack. Although the Mattoon banks both opened within eleven days and most of the others within twenty-four days, each city faced its own problems, similar to Charleston's but not so severe. A Mattoon man had just borrowed \$250 for a down payment on a business enterprise when the National Bank was closed before he could clear the check. He had only \$.60 in his pocket, but the bank reopened within two weeks.⁶ Mattoon's handicap from the "Banking Holiday" had certainly been less than Charleston's was to be.

Two years from the reopening of the reorganized National Trust, Charleston bankers were able to repay the RFC loan and could begin to consider repaying the "other half" of the deposits, which had been legally waived. Thirteen months later, on May 1, 1937, the National Trust made its first and last installment on the rest of the deposits, bringing the total repaid to 55% of the deposits. This payment came on the heels of a 3% dividend payment to CNB stockholders. And from 1937 through 1939, the CNB was able to pay stockholders 3% semi-annually, so it appeared that Charleston banking was back on its feet, even if some deposits had been waived.⁷

As noted, one more bank closed in 1933, the Ashmore State

⁵Interview with Glen Seymour, July 11, 1975.

⁶Interview with Robert Alexander, July 24, 1975.

⁷Charleston Daily News, April 24, 1937, p. 1; January 13, 1937, p. 1; January 6, 1939, p. 1.

Bank, but all Coles banks tended to grow through the remainder of the decade. The 1939 total volume for Coles banks had slightly surpassed \$7.5 million; by 1944, their total volume was nearly \$17.25 million. Perhaps more indicative of the strain of the depression decade was that deposits in 1929 represented 64% of banking volume, but, by 1944, this portion had dwindled to 4%.⁸ It would appear that faith in the banks had returned, but it was short-term faith which shunned long-term deposits. Nevertheless, business began to recover locally, and the New Deal banking measures deserved much credit for buttressing the vital institutions.

There were other New Deal programs which were less obviously successful. On August 5, 1933, when the first Blue Eagle appeared on the Daily Journal-Gazette masthead, only forty-three Mattoon firms had signed up with the National Recovery Administration. The NRA attempted to keep wages up, hours down, and promote the right of collective bargaining. Since Mattoon had 257 retail establishments alone in 1930, there appeared not to be immediate support of the NRA codes. By August 28 and September 2 respectively, both Mattoon and Charleston had established "NRA Committees" to beef up the signers' list. In Mattoon, the secretary of the Association of Commerce, D. J. Towmey, headed up the campaign; in Charleston, key city groups represented on Chairman Clarence Huffman's committee included the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, CERC, Charleston Welfare League, Women's Club, the Nickel Plate, city ministers, labor, the mayor, and the Red Cross. Their

⁸See Table VIII.

efforts did not result in any real wage or hours improvement, but they probably did deter some firms from wholesale pay cuts. That the committees met less than total success was apparent with the Mattoon grocers' adoption of a sixty-four hour work week on December 16, 1933. But the code effort continued locally in 1934, and the Blue Eagle seemed highly revered, even if its meaning was sometimes less than comprehended. The local leaders must have realized the unemployment and commercial problems which would have resulted without wage and hour supports, but, by May, 1935, when the NRA was declared unconstitutional, no mortal outcry was voiced in Coles.⁹

No doubt the greatest reason for a loss of taste for the NRA was Section 7a of the parent National Industrial Recovery Act. This guarantee of the right of collective bargaining soon led to the formation of unions in both Charleston and Mattoon, which in turn led to increased aspirations by factory workers and therefore labor strife. Coles was generally not very responsive to the right of collective bargaining, and Charleston specifically resisted the unionization movement tenaciously. On October 3, 1934, the Charleston Daily News reported a union organizer had been contacting the city's Brown Shoe workers attempting to organize a union where one wasn't needed, since the NRA already regulated wages and hours!

⁹Daily Journal-Gazette, August 5, 1933, p. 1; Charleston Daily News, December 16, 1933, p. 1; and U. S. Department of Commerce, Fifteenth Census of the United States, Vol. I; Retail Distribution: Part I--Summary for the United States, and Statistics for Counties and Incorporated Places of 1,000 Population and Over (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), p. 116.

The same day, Fred Kuehne closed his Mattoon plant rather than grant "closed shop" to a union being organized there. He noted that no other furniture factory had closed shop, and firmly pronounced that "the men who joined the union are not asking for more wages. They have been satisfied with the hours of work. But they ask a voice in the management of the business, and this we are not willing to grant."¹⁰ Kuehne's had employed 150 men, but was now cancelling all materials ordered and all utilities service and preparing to move. Attempting to mediate the issue, Association of Commerce representatives met with the Committee of Local 1866 of the Carpenters' and Joiners' Union and found the bone of contention was a voice in working conditions. The union leadership argued that around twenty members had been fired for union activity, and that out-of-towners had been brought in as replacements. Meanwhile, one John Allen was leading a non-union drive to reopen the factory, and claimed twenty-five signatories and fifteen intimidated sympathetics. Such sparring continued until a joint meeting on October 12 between Kuehne officials, Mattoon business leaders, and union representatives resulted in a "compromise" by which all workers, union and non-union alike, would be called back. Reflecting on the Kuehne difficulties, Charleston editor John B. Rardin invoked Section 7a as providing for no coercion by the employer of the employee, and "closed shop" was therefore prohibited. Of course, Rardin overlooked alleged coercion by Kuehne's management in the form of firings for union activities.¹¹

¹⁰Daily Journal-Gazette, October 4, 1933, p. 1.

¹¹Ibid., October 5, 1933, p. 1; October 6, 1933, p. 1;

But Rardin soon had concerns closer to home, as the contest warmed between the growing Charleston unit of the International Boot and Shoe Workers' Union, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, and the Brown Shoe Company. By December, nearly one-half the factory workers were favoring the union. In January, 1934, Brown Shoe contended that the union could not tell workers they would get no rights if they failed to join the union; in addition, the National Industrial Recovery Act had not prohibited individual bargaining. But in latter April, after Local 664 of the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union in Mattoon threatened to strike if a pay increase schedule of from 10-60% was not adopted, Brown Shoe officials promised to meet in Mattoon with union representatives from six of its factories in Illinois and Indiana on May 8. But the officials did not show, and the same day passive "non-production" strike votes were taken by the Mattoon, Charleston, and Sullivan, Illinois, plants. While threatening to wire General Hugh Johnson, head of NRA, the local unions stood idly by their machines or played cards while union representatives went to the St. Louis main office to try to confer with company officials. On May 11, all six striking plants were padlocked, locking out 1100 workers in Charleston and 850 in Mattoon. Pickets were then stationed around both plants to prevent damage which could be blamed on the union or removal of the machinery to another plant. The Charleston local's president, Harold C. "Dolly" Davidson, who also served as president of the union's District Association governing the six striking plants, had

directed the locals toward a non-violent policy which would nevertheless draw attention to the problem. Therefore, on May 12, Charleston unioners paraded in order around the Charleston square and then back to their union headquarters in Trainmen's Hall. And on May 14, Charleston and Mattoon were both represented at a peaceful parade at Sullivan. By the following day, four more Missouri Brown Shoe plants were called out on strike, and only four of fourteen plants remained in operation.¹²

Finally, on May 18, Brown Shoe officials met with H. H. Phillips, a Boston official of the union, Harold Davidson, and an area labor organizer, H. H. Emmons. National Labor Board mediation was provided in an attempt to resolve the issues of 16-60% wage increases and union recognition. Meanwhile, back in Charleston, a counter-union movement was underway, and the union met in a Morton Park rally for a pep talk against non-union activities. But on May 25, a settlement was reached in St. Louis providing that there would be no union recognition nor any discrimination against the union, and that all wages and working conditions would be negotiated separately by each factory with a representative from each department. There was no wage increase; local negotiations were to take care of any pay increases. The conditions of settlement were ratified by a majority of the plants, with Mattoon one of the dissenters. But work finally began again after three weeks

¹² Charleston Daily News, November 8, 1933, p. 1; January 29, 1934, p. 1; April 24, 1934, p. 1; May 9, 1934, p. 1; May 11, 1934, p. 1; May 15, 1934, p. 1.

of confrontation.¹³

The result of the settlement was that the onus was on each local to possess strong memberships for negotiating effectively. To Harold "Dolly" Davidson, solidarity was essential to overcoming working twelve hours to make \$.50 on piecework, due to the lack of orders or smooth operation. On wages of \$.11 per hour, comfort was hardly forthcoming. Sometimes women went home with \$3 for a six-day week. Such pay often entitled them to relief from the township supervisor, which ironically meant that the taxpayer was subsidizing the Brown Shoe Company. And meanwhile, Brown Shoe was regularly announcing healthy dividend installments.¹⁴ However, some workers were anxious to preserve their job and regarded union activities as a threat. So as union and non-union forces contended for membership, tempers flared. The evening of July 23, 1934, a non-union "social club" meeting was held in the Modern Woodman Hall, one block northwest of the Charleston square. Everett Curtis, noted for his pugilistic prowess, stood guard at the door, but fell victim to a solid blow over the head. As Mattoon and Charleston unioners forced their entry, the fracas engulfed dozens of antagonists. A Mattoon unioner, Russell Shriver, also suffered a severe blow to the head, and a rough total of a dozen required some medical treatment. Mayor G. Palmer Stoner soon showed up with both sheriff's deputies and city police, but the riot was not really quelled until all the

¹³Daily Journal-Gazette, May 15, 1934, p. 1; May 18, 1934, p. 1; May 26, 1934, p. 1.

¹⁴Interview with Harold C. Davidson, July 29, 1975.

light bulbs were broken.¹⁵

Charleston's justice came swiftly. Two days later, Jacob Berkowitz learned that, as attorney for twenty-four of the thirty arrested, the jury selection would begin Saturday of the same week and the trial began the Wednesday following. Charged with causing a general disturbance which violated a city ordinance, all of Berkowitz's defendants pleaded not guilty. The five-day trial held in Police Magistrate Dennis Laughlin's court yielded the following verdicts: thirteen were found guilty of aiding and assisting in disturbance of the peace; eleven were found not guilty; and city attorney T. N. Cofer dismissed six cases. Fines ranged from Oscar Stewart's \$2.50 to "Dolly" Davidson's \$87.50; court costs averaged \$27.50 each.¹⁶ A circuit court appeal upheld the city's decision in January, 1935; and an appellate court seconded the thirteen's conviction when its turn came in January, 1936. Charleston's officials breathed a sigh of relief, feeling the court's decision would

. . . do much towards strengthening the city officials in their efforts to protect the peace and quiet of the city against such disturbances and will have a beneficial effect in the future. It ought to also do much towards bringing about the reopening of the local factory here. It has been a costly experience for all concerned and should teach a valuable lesson.¹⁷

City officials and many residents apparently strongly felt that violence and labor strife were not only illegal but also prohibiting the normal functioning of business. John

¹⁵Daily Journal-Gazette, July 24, 1934, p. 1.

¹⁶Charleston Daily News, August 6, 1934, p. 1.

¹⁷Ibid., January 18, 1936, p. 1.

Bush, head of all the Brown Shoe factories, was diametrically opposed to union activities, and had begun to close down the factories where unionists were pressing for majority membership, though excusing the closings as due to business conditions. But when the Charleston factory was closed in May, employees were advised to find work elsewhere if they could. Naturally, most could not, and therefore the demands on the IERC relief funds increased drastically. Throughout 1935, many citizens felt the unionists were to blame for the depressed economic circumstances which resulted from the Brown Shoe closings. "Dolly" Davidson became the focal point of many citizens' complaints, as was evidenced by his being physically warned by a Sullivan merchants' mob cued by a fire alarm when he visited that city to protest the recent reopening of its plant on an "open-shop" basis. Because they had neglected the tar and feathers, the mob had to be stopped by a lawyer in the ranks who remembered the legal consequences. On September 11, the Charleston Boot and Shoe Workers' union voted 124-65 in favor of returning their charter to the Boston headquarters, since it was rumored that the plant would then reopen in three weeks. After the vote, some fifty men were also prepared to tar and feather Davidson if they could have found him. Therefore came the sigh of relief from many when his appeals of the Charleston riot conviction were exhausted.¹⁸

Four days after the Charleston workers surrendered their charter, the Mattoon union, in hopes of preventing a threatened

¹⁸Interview with Harold C. Davidson, July 29, 1975; and Charleston Daily News, September 9, 1935, p. 1; September 12, 1935, p. 1.

shut-down of their already reopened factory, also voted to return their charter. However, the factory closed anyway in October, and did not reopen until April, 1936. At that time, unemployment in Coles was so high that 1000 applied for 200 jobs. Meanwhile, extensive repairs had been made on the Charleston building, and it prepared to open at less than half its capacity in June. The Charleston Daily News rejoiced that "everybody will now be happy and the town will go into the throes of a real substantial boom."¹⁹ But when over 1000 applied for 400 jobs which soon shrank to 200 by mid-August, perhaps several wondered if sacrificing the unions had solved all Coles' factory problems. Nevertheless, the fact remained that the new labor unions fostered by the parent act establishing the NRA had all been choked out or effectively muzzled by a conservative alliance of management and public opinion. Coles was not really ready yet for unions other than those directly related to construction or railroading, and those two groups remained the only substantive support the factory unionists could muster. Brown Shoe, meantime, continued to have its labor difficulties at Salem, Illinois, and elsewhere; and in 1938, Kuehne was instructed by the National Labor Relations Board to re-instate 150 Flora plant employees fired for a union sit-down strike in March, 1938. But in Coles, neither John Bush nor Fred Kuehne encountered further effective union activities in the Thirties.²⁰

¹⁹Charleston Daily News, May 27, 1936, p. 1.

²⁰Ibid., September 16, 1935, p. 1; March 31, 1936, p. 1; June 10, 1936, p. 1; January 13, 1938, p. 1.

Other recovery related measures of the New Deal which extended down to Coles, and perhaps more effectively, included the Federal Housing Administration and the Homeowner's Loan Corporation. Both agencies tended to be used in Coles as a method of refinancing mortgages, but the Charleston Federal Housing Committee, for example, had insured 289 modernization notes at an aggregate of \$74,417 by April 30, 1936, a little over one year from its local institution. Chairman Jack Claar's committee also insured 8 mortgages at a total of \$25,875 by March 31, 1936. The HOLC had functioned locally earlier than the FHA, and after the three year period ending June 13, 1936, boasted 293 individual loans totaling \$683,710. This number of loans had resulted from around 600 applications, and roughly one-tenth of the money loaned went for tax assessments.²¹ Certainly these quantities of federal money did not fend off economic disaster for Coles homeowners, but neither was such a contribution negligible.

The overall business response of Coles to the New Deal does not seem to have been all that positive, but certain areas showed improvement. The number of retail establishments grew steadily and substantially from 1930 through 1939. Retail payrolls did undoubtedly decline drastically in the middle of the period, probably reflecting layoffs as well as devaluation, but had nearly recovered by 1939. Wholesale establishments also grew steadily from 1930 to 1935, with sales similarly growing in volume, if not in devalued dollars. And both the number

²¹Ibid., June 17, 1936, p. 1; April 13, 1936, p. 1; and August 17, 1936, p. 1.

of employees and payroll quantities increased by over 70% from 1930 to 1939. In fact, the depression seemed to most stunt manufacturing in Coles. Where there had been thirty-eight establishments in 1927, thirty remained in 1935, and only one was added by 1939. Both production value and the number of employees had more than halved in the eight years from 1927 to 1935, and, although employment had nearly recovered by 1939, production value remained at about two-thirds its pre-depression level. Wages continued to suffer at about the same rate as production value, perhaps slightly more.²²

The worst years for Coles business were probably 1933 and 1935. In 1933, Mattoon citizens could only spend an aggregate of \$200,000 for its private and public repairs and remodeling. That same year, Mattoon's Chuse Engine Works closed and moved out of town. For the first time in many years, Central Illinois Public Service was unable to pay local dividends in 1933. The railroads seemed to have more business than in 1932, but were still well under previous levels of business. The increased level of unemployment accompanying the Brown Shoe strife of 1934-35 and the strain on the farmers after the 1934 drought were reflected in the decreased retail sales of 1935. Nevertheless, tax collection was reported at 88.5% completed by the county treasurer in mid-September, 1935. At the same time, he reported that 60% of the delinquent taxes from 1932-33 had been paid to that point. At similar times in 1936, 1937, and 1938, the treasurer would report 92%, 75%, and 80% of the previous year's taxes collected, respectively. The availability of

²² See Table VIII.

banking and federal loans had eased up the tax problem encountered in large proportions in 1932-1933.²³

For the consumer, the improvement by 1936 was not so obvious. In 1929, Coles had utilized 5,440 residential telephones; by 1935, only 3,748 remained installed. However, the manager of Charleston's local exchange could report in December, 1936, that many were reinstalling phones absent for five years, and at a rate of one per day. And though the population was increasing, the number of autos registered in Coles decreased from 7,900 to 7,620 between 1927 and 1937. A less drastic parallel was in major household magazine subscriptions; from 1927 to 1938, subscriptions to standard magazines declined from 9,151 to 9,007.²⁴

Brown Shoe did begin to grant some wage increases in 1937. By April, wages were up 10%, and remained so until April, 1938, when 10% was again cut from wages. But in August it was returned, and business stabilized more through the remainder of the decade. While public bodies like the City of Mattoon and the County Board remained in debt, by July, 1937, several merchants were prosperous enough to close at noon on Wednesdays. Earlier that year, many Charleston residents had felt sufficiently "comfortable" to contribute five or six truckloads of clothing to a drive organized by Mrs. Otto Pinnell, of the Charleston Welfare League, and Everett Brown, of the Red Cross,

²³Daily Journal-Gazette, December 9, 1933, p. 1; Charleston Daily News, September 11, 1935, p. 1; September 18, 1936, p. 1; September 1, 1937, p. 1; September 2, 1938, p. 1.

²⁴See Table VIII; and Charleston Daily News, December 4, 1936, p. 1.

for relief for the flooded victims of the Ohio River Valley. Even if they had no loose money, Coles residents were prepared to aid others by 1937. By 1938, Charlestonites were "healed" enough to pay \$.30, instead of the previous Lincoln Theatre's \$.25, at the newly opened \$150,000 Will Rogers Theatre.²⁵

Of course, Mattoon received a tremendous shot in the arm from oil speculation in the latter Thirties. In 1936, exploration was begun by Carter Oil Company, a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey, after seismographic work revealed an oil bearing structure over ten miles long and a mile wide running north to south through Mattoon. Soon Carter, Texaco, Gulf, Superior, Magnolia, and all other Illinois companies but one were competing for leases as well as an Illinois headquarter's location in Mattoon. The influx of salaried advance personnel was unprecedented and it created such a housing and office shortage that both the Hotel Grant and the Hotel Byers were soon full, and many people rented out sleeping rooms or cots on back porches at \$10 per night. The representative of the initial company had to set up headquarters in the Byers Hotel for two years, due to the lack of space.²⁶

In reality, no production of oil occurred in the Mattoon area until 1945-1946. This was due to the doubtful risk of the Mattoon field, the slowness of closing out the leasing blocks, and shortages of steel pipe during World War II. But the leasing

²⁵Interview with Everett W. Brown, July 30, 1975; Charleston Daily News, July 15, 1937, p. 1; January 28, 1938, p. 1; August 6, 1938, p. 1.

²⁶Interview with Alf R. Thompson, July 29, 1975; with Elmer and Juanita Ganley, July 29, 1975; and with Robert and Irene Alexander, July 24, 1975.

and establishment of headquarters poured new money and vigor into the hotels, the country club, and undoubtedly the city's commerce. One office equipment firm rapidly blossomed in the 1936-1939 period; and Mattoon had possessed too many struggling lawyers before 1936, but the oil leasing technicalities kept them occupied into World War II. So, in spite of not having drilled, money was pumped into Mattoon's economy while surrounding towns envied her oil potential.²⁷

As the end of the decade approached, it was apparent that conditions in Coles were improving in the business community. Coles had suffered most, it seemed, in the odd years of the early Thirties, and the New Deal programs had not quickly or extensively ameliorated business conditions, especially in the area of manufacturing. Merit was deserved by the federal government for the first real stabilization of Coles banking, and certainly federal loans had eased a modest percentage of the individual financial problems encountered in Coles. After the New Deal was instituted, tax delinquency never again reached epidemic proportions of 1932-1933. But in most business cases the arm of federal intervention did much less for Coles' recovery than it had for Coles' relief. However, the improvement of retail activity was definitely aided by the above relief-oriented federal measures which did create purchasing power. Otherwise, the contribution of the "Roosevelt Shuffle" to Coles' business seemed small, though nebulous.

27

Ibid.; some areas south of Mattoon experienced the actual drilling as well as the leasing boom in 1937-1939. One such stimulus of great value is recounted in E. L. Allen, New Deal... in Effingham County, pp. 51-53.

CHAPTER IV

THE FEDERAL-FARM RENDEZVOUS, 1933-1939

Farmers probably felt the guiding hand of the federal government in the Thirties much more than did businessmen, or even labor, in Coles. Federal intervention in agriculture continued to depend on local organization and execution, but most Coles farmers were eager to comply with federal regulations on voluntary programs. The reasons for the farmer's readiness were far from incomprehensible: in 1932 and 1933 Illinois' average prices for both production grain and livestock hit new lows unparalleled in decades before and after; the 1933 farm parity ratio was at an all-time low of fifty-eight, and farmers knew they could not long survive such conditions.¹ Meanwhile, their tax burden per acre remained high compared to market value of their land and products, so they were prepared to try something--anything. Although the voluntary associations for crop control formed before 1933 had been a step forward, they had not resulted in substantial price increases.

By December, 1933, however, federal voluntary programs with more fiscal impact were in operation. That month, Theodore Rathe, chairman of the Coles Supervisory Council for the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), estimated that over half of Coles' farmers would participate in a corn storage

¹See Table I.

plan for the 1933 crop. As of December 15, over 10,000 bushels of Coles corn had already been sealed in cribs, thereby allowing the farmer to lock the price at a minimum of \$.45 per bushel. While the corn was stored as collateral, the farmer could get a loan from a national bank until such time as the market price increased or he was told to deliver his corn.

The small farmer, who seldom before enjoyed the luxury of waiting to sell, was most benefited initially by the program, but it salvaged larger farmers as well. Rathe was also able to announce that fall that 94% of the Coles wheat farmers had signed up with the government's wheat acreage reduction program, with 99% honors going to Humboldt Township. The wheat program entitled signatories to \$.28 per bushel on 54% of their average yield if they would plant only the acreage allotted by an elected community wheat control committee. Since a tremendous holdover of surplus wheat from 1932 existed, most farmers were quite willing to try limiting their crop for that amount.²

In 1934, the AAA began its local attempts to reduce corn acreage and hog production, hogs being basically corn-on-the-hoof. After the last in a series of meetings to explain the "federal corn-hog program" in January, veteran Farm Advisor Melvin Thomas felt that its reception had been favorable and that many would participate. In August, at least sixty corn-hog supervisors for Coles were given a training session on how to measure fields and inspect hogs. The large number was proven realistic when the participation tallies for that year and the following came in: in 1934, 1,710 contracts were

²Charleston Daily News, December 15, 1933, p. 1; and Daily Journal-Gazette, September 23, 1933, p. 1.

signed to retire 235,544 acres from corn production; and 1,309 contracts reduced corn acreage by 206,938 acres in 1935. It appeared that 401 fewer contracts had been signed the second year, but meanwhile the average acreage retirement had increased from 137 to 158 acres per contract. Apparently the larger farmers were finding it more beneficial. Nevertheless, the percentage of total participation was relatively high at 75% in 1934 and 57% in 1935. Meanwhile, the wheat program was paying its dividends in Coles. By March, 1934, \$19,000 had been received by county farmers for only 590 of nearly 2,000 contracts.³

The success of the AAA was apparent, though far from 100%. As in nearby Effingham County, the AAA's cumulative influence was positive. During 1934-1935, key crop and livestock prices made steady advances in the nation and Coles. Credit went to the farm cooperatives, but "mother nature" lent an undesired hand. By June, 1934, Coles had received so little rain that it was listed as a drought relief area along with the rest of the "Dust Bowl." If that wasn't enough, chinch bugs began attacking corn and broomcorn as they were driven from the freshly cut wheat fields. In order to cope with the bugs, the new Farm Advisor, E. W. Rusk, proposed a technique which involved plowing a furrow around the infested area, spraying the furrow's edge with creosote, and digging postholes along the interior of the creosote line. When the chinch bugs ran the line, refusing to cross creosote, they fell off in the posthole traps. To aid in the strategy, the federal government sent 600 barrels of creosote, the CCERC donated the labor of close to 200 relievers, and

³Charleston Daily News, April 11, 1935, p. 1; February 22, 1934, p. 1; for the number of farms in 1935, see Table VIII.

the township supervisors usually provided transportation and tools. Some fields were eaten, but the creosote treatment worked for the most part, and the bug losses were certainly far less than the drought losses.⁴

The New Dealers had realized, however, that reducing farm production, with or without nature's help, would not shield the farmer from financial hazards even less relenting than nature--banks, insurance companies, and the sheriff. Consequently, the Farm Credit Administration had been established in mid-1933, and its first stirrings locally came with the formation of a Coles Farmers' Debt Committee in September, 1933. With five prominent farmer members from the four corners of the county, this advisory committee confined its activities solely to the mediation and negotiation of adjustments between farm debtors and creditors, and to advisement on credit matters. If a creditor could be convinced to lower the interest rate, or adjust downward the inflated purchase price, or extend the time period on a loan, the committee argued that the local economy and all its participants would be better served in the long run.⁵

But Henry Morgenthau, as director of the FCA, also made more structured forms of financial relief available to Coles farmers. Between June 1, 1933, and May 1, 1934, the FCA loaned \$636,900 to Coles farmers, 92.3% of which was used to refinance indebtedness, often at a lesser rate. Two hundred sixty-five thousand, four hundred dollars went to banks, \$60,500 to insurance companies, \$3,800 for taxes, \$5,100 to merchants, \$263,000

⁴Charleston Daily News, May 11, 1934, p. 1; June 23, 1934, p. 1; Daily Journal-Gazette, June 15, 1934, p. 1; June 20, 1934, p. 1; and E. L. Allen, New Deal . . . in Effingham County, p. 81.

⁵Charleston Daily News, September 9, 1933, p. 1.

to other creditors, and \$21,700 was used to buy land or equipment or improve buildings. Refinancing on such a scale certainly eased the farmer's burden. But longer term loans were made to Coles farmers between May 12, 1933, and mid-November, 1934, in the form of Land Bank and Commissioner's loans. Also under the aegis of the FCA, these loans totaled \$1,157,900 in the noted period alone.⁶ The federal government was pulling no stops in rescuing the "indebted species." At the same time, the FCA also fostered self-help credit associations to engage the farmers more directly in his own financial aids.

While Melvin Thomas was explaining the crop reduction programs in September, 1933, he was also extolling the potential of a cooperative lending organization, the Production Credit Association. Thomas explained that local farmer cooperatives could borrow from Morgenthau's FCA and become their own bankers, in a sense. Apparently Thomas was so successful that he resigned after sixteen years as farm advisor to become active in the formation and operation of a Charleston PCA, and continued to serve as an officer of the National Farm Loan Association. When 1934 closed out, the Charleston PCA had 282 stockholders and had loaned \$141,889; by the end of 1938, 716 stockholders had endorsed \$634,583 worth of loans for the year. In four years of operation, the PCA had loaned \$1,845,000 and had realized a loss of only .07 of 1%. The only real controversy around the PCA occurred when its former accountant was convicted of embezzling \$3,500 from interest payments in 1937.⁷

⁶Ibid., May 29, 1934, p. 1; November 17, 1934, p. 1.

⁷Charleston Daily Courier, February 10, 1939, p. 1.

Farmers could not live by loans alone, and most had apparently recognized as much and were therefore cooperating with the government's production control program in an effort to raise prices. But in January, 1936, only two months after farmers had voted support of the AAA by a seven-to-one margin in a national referendum, the Supreme Court found the processing tax unconstitutional. No local furor, however, was raised over the Supreme Court's decision; it seemed a court's decision was considered inviolate by Coles residents. Anyhow, by March, Congress had made a special appropriation in order to make good the corn-hog contracts which had been signed in 1934-1935. By the time its three year anniversary rolled around, AAA benefits to Coles for acreage reduction totaled \$818,420. Of this amount, the vast majority--\$708,059--went to corn acreage reduction. By the time the second Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1938 was passed, only about 55% of Coles farmers were cooperating, though they did borrow \$382,183.⁸ Those who did cooperate sealed their corn at \$.63 and could receive Commodity Credit loans for that amount per bushel. During the same spring, however, a "Corn Belt Liberty League" was campaigning for its "substantial farmers" in complaining that the AAA's standards were not acceptable to Edgar County and eastern Coles farmers. Simply stated, now that the price was up, the allotments were too small. While only the older and well-established farmers had resisted the program in its earliest years, several farmers who had recovered under the auspices of the program began to feel secure enough

⁸Charleston Daily News, July 30, 1936, p. 1; and Charleston Daily Courier, April 3, 1939, p. 1.

to buck the program by 1938.⁹

Another lesser source of aid for Coles farmers came from the above noted Coles Farmer's Debt Committee, which in 1935 and 1936 served the Resettlement Administration in its attempts to resettle families destituted by nature and finances. Actually, some RA funds were used to enable 24 farmers in the year ending September, 1936, simply to retain their farms while adjusting their debt within their ability to pay. The adjustment was from \$125,685 to \$111,203 on 2,846 acres. As a result, \$802 was paid in back taxes.¹⁰

During the latter Thirties, the AAA program had become a conservation program in addition to its obvious price support activities. One other unusual federal program also shares an evolution from relief to conservation. The Civilian Conservation Corps was promoted with great publicity at its inception as a reforestation army after Roosevelt's own heart, but it was really more of an unemployment measure initially. Before July, 1937, only young male applicants referred by local relief committees, such as CCERC, could enjoy the privilege of working for \$30 per week with \$25 deducted and mailed home to the reliefer's family. Coles was no exception; as noted above between 300 and 500 men signed up from this county between 1933 and 1939. The program certainly had to be beneficial to the families, the individuals, and to the local relief authorities.

⁹Interview with Herman Prather, August 11, 1975; Charleston Daily News, April 27, 1938, p. 1; May 28, 1938, p. 1.

¹⁰Charleston Daily News, August 18, 1936, p. 1; September 3, 1936, p. 1.

But the complexion of the CCC for Coles County changed somewhat in latter February, 1935. Charleston then received news that a conservation camp was to locate there before summer. Indeed, young men began arriving at the south Fourth Street road site in May, having been transferred from Mississippi Palisades Park at Savannah, Illinois. Before the 200 young men started arriving, CCC officials had already arranged for soil erosion prevention work on over 4,000 acres. Farmers had to provide necessary materials such as concrete, but the tools and labor were supplied by the conservation "army." In many ways, it was army-like: at first, Camp Charleston was only a tent encampment; military officers maintained rather strict discipline with regard to dress, meals, and work organization; and only occasional furloughs were granted for relaxation. A permanent furlough in the form of a dishonorable discharge was occasionally threatened.¹¹

For two years, the 18-27 year-old men at Camp Charleston aided area farmers in soil conservation measures. Most of their work involved terracing for erosion prevention, but some work was also done in grading for better soil drainage. Inasmuch as their work was concentrated in the southern and rougher part of the county, erosion measures predominated. Dams were built and pine trees were planted. At the Wrightsville curve on south Route 130, trees were planted on the extremely steep grades adjacent to arrest the turbulent run-off each rain

¹¹Charleston Daily News, April 20, 1935, p. 1; May 24, 1935, p. 1; and interviews with Luther Dennis, July 6, 1975; with Harold Dennis, July 10, 1975; with Walter Newcomb, July 22, 1975.

brought. Some of the men worked at a lime quarry as well, apparently in order to improve clay soils before trees were planted. Undoubtedly, farmers who chose to take advantage of the free labor for conservation measures were well served.¹²

In June, 1937, Camp Charleston was ordered to re-locate at Skokie, Illinois. This did not mean that Coles lost the CCC relief siphon or even all its CCC camps. Almost no local enrollees had been sent to Camp Charleston, and a second camp, Camp Shiloh, was simply moved from just north of the Lincoln farm to the Camp Charleston site. The Shiloh enrollees had all been veterans of the World War, and had spent several months in reconstruction of the Lincoln homestead in order that Governor Horner might dedicate it as Lincoln Log Cabin State Park in August, 1936. After their transfer to Camp Charleston, the Shilohers also engaged in some conservation measures, one of which involved tree planting and related activities at Fox Ridge State Park. In early 1938 the veterans were moved to other western Illinois camps, and the remaining eleven National Park Service representatives were soon joined by new and young blood. After erecting a log cabin on the Charleston Square as part of the National Lincoln Memorial Highway celebration in June, the CCC men returned to soil conservation measures concentrated at Fox Ridge. For most enrollees life in the camps was much more desirable than no work at home, and, although one short-winded sit-down strike was staged at Fox Ridge because the promised steak was not

¹²Interview with Walter Newcomb, July 22, 1975.

served when the shipment failed to arrive, the meal fare was considered pretty good. One didn't mind horsemeat if he didn't know that was what it was. Generally, the townspeople seemed as pleased as the camp residents that the camp was there, and no serious trouble was caused by the conservationists on furlough.¹³

Between the erosion prevention of the CCC and the acreage retirement of the AAA, Coles soil was in better shape as the Thirties drew to a close than it had been for years. The value of these programs was reflected in the increases in the ten-year average crop yield per acre for the decade ending in 1940 over the decade ending in 1930. For corn, the average yield in the Thirties was 37.1 bushels per acre compared to 32.9 for the Twenties. For winter wheat, the increase was from a 17.0 bushel average to 19.2 in the Thirties. And a new crop, soy beans, also registered an increase from a 13.5 bushel average to 18.3.¹⁴ However, not all the credit for increased Coles production was deserved by the federal conservation programs. The use of higher producing hybrid corn increased from less than 10% in the early Twenties to 76.4% in 1940.¹⁵

Not only was science mustered to the farmer's cause in

¹³Charleston Daily News, April 25, 1936, p. 1; May 28, 1938, p. 1; July 22, 1938, p. 1; and interviews with Harold Dennis, July 10, 1975; with Walter Newcomb, July 22, 1975; with Glen Seymour, July 11, 1975.

¹⁴Illinois Cooperative Crop Reporting Service, Illinois Crop Yields Per Acre (harvest) by Counties, 1911-1940 (Springfield, Ill.: State of Illinois, 1940?), unpaginated.

¹⁵Illinois Agricultural Statistics, Circular 445: State Data through 1944 (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois Cooperative Crop Reporting Service, 1949), p. 16.

the Thirties, but also mechanical technology. In 1938, 43.2% of Coles' corn had been mechanically picked; but by 1941, 56.8% fell to the metal juggernaut. Wheat harvested by combine in 1937 came to only 30%, but 52% was so reaped in 1939.¹⁶ The mechanical trend also abetted the process of farm consolidation in Coles. In 1925, 2,306 farms had fractured the productive soil in Coles; a decade later, 2,286 remained. But by 1940, the "hard times" and the mechanical ability to farm more had reduced the number of Coles farms to 2,083 in the five-year interim. Distributed among the 2,083 farms were 1,422 tractors, which indicated that well over half the farmers had taken the most basic mechanical step.¹⁷ Undoubtedly some of the larger farms must have possessed more than one tractor, but that 50% had at least one tractor remains a reasonable estimate.

The ability of the larger farmer to survive also seems to be reflected in the increase in farm tenancy from 41.8% in 1925 to 44.9% in 1940. In general, the flux of depression farming seemed not to favor the welfare of the less capitalized yeoman. But the farmers who did survive the early depression years saw the return of prosperity, though farm income was not a "bonanza" until World War II beefed up demand. With the aid of AAA cooperation payments, 1935 signaled the return of a farm parity ratio of ninety-five, a figure which compared favorably to the average ratio of the Twenties. The next two years were even more profitable, but 1938-1940 registered a mid-eighties average. Finally, in 1941, the ratio rose to two points under the

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 17, 23.

¹⁷See Table VIII.

1910-1914 desired average of one hundred. The AAA had winched the farmer out of the depression throes, and World War II pulled him above "normalcy."¹⁸

The value of the federal farm program to Coles, however, should not be measured in just prices received and paid. Coles farmers learned how to cooperate with the national government in finances and crop control through voluntary programs bringing the stabilization both desired. The AAA made farming a somewhat more predictable occupation, and it is certain that no federal program could have prevented the impersonal consolidation process. The conservation aspect of the AAA was continued in amended and extended form for over three decades with increased emphasis on "soil building" programs. Meanwhile, the "ever-normal granary" principle continued to serve the farmer in sheer dollars. In the Thirties, as well as in later decades, the "allotment" seemed always to be the focus of controversy, but a majority of farmers had recognized the necessity of a program establishing a floor in agricultural price fluctuations.¹⁹

As the Thirties rolled into the Forties, the farm living standard was improving, though many lacked certain urban luxuries. One area of underdevelopment lay in electrical power. In December, 1938, however, the planning stages of rural electrification were nearly complete, and the Rural Electrification Administration had approved the installation of the first phase of 335 line miles in 1939-1940. Nevertheless, at the end of the latter year, only 27.8% of rural Coles enjoyed the luxury

¹⁸See Table VIII and Table I.

¹⁹Interview with Herman Prather, August 11, 1975.

of electricity. Fortunately, for farmers, as the Forties progressed, the Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative rapidly extended the clean and convenient power to rural Coles inhabitants. During the Thirties, no real opposition was registered against this "en-lightening" project, though a few regretted giving the high line the necessary right-of-way.²⁰

All in all, the New Deal had served Coles rural life well. In terms of finance, conservation, and comfort, the quality of rural life was much improved. Like all New Deal experiments, adjustments had been necessary in the agricultural programs. Yet success in achievement of objectives vouched for a feasible program. It was a program which a reformer like Rexford G. Tugwell would have "planned" to the technical ultimate, but his program would probably have failed for its lack of the "open-door rendezvous."

²⁰ Charleston Daily Courier, December 14, 1938, p. 1; see Table VIII; and an interview with Herman Prather, August 11, 1975.

CHAPTER V

IMPRINTS OF THE DEPRESSION: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

When the Depression first began to make itself felt in Coles, most residents reacted by setting their chin, tightening their belt, and preparing to ride it out. Many probably seconded the summary statement of a Charleston editor:

This country is not going to the dogs . . . We have been through similar business storms before, probably not so severe, but they all blow over and the casualties are not so numerous as anticipated. A storm is never pleasant and we are always fearful so long as it lasts. We shall continue to live and will again prosper. The difference between prosperity and adversity is only 15 to 20 per cent of the total volume of business. People will continue to eat, to wear clothes, to go to shows, to ride in automobiles, to read newspapers and to watch advertisements closer than ever, and because things are slow there is no use laying down and making them slower. The only thing that makes this depression hard is that it was so unnecessary. But just sit tight and everything will come around all right. It always has come and always will, just like the rain.¹

Anyhow, a philosophical outlook and perseverance couldn't hurt. Many were able to retain such stoicism through 1932, with the aid of the twenty-twenty hindsight of those who remembered the 1893 depression.

Gradually, however, the introspection stimulated by the deepening economic crisis and the passage of time led some to question whether or not punishment was being inflicted because

¹Charleston Daily News, June 25, 1930, p. 1.

rural and traditional values had been forsaken. Those who thought so sought to return to the "real" values, and those not so guilt-oriented continued to tighten their belt. Both thanked providence for the less they still had, and let escape a sigh of relief that they were not on relief.

By mid-1934, as unemployment increased and the drought plagued Coles, many began to concede that, though the country wasn't going to the dogs, it might be a reasonable precaution for the New Dealers to help appease some of the more rabid mongrels. They were all in it together, but now the federal government was sharing the circle, too.

People did continue to live, eat, love, and laugh. Avid sports fans argued in 1930 about the relative merits of outfielders Hack Wilson and Babe Ruth as they strove for home run honors that year. Local "authorities" analyzed Robert "Lefty" Grove's thirty-one wins against four losses in 1931, and reveled or cringed as the famous Paul "Daffy" Dean and infamous Jerome "Dizzy" Dean led the St. Louis Cardinals to the 1934 world title. When eight caddies at the Charleston links struck for a dime increase in their \$.25 per hour wages in August, 1936, recreation was not really hampered--all eight were fired. People did not stop going to the theatre either; on the contrary, both Charleston and Mattoon voted in 1930 and 1931 respectively to allow Sunday shows in addition to those run the other days of the week. By the later Thirties, Charleston was supporting two talkie houses instead of one. Although the Chautauquas of both Mattoon and Charleston had failed by 1932, families, churches, and fraternal organizations tended

to get together more than ever before, on the front porch or at the park. It seemed that suffering and discomfort resulted in more neighborly warmth and camaraderie.²

The support of friends was also needed in some things not economic. In the latter part of 1933 a mild scarlet fever circulated among Charleston residents, and as many as nineteen cases were under quarantine at one time. A year later, Mattoon quivered through a typhoid scare disproportionate to a town its size. Following the Christmas holidays in 1935, all Mattoon dogs had to be quarantined for sixty days to prevent a rabies epidemic. One week before the Christmas holidays in 1937, Charleston suffered an explosion and fire in the 700 Block of Seventh Street which resulted in one dead, thirty-five homeless, and an estimated \$75,000 worth of damage. The Bails Flats fire destroyed not only apartments but six businesses as well. The Charleston citizenry rallied behind the local Red Cross efforts and raised several hundred dollars for the homeless victims, and the National Red Cross also donated over \$1,000 and administration to the disaster relief efforts.³ The community seemed to band together in spite of hard times.

Yet friendship could not soothe all the tensions building up during the course of the depression. Economic strain was seldom the sole cause when suicide was resorted to; indebtedness

²Ibid., August 31, 1936, p. 1; April 16, 1930, p. 1; June 4, 1931, p. 1; June 24, 1932, p. 1; and an interview with Alf R. Thompson, July 29, 1975; and with Everett W. Brown, July 30, 1975.

³Charleston Daily News, December 20, 1937, p. 1; December 21, 1937, p. 1; and an interview with Everett W. Brown, July 30, 1975.

was usually accompanied by physical ill health. Seven suicides in Coles were noted in local newspapers between the stock market crash and 1940. Over half of these came in 1933, and only one, noted above, lived rurally.⁴ Those who succumbed to the strain, it seemed, did so early and usually lived in the city. But suicides did not qualify as a preoccupation among Coles residents.

Law and order, however, was foremost in the minds of many citizens. Respect for the law grew, if anything, during the Thirties, and crime did not really increase until after World War II had ushered in affluence. Fewer merchants were in court for suit in the depression decade than in the following decades, by far.⁵ Despite a lack of evidence indicating that vagrancy was a serious problem, the sheer volume of transients drifting through the county, especially Mattoon, frightened many residents. The Chief of Police in Mattoon, Homer Brimberry, countered headlines like "Transients Getting Bold and Insolent" by escorting many "kings of the road" out of town after they had been allowed to spend a night in the City Hall building. A year later, in the spring of 1934, he was taking firmer measures; after getting two Mattoon vagrants sentenced in city court to the Vandalia state farm, Brimberry warned all others to ". . . find work, get out of town, or go to the penal farm."⁶ The same summer,

⁴The suicides included above noted Joe Kerans in 1930; a Charleston painter, Everett Lowry, in 1931; Frank Smith, Harold Vanatta, Fred Gilliland, and Louis Ozier in 1933; and Mrs. Betty Wheeler in 1938. According to newspaper accounts, only two suicides were related solely to economic difficulties.

⁵Interview with Jacob Berkowitz, July 14, 1975.

⁶Charleston Daily News, April 21, 1934, p. 1.

transients were no longer allowed the privilege of sleeping in the Coles jail at night. However, city jails continued, on an off-and-on basis, to allow the night visitors to use the public facilities. Officials usually thought it better to be able to keep an eye on the rootless, but, when the volume got too large, it seemed that providing them with shelter was self-defeating because it retarded their moving on.

There was perhaps a slight increase in petty crime in the middle Thirties. In Charleston thieves were bold enough to lift a crucifix, two candle holders, and other property valued at \$200. And a gang of petty thieves operating in the northern half of the county prompted the formation of farmers' vigilante committees to cope with the harassment. The Mattoon citizenry found some comfort in a committee of their own in the middle years as well. Many county residents were encouraged, though, by the display of Bonnie Parker's and Clyde Barrow's "Death Car" at Charleston's McArthur Motor Sales because it was complemented by a "wages of sin" lecture for the children.⁷

The same residents also were soothed by the awareness that Coles had thirty delegates at the Vandalia penal farm in November, 1936. Since penal farm officials allotted Coles a quota of only seven, it seemed that the county was not lax in its willingness to "farm out" undesirables, especially vagrants. Some vagrants dreaded local insecurity more than the penal farm, and occasionally a police magistrate would be requested by the vagrant for a 60-90 day sojourn! The Coles jail register,

⁷Ibid., February 14, 1934, p. 1; June 10, 1937, p. 1; and June 14, 1937, p. 1.

meanwhile, did not reflect any drastic increase in guests. In mid-1934, the jail was averaging twelve inmates. Deputy Sheriff Mac Cochran's Coles Jail Register, which he began in 1931, indicated 1,304 clients in seven years, which averaged in the neighborhood of 200 per year.⁸

If any trend existed in Coles crime in the Thirties, it must have been in the direction of more petty crime and toward better law enforcement as well. During the early Thirties major robberies and murder seemed more common than later in the depression. Robberies most commonly occurred at gas stations, probably due to accessibility and greater odds against recognition. Mattoon had the highest ratio of robberies and murders, thanks to its larger population and its location as a travel crossroads. Coles' justice reacted swiftly and surely, especially compared to Chicago's law enforcement. And although the increasing prevalence of the auto made enforcement more difficult, law agencies did their best, and generally it was good enough. One failure--the inability of Mattoon police to cope with a modern gang which had robbed the Humboldt bank--resulted in the Mattoon City Council authorizing the purchase of \$708 worth of equipment to again give the police the edge. Included were bullet-proof steel vests, Remington rifles, a Thompson machine gun, and tear gas equipment. Where future prevention was of the essence, as after the abduction of Jane Ralston on May 12, 1930, the Mattoon Association of Commerce led a drive to establish a vigilante committee for

⁸Ibid., November 13, 1936, p. 1; September 11, 1934, p. 1; April 27, 1938, p. 1; and an interview with Morgan Phipps, July 24, 1975.

the protection of girls and women.⁹

In murder cases, apprehension and retribution followed shortly after the crime. For killing Mrs. Carrie Bowers and her two children on May 19, 1931, Merle Johnson was sentenced on June 27, 1931, to the electric chair. Such justice was swift but dubious, since Johnson believed he was helping the victim rejoin her dead husband. When the judge asked what sentence he felt he deserved, Johnson actually replied that he felt he deserved the electric chair. But such was the limitation of the law of the era. Justice was almost as quick for the murder of Mattoon service station attendant Virgil Swank on January 24, 1932. Twenty-two year old Joseph Dennis of Shelbyville was captured within three weeks; within three months, he had been sentenced to life.¹⁰

As the decade progressed, major crimes and crimes of passion were noticeably lacking in the newspaper coverage. Perhaps the earlier examples of justice served well as deterrents; more likely, the depression stunted, rather than spawned, serious crime. Citizens became more convinced to prevent crimes against society than they had in the era of prohibition. In fact, some city ordinances were even adopted against the use, growth, and sale of marijuana. There were startling rumors that smoking the "dope" was not unknown in Coles, and a newspaper reported its use was generally " . . . in the form of a cigaret and

⁹Daily Journal-Gazette, March 19, 1930, p. 1; May 13, 1930, p. 1.

¹⁰Ibid., May 12, 1932, p. 1; June 27, 1931, p. 1; and an interview with Jacob Berkowitz, July 14, 1975.

makes the victim smoking it absolutely wild and irresponsible."¹¹

There may well have been a return to more traditional values in the Thirties which the law and order trend followed. Although their finances undoubtedly suffered some, most churches held their attendance or gained. Mattoon churches such as First Baptist, the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, Central Community, and First Methodist had enrollments and attendances which would be enviable to later clergy.¹² A Charleston Christian Church clergyman reported that his offerings held up and his attendance increased in the decade.¹³ Charleston's Methodist Sunday School Superintendant, Benjamin Weir, could report a pleasing 500-600 attendance at that church's tenet teaching sessions. There is no evidence of a great wave of fundamentalism engulfing the county; for the most part, fundamentalism had never been abandoned by Coles congregations. But a greater sense of piety was fostered by the hardships of the depression, and the transfer of moral values into social life may have been reflected in the activities of local government.¹⁴

One area in which fundamental values seemed to reburgeon related to drinking and gambling. While these areas had not really been of extensive or consistent concern in the late Twenties and early Thirties, local governmental units began in the mid-Thirties to pass more restrictive laws and enforce

¹¹Charleston Daily News, June 9, 1938, p. 1.

¹²Daily Journal-Gazette, March 8, 1933, p. 1.

¹³Interview with Reverend Hozy L. Hayes, July 9, 1975.

¹⁴Interview with Everett W. Brown, July 30, 1975.

them. The tabooed brew referred to variously as "grog," "white mule," or "hooch," was hardly in short supply for anyone who really wanted it before the repeal of prohibition in 1933. Some brewed up their own; "enough home brew is made in Charleston to drown a submarine, according to grocers who sell the malt."¹⁵ Many farmers staggered their home brewing so that a "run" would always be ready to be rationed among friends. Some families in the county gained quite a reputation for bootlegging whiskey, much of it being imported from the Pana area or from Teutopolis. The price averaged around two dollars a pint, and a number of businesses even made subtle arrangements to retail the bottled tingle if it were requested in the right manner. Naturally, the secret was knowing somebody who knew somebody.¹⁶

Charleston had enjoyed dryness over a decade before prohibition took effect, the saloons having been closed with the aid of Billy Sunday in 1908. But by 1930, only the Women's Christian Temperance Union bothered to complain fervently among Charlestonites, and even that tended to remain mostly complaining. In early 1930, a Literary Digest poll on the Volstead Act (which enforced prohibition) yielded the following: in Charleston, 46 wanted enforcement, 78 wanted modification and 139 wanted repeal, while in Mattoon 266 wanted enforcement, 136 wanted modification, and 135 wanted repeal.¹⁷

¹⁵Charleston Daily News, August 5, 1931, p. 1.

¹⁶Several residents interviewed indicated that alcohol could be acquired rather effortlessly in Coles during Prohibition. Drinking was far from absent in certain social circles.

¹⁷Charleston Daily News, May 31, 1930, p. 1.

Consequently, the local officials did not seem to get too worked up over the drinking if it remained somewhat discreet. Any vigorous enforcement of prohibition was basically left up to federal authorities after 1929, unless the violators happened to be from out-of-town and indiscreet. But the federal government's effectiveness with only one agent for each fifty-five thousand citizens was minimal in Coles as elsewhere, and only random raids could be made. For example, seven federal agents from Danville netted only two violators in one Charleston raid; eight more agents were probably shamed into a second raid five weeks later which netted a more respectable eight local "booters."¹⁸ Yet federal raids were few and far between in enforcing the controversial law.

After drinking had again become legal, many Coles townships began to demand more stringent local regulation of consumption. Hot night spots called "roadhouses" prompted the new crackdown from a practical legal point of view. And places like the "Garden Spot" and "Blue Heaven" east of Charleston did much to inspire those inclined to moralistic polemics. The city of Oakland led the way in padlocking its two liquor establishments, finally doing so in September, 1935, after resolving a five-month election dispute. On New Year's Day, 1937, Mattoon's "Smitty's Place" was the first roadhouse to have its liquor license revoked by the Coles Liquor Control Commission for selling to minors, and some felt that was only one of numerous moral misdeeds. To more effectively prevent liquor abuse, Charleston Township voted dry in April, 1937,

¹⁸Ibid., September 22, 1932, p. 1; October 31, 1932, p. 1.

and Hutton, Seven Hickory, Morgan, and Ashmore Townships tallied the same results. The city of Charleston attempted to vote dry in the same election, but a local tavern operator successfully charged that the petition calling for the vote did not contain 25% of the registered voters. Humboldt did join the ranks of the unslackened, but Mattoon voted overwhelmingly wet and, like Charleston, remained a Coles oasis the rest of the decade. Throughout 1937, Coles officials tried almost too hard to crack down on drunken driving, a primary motive behind the spring votes.¹⁹

In contrast to drinking policies, the trend toward regulation of gambling in Coles was never so consistent or distinct. Periodically, the sheriff or the city police would ceremoniously clamp down in an effort to make political hay in election years, but the operations of substance, such as the Charleston Blackfront, continued. In the latter part of 1933, Mattoon's Mayor E. E. Richardson ordered all gambling devices removed, as did Charleston's Mayor G. Palmer Stoner. County authorities confiscated five slot machines in Oakland in December, 1937, but no raid compared to that on C. J. Matlock's Mattoon club in August, 1938. Forty-two persons were arrested and hauled to the judge's office in a freight truck. Matlock's bond was set at \$400 and his patrons, some of whom hailed from Decatur and Terre Haute, were bailed at \$100 each. Racing ticker tapes, blackboards, cards with betting instructions, and tickets were confiscated by Constable Bruce Cunningham. Apparently,

¹⁹Ibid., September 9, 1935, p. 1; January 1, 1937, p. 1; April 7, 1937, p. 1; April 8, 1937, p. 1; May 28, 1937, p. 1; April 21, 1937, p. 1.

however, liquor and gambling did mix because in February, 1939, a gambling room one mile beyond Mattoon's city limits was held up, and the Mattoon police again declared war on the city's gambling.²⁰

The significance of the attempts to regulate drinking and gambling in Coles lay not in the fact that law enforcement often failed to deal definitively with the issues, but rather that public opinion seemed to demand stronger regulation as the depression wore on. In times of affluence, gambling and carousing had been more acceptable; by the mid-Thirties, however, social standards had elevated somewhat in the minds of many citizens, despite the feasibility of the enforcement of such standards.

The Depression seemed to have a less measurable impact on matrimonial status than it had had on criminal standards. It was early observed that the "Depression should not be permitted to deter matrimonial unions. Two people can suffer as comfortably as one."²¹ It turned out that the tongue-in-cheek observation was not far from the course which was followed in Coles. 1931 registered a sharp decline from the previous two years, indicating that housekeeping plans were being postponed pending the downward economic trend. In 1932-1933, however, the procrastinators must have decided to live on love rather than economics because the vows were taken at a more normal rate. The tallies for 1934-1936 show an even greater

²⁰Ibid., August 13, 1938, p. 1; December 29, 1937, p. 1; Daily Journal-Gazette, August 29, 1933, p. 1; Charleston Daily Courier, February 4, 1939, p. 1.

²¹Charleston Daily News, December 14, 1932, p. 1.

increase, despite 1935 being one of the slowest economic years in Coles.²² Perhaps the security of the alphabet programs with their built-in favoritism to the married encouraged a return to marital normalcy.

Yet the most drastic change in the marriage rate came with passage of a hygienic marriage law in July, 1937. The Illinois General Assembly had hoped better to control venereal disease by mandating a blood test and a three day waiting period previous to issuance of the license. The 1937 marriage rate in Illinois was cut to 61% of its 1936 level, while the Coles drop was to 77% of the previous year. Thereafter, Coles' percentage also dropped to less than two-thirds its former levels.²³

A deeper influence was exercised by the Depression on the divorce rate. While Coles was not a high divorce rate county, the number of divorces granted increased noticeably during the Thirties. From 1931 through 1935 Coles had averaged 90.8 divorces per year; in contrast, the average rose to 116.8 from 1936 through 1940.²⁴ The minimal decline in divorces in the early Thirties may reflect an initial tendency of the family to be drawn together. But the reduction could also reflect the increasing difficulty the aggrieved parties were having paying the fees incurred in the divorce process. De facto divorces, commonly practiced in desertion, may have served as the recourse for those of lesser substance and greater marital

²²See Table IX.

²³Charleston Daily News, January 24, 1938, p. 1; also see Table IX.

²⁴See Table IX.

friction. Throughout the Thirties, desertion was the predominate motive for divorce. It is possible that, since a divorce proceeding based on legal desertion could not be started until one year following publication of a notice in a local newspaper, the comparatively large divorce tally for 1935 and after may have had its roots in the earlier economic stress of 1930-1934.²⁵ In summary, families appearing legally to be buttressed by "hard times" may not have been so well-bound as the figures implied.

The statistics for public school enrollment in Coles are more reliable, but also difficult to interpret. Generally the total enrollment was declining between 1931 and 1941, which was ironic in light of a population increase from 37,315 to 38,470 in the decade ending in 1940. So while the population increased by over 1,000, the total school enrollment declined by nearly 500. The high schools tended to gain students until an apex was reached in 1939, but the grade schools almost continuously shrank and their enrollments were still declining into the Forties. A plausible explanation for the increase in high school attendance may lie in increased offerings of vocational subjects. The only tally increase across the board came in the 1936-1937 school year, probably as a result of the work-study programs begun then by the National Youth Administration. But no other distinctive trend seems to have

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The statement that the great majority of divorces were decreed for desertion was based on an interview with Jacob Berkowitz, July 14, 1975; in addition, examination of the divorce decrees for 1933 and 1937 in the Chancery Files of the Coles Circuit Clerk's Office yielded the same result.

been fostered by the New Deal or the Depression.²⁶

The Depression had brought strains to teachers, despite reductions in class size. When the county cut taxes in the early Thirties, education was affected since nearly half the local tax money was so earmarked. Consequently, teachers were forced to help take up the slack by accepting cuts of 10% on salaries averaging under \$90 per month. By the 1936-1937 school year, however, the average salary was restored above \$90. While teachers did not relish the sacrifice, jobs were maintained, and Coles schools remained solvent in spite of the depressed tax market.²⁷

The county's 142 school buildings were staffed mostly by women in the Thirties, with roughly one out of four staff members a man. In August, 1937, sixty-seven Coles teachers had only one year of experience, and only thirteen had taught for more than twenty years. Considering that many were teaching on two-year certificates, many students did not receive very experienced or qualified instruction. But in March, 1938, Coles Superintendent of Schools Harlan Beem could proudly announce that one portable battery film projector was in the county's possession for supplementary use by all the schools in showing educational films!²⁸

At Eastern Illinois State Teachers' College, enrollment

²⁶See Table VIII for county population statistics, and Table IX for public school enrollments.

²⁷Charleston Daily News, April 26, 1933, p. 1; April 27, 1933, p. 1; April 31, 1936, p. 1.

²⁸Ibid., August 20, 1936, p. 1; March 26, 1938, p. 1; also based on an interview with Glen Seymour, July 11, 1975.

by college students during the regular year improved somewhat from 1930-1934, declined moderately from 1935-1937, and then hit new highs by surpassing 1,000 from 1938-1940. The college faculty also flinched at a ten percent salary reduction in 1933 after Governor Horner requested such a cut in light of the increasing shortage of state funds. The losses of the professors were gradually recovered after 1934, as the state's finances improved. Tuition hovered at \$25 per quarter or less through most of the Thirties, and some students who would have gone to a more expensive school found Charleston not such a bad location to learn in. Under the able leadership of the monumental Dr. Livingston C. Lord until his death on May 15, 1933, and his successor, Dr. Robert G. Buzzard, E.I.S.T.C. provided quality teacher education which allowed Teacher College graduates a high rate of placement, especially in comparison to competing schools.²⁹

One of the most desirable social changes which occurred in the Thirties was the acknowledgement by many that the elderly deserved special care on their own merits and because they represented a significant sector of the economy. In Coles, this did not mean that Dr. Francis Townsend became anything approaching a messiah or even a prophet. On the contrary, few Townsend meetings were held, and those that were boasted poor attendance. By the time Townsend meetings were held in

²⁹ Charles H. Coleman, Eastern Illinois State College: Fifty Years of Public Service, Eastern Illinois State College Bulletin No. 189 (Charleston, Ill.: Eastern Illinois State College, 1950), pp. 312, 345-346, 366, 370; interview with Glen Seymour, July 11, 1975; and also Charleston Daily Courier, March 9, 1939, p. 1.

Charleston's Union Hall on Jackson Street in 1938, the Federal Social Security program had successfully undercut most of the discontent in which the Townsendites spawned. The mandated Illinois Old Age Assistance Act established for the first time a standard of assistance to be given those who qualified. Coles administration was initially undertaken by an appointed County Commission of Public Welfare whose members served for no pay.³⁰

The Coles Commission of three was named by the county judge in February, 1936, and Chairman W. H. Shubert's commission began Coles Court House operations the same month. In August, 1938, Mrs. Leatha Vause replaced Shubert, but the commission had done much in the two year interim. During ten months of Coles operation in 1936, 1,846 had applied for old age assistance, 269 had withdrawn, been rejected, or died, and 1,388 had already received assistance. In April of the next year, 1,433 were on the pensioners list, and a year later, one hundred fewer were averaging \$16.84 per month for an aggregate \$22,450. The elders of Coles had finally arrived at a minimal uniform standard of care, and they would remain active in the demand sector of the economic process as a result.³¹

Election returns indicated that both the elderly and the not so elderly had expected to benefit, and then felt they had, during the Thirties. Those who had been willing to point a personal finger of blame for the suffering caused by the depression usually had searched out Herbert Hoover as the devil's

³⁰Public Aid in Illinois, p. 18; Charleston Daily News, February 16, 1938, p. 1.

³¹Charleston Daily News, January 19, 1937, p. 1; April 12, 1937, p. 1; March 24, 1938, p. 1.

advocate. As a result of the economic decline between 1930 and 1932, the traditionally Republican Coles voted eleven to seven for the head of the Democratic ticket in 1932. The Republicans were not shut out, and they did not allow any overwhelming majorities for any of the Democratic candidates other than Roosevelt.³² But the local Republican Party suffered from the inactivity or the inefficacy of the Hoover administration. Inclined by nature against federal intervention, Coles farmers and businessmen were especially negative in their response to the Federal Farm Board's lack of results and the "refinancing" of only the elite by the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. Not that they were mandating more intervention in private affairs by Roosevelt, but it was time for effective action, even if it might be unorthodox.

Despite their determination to survive the depression, Coles residents viewed the 1932 election as the only ray of hope avoiding stagnation. Many felt the common man needed a national tribune, and the Republican Party was not offering such an advocate. The self-appointed voice of Coles Democrats had put it this way:

Tuesday will see a revolution in this country-- a revolution at the ballot box. And . . . one more prediction--that the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt and John N. Garner . . . will register a new era in American political life. It will give the people of this country a chance to participate once more in the solemn and serious business of government, a government that will be under Democratic rule and bring back the spirit, the courage, and the faith of the American people in its sacred institutions.³³

³²See Table III.

³³Charleston Daily News, November 7, 1932, p. 1.

When the ballots were counted two days later, even many Republicans had agreed that a change was needed. Only Pleasant Grove and Ashmore Townships managed to vote for the Hoover team, and that by a slim margin.³⁴ The heavy Democratic vote came in the rich northern farming townships, excepting East Oakland, with the strongest Republican vote in the southernmost townships. The swing votes came in the middle townships of Mattoon, Lafayette, and Charleston, with Mattoon providing the most crucial quantity.³⁵ Obviously the Republican grasp had been broken, and a new and more equitable balance of key office control was struck which would be maintained throughout the Thirties.³⁶

The mid-term elections brought a modest Republican recovery in both 1934 and 1938. The traditionally Republican southern and eastern townships reverted to the old standard, while the northern Democrats held firm. Some Democratic reversals were registered in the middle townships, but holdover wins from the previous presidential elections preserved the balance.³⁷ Coles was no longer a one-party fiefdom.

By the 1936 election the more conservative Democrats, as well as the Republicans, felt they had something to object to-- Roosevelt's increasing federal intervention, both real and threatened. Even the Rardin paper now quipped, "Let the Tugwell

³⁴See "Tabulated Returns" in the Daily Journal-Gazette, November 9, 1932, p. 1.

³⁵See Table IV and Figure I.

³⁶See Table III.

³⁷Ibid.

Republican brain trust be dissolved and get back to States' Rights and Jeffersonian principles."³⁸ The continued existence of non-local relief programs and the creation of WPA had begun to irritate many who didn't need them. Both business and agriculture were improving in Coles in 1936, so some dissidents were unavoidably incubated. Consequently, Alf Landon made a better showing than Hoover had in 1932, but Roosevelt also increased his poll.³⁹ Many voters must have been expressing loyalty to the "new dealer" for services rendered toward both relief and recovery.

Four years later Roosevelt did not keep pace proportionately with Wendell Wilkie, though the President won another Coles majority. The interim had brought more prosperity as well as the court-packing controversy. Since Roosevelt had not made a campaign issue of expanding the court, the shock of the unanticipated attack on the septagenarian sages in 1937 rocked the faith or tolerance of the local professional class. One of the most prominent Mattoon lawyers entered his office the day following Roosevelt's restructuring proposal and ordered the great patrician's picture removed from the wall.⁴⁰ The satirical observation that Roosevelt was trying to turn the Supreme Court into a Townsend convention only confirmed the growing concern of the professional class. The reforms of NRA coupled with the threat to the Court were getting out of

³⁸Charleston Daily News, May 19, 1936, p. 1.

³⁹See Table III.

⁴⁰Interview with Jacob Berkowitz, July 14, 1975.

hand. And by 1940 an increasing percentage of large farmers were not so pleased with the quotas of the second AAA. The coupling of the business and farm discontent over the increasing reforms of the second term led to the stronger showing against Roosevelt in 1940.

Nevertheless, the Democratic ticket in 1940 actually did better than it ever had with respect to key offices. The percentage of 1938 hold-overs was low, but new wins seated the Democrats at a new pinnacle of control.⁴¹ The Democratic thrust must have come largely from the smaller farming and working classes who probably benefited most from the parity supports and financial aids, respectively, of the second term.

Meanwhile a definite Democratic trend in the township and city governments in the most populous middle townships of Mattoon and Charleston had not set in until 1935.⁴² Once the Democratic aldermanic machine was functioning well in both the twin cities, the Republicans instigated a 1937 movement to install a commission government. In Mattoon the referendum was successful, perhaps due to a scandal over misplaced city funds. But in Charleston the tactic was soundly defeated. In both cities, however, the Democratic edge was far from permanent.⁴³

The County Board, however, after a slow start, switched from a 12-8 Republican majority in 1935 to an 11-9 Democratic

⁴¹See Table III.

⁴²Charleston Daily News, April 5, 1933, p. 1; April 3, 1935, p. 1.

⁴³Ibid., January 6, 1937, p. 1; January 20, 1937, p. 1; April 7, 1937, p. 1.

majority in 1937. For the first time in years the Board was Democratic, and their position was soon even more solidified. In 1938 the same ratio was maintained, but in 1939, Coles voters chose Democrats, 13-7.⁴⁴

By 1940 there could be little doubt that Roosevelt had rejuvenated the Coles, as well as the national, Democratic Party. While the President himself no longer polled so overwhelmingly, his personality and his New Deal had lent a vital essence to the local Democracy. No longer was Coles strictly provincial and anti-federal. It had drastically needed the federal aid, and many residents felt well served by it. Unlike nearby Effingham County, socialism had not really been feared and the Democratic Party had been given a shot in the arm.⁴⁵

Coles had survived a difficult ordeal between 1930 and 1940. Though an agricultural oriented county, it possessed enough industry and urban population to cringe at the impact of the business decline. In addition, the early Thirties brought agriculture to a rock-bottom in Coles. Advocates of states' rights were forced to concede that local self-help was inadequate in the age of interdependence. However, when recovery began to make itself apparent in the later Thirties, the luxury of criticizing federal intervention was again within local means. Nevertheless, the majority did not quickly forget the emergency sustenance given by the national bureaucracy.

⁴⁴ Ibid., April 4, 1935, p. 1; April 8, 1937, p. 1; and Charleston Daily Courier, April 5, 1939, p. 1.

⁴⁵ E. L. Allen, New Deal . . . in Effingham County, p. 104.

Not all the alphabetic experiments were regarded in Coles as boons, but neither were many regarded as boondoggles. The NRA had won few local friends, as management was inherently negatively inclined and labor lost jobs rather than gaining rights. More successful was the AAA; farmers finally realized effective price supports and learned the value of conservation and production control. The new lending regulations and innovations of such programs as the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Farm Credit Administration, and Homeowner's Loan Corporation quickly won the support of both rural residents and townsfolk. And while no one enjoyed having direct relief programs, gratitude for their existence overbalanced criticism. By the same token, the work relief programs were criticized most because more weren't under way. Work relief, especially WPA, brought many improvements with high social equity to Coles, and the overwhelming majority did not smack of "time-killing."

When World War II came to waft the remaining scents of depression from Coles, the citizenry had learned much from the lean years of introspection. The province could not always remain provincial, the belt could run out of notches, and two parties could be better than one. At the same time, traditional values and a spirit of neighborly cooperation could go far toward meeting crises surpassing the individual's ability to cope. The Coles native had maintained his desire to help himself, but had not been too proud to refuse the assistance of the New Deal. He had mandated Franklin D. Roosevelt, but not granted him license. Perhaps most importantly, the Coles native had learned that depressions do not have to be simply

endured; political and economic innovations could cushion or correct many of the "natural" evils of "hard times."

TABLE I

ILLINOIS' SEASON AVERAGE PRICES FOR KEY COLES
GRAINS AND LIVESTOCK (AND U. S. FARM PARITY RATIO), 1924-1944^a

YEAR	PER BU. CORN	PER BU. WHEAT	PER BU. OATS	PER 100 LBS. CATTLE	PER 100 LBS. HOGS	FARM PARITY RATIO ^b
1924	\$1.02	\$1.26	\$.47	\$6.50	\$7.40	89
1925	.64	1.48	.38	7.50	11.20	95
1926	.69	1.25	.37	7.50	12.10	91
1927	.85	1.30	.46	8.50	9.80	88
1928	.80	1.19	.38	10.60	8.70	91
1929	.76	1.12	.39	10.50	9.60	92
1930	.54	.75	.30	9.00	9.00	83
1931	.25	.40	.17	6.40	6.10	67
1932	.27	.42	.13	5.00	3.55	58
1933	.50	.85	.32	4.35	3.70	64 (66)
1934	.79	.85	.43	5.00	4.25	75 (80)
1935	.64	.84	.25	7.10	8.80	88 (95)
1936	1.05	1.02	.40	6.80	9.60	92 (95)
1937	.47	1.03	.28	8.30	9.80	93 (97)
1938	.45	.61	.23	7.60	8.00	78 (83)
1939	.52	.70	.30	8.10	6.40	77 (85)
1940	.61	.71	.30	8.80	5.50	81 (88)
1941	.74	1.01	.41	10.00	9.30	93 (98)
1942	.90	1.18	.49	11.70	13.30	105 (109)
1943	1.06	1.48	.73	13.10	14.00	113 (116)
1944	1.05	1.48	.71	12.00	13.40	108 (110)

^aIllinois Agricultural Statistics, Circular 445: State Data through 1944 (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois Cooperative Crop Reporting Service, 1949), pp. 15-16, 19-20, 25, 83, 88; U. S. Department of Agriculture, Handbook of Agricultural Charts, 1969, no. 273 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 7.

^bThe "Farm Parity Ratio" was computed by dividing the prices received by the prices paid and multiplying by 100 (1910-1914 = 100). The parentheses indicate the result of federal price supports.

TABLE II

MATTOON UNITED CHARITIES' CASH RECEIPTS
AND EXPENDITURES, 1930-1940^a

YEAR	RECEIPTS	EXPENDITURES	CLOSING BALANCE
1929	\$?	\$?	\$ 185.66
1930	2038.99	1071.84	1152.81
1931	2809.81	2788.92	1461.73
1932	2335.02	2518.87	1280.88
1933	1770.99	2106.29	945.58
1934	102.41	86.42	961.57
1935	83.93	99.85	945.65
1936	205.59	161.04	490.20 ^b
1937	62.90	191.76	361.34
1938	966.03	732.57	594.80
1939	1250.78	999.78	845.34
1940	2021.50	1166.74	854.76

^aSources: Mattoon United Charities Ledger, 1930-1942.
Housed in the United Charities Building, 1716 Richmond Ave.,
Mattoon, Ill. (c/o Mrs. John C. Sheridan).

^b\$500 was transferred to savings, according to the
ledger from which this table was derived. Other balance
variations were inherent in the bookkeeping system.

TABLE III

TABULATED VOTE OF COLES COUNTY FOR
SELECTED^a OFFICES, 1928-1942

OFFICE		1928	1930	1932	1934	1936	1938	1940
President	R.	11,479		7,322		8,800		10,495
	D.	5,071		11,081		11,931		11,512
U. S. Rep. (19th)	R.	?	6,123	7,473	7,900	8,651	8,039	10,137
	D.	?	5,109	9,831	8,318	11,250	7,949	10,771
Governor	R.	9,912		7,780		8,800		10,751
	D.	6,204		10,068		11,693		10,891
Rep. Gen. Assembly (34th)	R.	?	7,724½	10,078	9,234	12,301	19,615	13,918
		?	7,006	10,793	14,024	12,924	8,013	15,574
	D.	?	6,619	13,709	11,968	16,179	10,831	17,446
		?	15,801	17,955	12,982	16,546	11,687	14,987
County Judge	R.		6,276		8,617		8,783	
	D.		6,142		7,637		7,500	
County Clerk	R.	?	6,637		8,436		9,344	
	D.	?	6,090		7,838		6,980	
County Sheriff	R.		7,133		8,399		8,490	
	D.		5,978		8,221		8,049	
States' Atty.	R.	10,650		7,459		8,507		9,597
	D.	5,053		9,824		11,782		11,585
Circuit Clerk	R.	10,370		9,333		9,039		9,828
	D.	5,337		8,404		11,053		11,312
County Treas.	R.		6,254		8,608		8,279	
	D.		6,322		7,733		7,842	
Coroner	R.	?		10,497		10,250		9,259
	D.	?		7,670		9,884		11,989
% of open selected offices Dem. won		0?	25%	67%	38%	78%	25%	89%
% of all selected offices Dem. controlled			15%	54%	46%	54%	46%	62%

^aSelection of the offices was premised on frequency of election and significance of role to Coles. For example, U. S. and Illinois senators were deleted for the former reason, and U. of I. trustees and the Superintendent of Schools for the latter.

Sources: Tabulated Returns for Coles County General Elections in Daily Journal-Gazette and Charleston Daily News the Wednesday following each election day; and Canvass by Voting Precincts, Coles General Election, November 6, 1928; ibid., November 6, 1934; ibid., November 3, 1936; ibid., November 8, 1938.

TABLE IV

NUMBER OF DEMOCRATS EACH TOWNSHIP SUPPORTED FOR
SELECTED OFFICES NOTED IN TABLE III^a

TOWNSHIP	1930	'32	'34	'36	'38	'40	Ave. supp. per year	Approx. to- tal no. voting (1932)
Total possible selected Democrats	8	9	8	9	8	9	8.5	
Mattoon	5	6	3	7	4	8	5.5	7500
Pleasant Grove	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.0	675
North Okaw	7	8	7	8	7	8	7.5	550
Humboldt	5	8	7	8	6	7	6.8	625
Lafayette	3	6	6	7	6	4	5.3	875
Paradise	1	5	3	1	1	1	2.0	275
Hutton	2	8	3	3	4	3	3.8	525
Morgan	7	8	7	8	7	8	7.5	400
Seven Hickory	7	8	7	8	6	8	7.3	450
East Oakland	2	2	2	3	2	2	2.2	1050
Ashmore	2	1	1	2	1	1	1.3	725
Charleston	3	6	4	8	4	4	4.8	4600

^aThe lowest possible number to support was 1, due to the state representative district cumulative voting system. The highest possible average number to support was 8.5.

Source: Derived from Table III.

TABLE V

DIRECT GENERAL RELIEF TO COLES, 1933-1939^a

DATE	IERC FUNDS EXPENDED (FED. AND STATE)	LOCAL FUNDS EXPENDED	NO. OF CASES	NO. OF PERSONS	% OF 1930 POPULATION
Jan. '33	\$ 17 (21,384) ^b	?	?	?	?
Apr. '33	7,036	1,230	1,157	c.4,396 ^c	c.11.7
June '33	4,867	2,354	1,154	c.4,385	c.11.7
Oct. '33	16,206	1,861	1,155	4,025	10.8
Jan. '34	18,651	908	883	c.3,355	c. 8.9
June '34	30,607 (280,711)	1,786	1,651	c.6,120	c.16.4
Oct. '34	26,740	2,564	1,212	c.4,605	c.12.3
Jan. '35	53,258	1,013	2,010	c.7,638	c.20.4
June '35	52,659	973	2,081	c.7,907	c.21.1
Oct. '35	56,483	972	2,146	c.8,154	c.21.8
Jan. '36	22,285	2,356	1,515	c.5,757	c.15.4
June '36	23,705	2,488	1,234	c.4,689	c.13.4
	(1,296,308 (4/33-6/36: 72,086)				
July '37	3,953	?	?	?	?
Oct. '37	9,467	?	?	?	?
Dec. '37	8,686	?	?	?	?
July '38	8,062	6,326	776	2,697	7.2
Jan. '39	13,324	8,791	1,033	3,532	9.5
June '39	12,646	3,225	785	2,768	7.4
Oct. '39	10,887	2,777	672	2,340	6.3
Jan. '40	9,491	5,734	739	2,665	7.1

^aSources: Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Second Annual Report. (Chicago, Ill.: 1934), pp. 186-187, 190, 198-201; ibid., Biennial Report (Chicago, Ill.: 1936), pp. 172-176, 188-192; Charleston Daily News, July 13, 1937, p. 1; ibid., Oct. 2, 1937, p. 1; ibid., Dec. 2, 1937, p. 1; Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, Monthly Bulletin on Relief Statistics, Vol. 6, no. 2 (Springfield, Ill.: February, 1939), pp. 28, 32; ibid., Vol. 6, no. 7 (July, 1939), pp. 104, 108; ibid., Vol. 6, no. 11 (November, 1939), pp. 172, 176; ibid., Vol. 7, no. 2 (February, 1940), pp. 32, 36.

(TABLE V continued)

^bAll figures are rounded to the nearest lower dollar; parenthetical figures are cumulatives through the indicated month.

^cWhere "c." precedes a number, it has been computed from the October, 1933, average of 3.8 persons per case (IERC, Second Annual Report, p. 76); from that the percent was also computed by dividing by the Coles 1930 census population of 37,315.

TABLE VI

COLES' WEEKLY CWA, CWS, AND CWES EMPLOYEE QUOTAS AND PAYROLLS^a

WEEK ENDING	TOTAL WORKERS	TOTAL PAYROLL
11/25/33	413	\$ 5,265
12/7/33	555	9,774.12
12/14/33	947	14,037.87
12/21/33	1,116	18,327.04
12/28/33	1,197	16,754.73
1/4/34	1,209	20,945.51
1/11/34	1,294	23,304.81
1/18/34	1,382	24,306.45
1/25/34	1,212	16,459.26
3/1/34	1,169	16,350.84
2/8/34	1,110	17,263.29
2/15/34	1,110	16,886.32
2/22/34	1,084	16,116.56
3/1/34	921	13,348.96
3/8/34	659	9,970.34
3/15/34	677	9,697.14
3/22/34	541	8,974.53
3/29/34	511	8,610.73
4/5/34	<u>454</u>	<u>5,195.83</u>
TOTAL	17,561 (man-weeks)	271,569.34

^aSource: Federal Civil Works Administration for Illinois, County Reports, Vol. I by Charles A. Petry (Springfield, Ill.: April 15, 1934), p. 122.

TABLE VII

ESTIMATED WPA PAYROLL FOR COLES COUNTY, OCTOBER, 1935-MAY, 1937^a

DATE OF NEWS RELEASE	TOTAL NO. ON PAYROLL	PAYROLL (FOR 2 WEEKS)
10/17/35	40	c.\$ 920
11/26/35	950	?
12/3/35	1,234	c. 28,382
2/19/36	1,556 ^b	c. 35,788
3/19/36	1,681	36,914
3/31/36	1,557	33,239 (c.361,726) ^c
5/6/36	1,432	c. 32,936
5/18/36	c.1,319	30,333
8/10/36	1,115	c. 25,645
9/2/36	c.1,794	41,270
10/30/36	1,030	24,449
1/18/37	1,266	26,911
2/3/37	c.1,134	26,074
3/6/37	1,035	c. 23,805
3/20/37	1,063	25,958
5/1/37	1,175	23,929
6/4/37	c. 919	21,154

^aBased on news reports where no "c." appears, and computed using an average \$23 per person each pay period where "c." appears. All figures are rounded to the nearest lower dollar.
Source: Charleston Daily News, October, 1935-June, 1937.

^b146 were women; usually about 10% were women.

^cThis is an approximate cumulative total of WPA grants to date; reported by the Charleston Daily News, April 20, 1936, p. 1.

TABLE VIII

STATISTICAL ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE DEPRESSION ON COLESA

	1925	1927	1929	1930	1935	1939	1940
POPULATION							
Total				37,315			38,470
Urban							24,024
Farm Population	10,261				9,286		9,317
Dwellings				9,300			
RETAIL							
Establishments		455		468	493	531	
Sales (Thous.)				13,414	8,780	12,774	
Employees				1,091	1,023	1,463	
Payroll (Thous.)				1,226		1,199	
WHOLESALE							
Establishments		28		64	78	77	
Sales (Thous.)				6,998	6,880	7,254	
Employees				237	284	325	
Payroll (Thous.)				288		396	
MANUFACTURING							
Establishments		38			30	31	
Value Products (Thous.)		9,683			3,630	6,646	
Wage-Earners		2,080			986	1,947	
Wages (Thous.)		2,120				1,346	
FARMING							
Value Products (Thous.)	4,610						5,288
(1922-25)							
# Farms	2,306				2,286		2,083
Farms' Value (Thous.)	50,817				25,958		33,545
Value Per Farm Tractors					11,355		16,104
% Tenant Operated	41.8%						44.9%

(Table VIII continued)

	1925	1927	1929	1930	1935	1939	1940
BANKING							
Total Volume (Thous.)			7,520				17,242 (1944)
Savings (Thous.)			4,822				623
CONSUMER USE							
# Res. Telephones			5,440		3,748		77.1%
Domestic Electricity			6,150				(Rural=27.8)
city			(=66.1%)				
Autos		7,900			7,620		
15 Standard Magazines		9,151			(1936)	9,007	
						(1937)	

^a Sources: U. S. Department of Commerce, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930; Distribution, Vol. I; Retail Distribution: Part I-Summary for the United States, and Statistics for Counties and Incorporated Places of 1,000 Population and Over (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1933), p. 116; ibid., Market Data Handbook of the United States, by Paul Stewart (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1929), pp. 36-37, 125, 172; ibid., Bureau of the Census, County Data Book (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1947), pp. 126-131; ibid., Consumer Market Data Handbook, by Ben P. Haynes and Gerry R. Smith (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1939), p. 85; ibid., Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the U. S.: 1940; Census of Business, Vol. II: Wholesale Trade (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1942), p. 963; ibid., Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the U. S.: 1940; Census of Business, Vol. I; Retail Trade: Part 3 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1941), pp. 270, 512; ibid., Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930; Distribution: Vol. II: Wholesale Distribution: State Reports with Statistics for Cities and a Summary for the United States Including County Statistics (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1933), p. 19.

TABLE IX

COLES' MARRIAGES, DIVORCES, AND PUBLIC
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, 1929-1940^a

YEAR	NUMBER OF MARRIAGES	NUMBER OF DIVORCES	PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT		
			ELE- MEN- TARY	HIGH SCHOOL	TOTAL
1921	310	88	? ^b	?	?
1930	293	84	?	?	?
1931	254	80	?	?	?
1932	326	83	6,466	1,510	7,976
1933	321	84	6,408	1,564	7,972
1934	373	89	6,374	1,604	7,978
1935	352	118	6,129	1,754	7,883
1936	349	123	6,082	1,724	7,806
1937	268	108	6,200	1,850	8,050
1938	175	119	6,104	1,847	7,961
1939	178	122	5,777	2,063	7,840
1940	180	112	5,718	2,031	7,749
1941	181	118	5,473	2,013	7,486

^aSources: Coles County, Ill. County Clerk's Office, Index to Marriages, Book C (1908-1929) and Book D (1929-1952); ibid., Abstractor's Office, Divorce Index; and State of Illinois, Annual Statistical Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Illinois, Fiscal Years 1932-1941 (Springfield, Ill.: State of Illinois).

^bPublic school enrollment tallies are listed in the year in which the schools' fiscal year ended. Figures for the school year ending in 1929-1931 do not exist.

FIGURE I

COLES TOWNSHIPS: POLITICAL TENDENCY
AND VOTING POPULATION, 1930-1940^a

North Okaw D (550)	Humboldt D (625)	Seven Hickory D (450)	Morgan D (400)	East Oakland R (1,050)
Mattoon I (7500)	Lafayette I (875)	Charleston I (4600)	Ashmore R (725)	
Paradise R (275)	Pleasant Grove R (675)		Hutton R (525)	

^aR signifies Republican, D - Democrat, and I - Independent.
Source: Based on Table IV.

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Interviews

Abell, Seneca. Route 2, Mattoon, Ill. July 24, 1975.

Abell was a "work supervisor" for able-bodied men at the Mattoon IERC office from 1932-1935. For the duration of the depression, he was the Coles supervisor of the WPA program.

Alexander, Robert and Irene. 3005 Walnut St., Mattoon, Ill. July 24, 1975.

Alexanders were owners and teachers at Utterback's Business College in Mattoon during the Thirties.

Berkowitz, Jacob. 229 Circle Drive, Mattoon, Ill. July 14, 1975.

Berkowitz began practicing law in Mattoon in 1931. Active in Mattoon's Young Democrats, he was selected Mattoon city judge in 1936.

Brown, Everett W. 2411 Fourth, Charleston, Ill. July 30, 1975.

Brown began operating an insurance agency in Charleston in 1931. He also served as Red Cross drive chairman in 1936-1937.

Davidson, Harold C. Lerna, Ill. July 29, 1975.

Davidson was president of the Charleston local of the International Boot and Shoe Workers' Union in the early Thirties, and also served on the joint council which directed several Brown shoe plants in a strike in 1934-1935.

Dennis, Harold. 1308 Adams, Charleston, Ill. July 10, 1975.

Dennis enlisted for a term in the Civilian Conservation Corps and lived at the Charleston Camp while working on Fox Ridge Park in 1939-1940.

Dennis, Luther. 521 N. Eleventh, Charleston, Ill. July 6, 1975.

Dennis joined the CCC in 1935-1936 in order to help his family, and was stationed for six months at Wisconsin's Camp Double Bend.

Dunn, Gerald W. and Vivian. 317 Charleston Ave., Mattoon, Ill. July 14, 1975.

Dunn taught and coached at Charleston Junior High School from 1929-1934.

Faught, Miss Lee. 1017 Wabash, Mattoon, Ill. July 9, 1975.

Miss Faught was a statistician for the IERC in Coles in the early Thirties, and then was transferred north as an auditor.

Foreman, Maurice. 1139 Buchanan, Charleston, Ill. July 25, 1975.

Foreman supervised NYA programs in twenty-one central Illinois counties in 1941-1942.

Ganley, Elmer and Juanita. 1300 Lakeland Blvd., Mattoon, Ill. July 29, 1975.

Elmer worked at the Mattoon Brown Shoe plant throughout the depression era, and Juanita was employed at the Hotel Grant during the oil boom.

Hall, A. O. ("Ras"). 820 Harrison, Charleston, Ill. July 9, 1975.

Hall was Charleston street commissioner from 1931-1933, and then served four years as Charleston Township Supervisor during the peak of WPA projects.

Hayes, Rev. Hozy L. 1621 Seventh St., Charleston, Ill. July 9, 1975.

Reverend Hayes was the popular pastor of Charleston's First Christian Church during the 1930's.

Monts, Herman and Thelma. 1618 Ninth St., Charleston, Ill. July 6, 1975.

Both Herman and Thelma taught in the Thirties, and his experience began in 1936 at the rural Mullen School north of Charleston. In 1939, he joined the QAA program in Coles as a case worker.

Moore, Ruby. 825 N. Tenth St., Mattoon, Ill. July 23, 1975.

Mrs. Moore worked as the Mattoon WPA sewing room project supervisor in 1936-1937.

Niemeyer, Edwin. Rt. 1, Humboldt, Ill. July 14, 1975.

Niemeyer farmed during the depression and kept a faithful diary of the conditions of the time. His father was an active farm leader, serving in the Farm Bureau and on the Coles Farmer's Debt Committee.

Newcomb, Walter. 1702 Eleventh St., Charleston, Ill. July 22, 1975.

Newcomb enlisted in Centralia in the CCC, and was stationed for his term at Camp Charleston in 1936-1937.

Phipps, Morgan. 3005 Richmond, Mattoon, Ill. July 24, 1975.

Phipps was a Mattoon fireman in 1933-1934, and was elected Mattoon Police Magistrate in the latter Thirties. He also was an active leader of Mattoon's Young Democrats in the early Thirties.

Prather, Herman A. Rt. 1, Ashmore, Ill. August 11, 1975.

Prather ran a general store in Ashmore from 1928-1938. In 1939, he joined the Coles AAA office as a vice-chairman of the local committee, and continued to serve there for twenty-seven years.

Reid, Mary. 721 N. Nineteenth St., Mattoon, Ill. July 14, 1975.

Mrs. Reid taught and also supervised other teachers in the vocational education phase of the WPA in Coles from 1936-1938.

Seymour, Glen. 1022 Fourth St., Charleston, Ill. July 11, 1975.

Seymour began teaching social science at Eastern Illinois State Teachers' College in September, 1929. He represented the University Board in escorting Eleanor Roosevelt on her visit to Charleston in 1938.

Stump, Miss Margaret. 500 Sixth St., Apt. 9, Charleston, Ill. July 8, 1975.

Miss Stump first worked as a clerk-typist for the IERC in Charleston in 1932-1933. She later worked for Charleston Township Supervisor Charles Crowder.

Thompson, Alf R. 23 Elm Ridge, Mattoon, Ill. July 29, 1975.

Thompson, as an advance agent for Carter Oil Company, established his headquarters at Mattoon's Byers Hotel during that city's 1936-1938 oil boom.

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