

ROWAN COUNTY SAW MUCH CONSTRUCTION DURING THE THIRTIES

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It was the severe drought of 1930, not the stock market crash of 1929, that ushered in a decade of hard times. Belt-tightening occurred as the town trustees of Farmers began to provide their services free and cut the City Marshal's salary to \$10 per month--and then to nothing. Likewise the 1934 Fiscal Court, which oversaw county expenditures, slashed the salary of the Superintendent of Schools from \$175 to \$100 per month and abolished the janitor's job at Haldeman (high school teachers there would share the burden). Then they informed senior teachers at the Haldeman and Morehead high schools that they would serve as assistant principals without additional pay.

All across America businesses and governments were reducing expenses. Such policy made a bad situation worse--for at a time when there was no unemployment insurance, the fewer the workers, the less the money there was for spending. The resulting decline in sales led to a further drop in the number of employees. And thus this vicious circle fed a downward economic spiral. During the dark days of 1932, Rowan county, like the bulk of the nation's counties, cast its vote for an aristocratic New Yorker, the cheerful Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In the interregnum between FDR's election and his inauguration, the country plunged further into despair. Finally Roosevelt was sworn into office, and he delivered an inspiring message best remembered by the phrase, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself--nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror." The new President called for an emergency session of Congress.

Congressmen and the President were snowed under by an avalanche of mail. Roosevelt realized that constituent pressure was so intense that Congress would accept whatever he proposed. For a hundred days Congress rubber stamped his legislation, which became known as the First New Deal. Soon the effects of the laws which established the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Public Works Administration and an Agricultural Adjustment Act would be felt in the county.

The CCC was the first agency to appear. The Civilian Conservation Corps employed young males for conservation purposes. No other program was so popular; though a few local pacifists, seeing that the agency was run by the Department of War, believed that the law intended to build up a defense force rather than being formed with a view to the economic betterment of the country. Before the coming of the CCC, Morehead was ringed with fire nearly every spring and fall, and half the hillsides were burned over as fires got out of hand. That changed with the advent of the CCC. During their first five years, the men of Camp Lochege built thirty-five miles of hard surface roads, twelve fire reporting telephone stations, three large fire towers, and three bridges. In addition, they were responsible for stringing forty miles of telephone wires. The improved roads, including what is still referred to as the CCC Trail, enabled people to travel further in a day, thereby helping increase the number of commuter students at MSTC (Morehead State Teachers' College). The 3-C boys worked long hours but still had an active educational program. Cooks to courses at the college, illiterates learned to read and write. An August, 1938, report stated that within four months most illiterates were able ". . . to carry on correspondence with home folks." CCC personnel were augmented by WPA teachers, a local editor, and other resource people.

Three C-ers found time for play as well. Ping pong, checkers, pool, cards, Monopoly, dominoes and horse shoes were available. George T. Young, MSU Professor Emeritus, a member of the King's Jesters and later The Gold & Blue (MSU's first stage band), remembers playing for dances at the CCC Camp. For more active 3-Cers, there was the "Warthogs," a baseball team that became a state power. And in boxing, "Tarzan" Blour was a favored heavyweight in local bouts.

Though the CCC program was a favorite, townspeople rightfully feared that the camp would close when the economy improved. The first scare came in 1935 when national troop strength dropped by 40%. About that time the camp was removed from Clearfield to public land at Rodburn. Statistics indicate a decline of troop strength at Camp F-4 between 1935 and 1937 from 208 men, to 146, and then to 91.

In March, 1938, new rumors of a closing reached Morehead. To show merchants and the community at large the impact of CCC dollars upon Rowan's depression ridden economy, the force was paid in silver dollars one pay day. Sometime between then and World War II, the base was abandoned. Superintendent of Schools Roy Cornette made a valiant attempt to retain the base for school use, but the building was removed in November, 1942, and sent to the Lincoln Institute at Lincoln Ridge, where it housed Blacks being trained in radio for the Lexington Signal Depot. A sixty foot flag pole " . . . in poor condition and of no salvage value" was turned over to the local American Legion Post.

Other New Deal agencies had an even greater impact upon the county. Raw sewage ran into Triplett Creek. With Federal funds a community "septic tank" was built. Fiscal Court members were shocked to learn that county graders and scrapers had been appropriated by individuals

and that the county could not prove title. Not surprisingly the fiscal court put a high priority on the construction of a county garage. Indeed the college, the city, and the county all had their own clear ideas as to what needed to be done.

Some of the earliest projects completed were sponsored by FERA (Federal Emergency Relief Administration). FERA completed three roads-- Farmers to Sharkey, Open Fork to Haldeman, and the Allie Young Highway. Professor George T. Young remembers the latter as a narrow two lane concrete road that connected Morehead with Flemingsburg and contained for several years the longest straight section of concrete highway in rural Kentucky. By means of a rotation system, five hundred men were employed in road work though no more than 168 men worked at any one time. FERA workshops aided fifty-two MSTC students; the agency also operated a refrigeration plant.

Soon FERA was replaced by CWA (Civilian Works Administration), which paid the minimum wage and hired only half of its personnel from the relief rolls. CWA workers remodelled the courthouse, built the county jail and did road work. Not only did CWA pay the bulk of the cost, but also it paid for using county trucks, tractors and rock crushers. Roosevelt was frightened at the high cost of CWA and the prospect that federal relief might become "a habit." He ordered the program killed as soon as the danger of starvation in cold weather ended. Despite its short life, some 33,771 CWA dollars entered the county.

The CWA figure is misleading in that many projects were continued by other agencies. By the end of 1935, FERA alone had spent \$250,000. Nor was this the total for federal funding. The PWA (Public Works Administration), under the watchful eye of Harold Ickes (who insisted

every dime be well spent), supported a variety of Rowan County projects. The city built a power plant and four foot dams on the Triplett (\$76,500 was appropriated as a grant and \$178,500 as a low-interest loan); the college constructed a \$440,000 science building and a men's dorm (Lappin and Mays Hall); and the county worked on a jail and a sewage plant.

Attempting to sort out the appropriations of the alphabet agencies would turn a CPA's hair gray, for Roosevelt, ever the pragmatist, would turn agencies off and on like faucets simply to suit the political realities of the moment. Often the agency that completed a project was not the one that began it. The creation of the WPA (Works Progress Administration) in 1935 is a case in point. The WPA established a sewing center at the courthouse and billed the county for \$744.19 of the \$22,650 cost. But the county was credited for all but \$180 of this amount for its earlier FERA sewing project. Similarly, the men's dorm shifted from PWA to WPA, and after the switch 45% of the cost was considered as a grant and the remainder considered as a 4% twenty-year loan. The City planned to pave city streets and complete CWA sewers with WPA funds. The school board requested that the building on the court house lawn, that they still use today, be built.

WPA built high schools at Farmers, Elliottsville and Haldeman, constructed the seventeen stone voting houses still in use, and five farm-to-market roads. The road projects required 650 men and each voting house called for the service of eighteen men, most of whom came off the relief rolls.

The WPA engaged in cultural activities as well. A WPA library opened up where "McKinney's shoe shop was" before being moved to the basement of the Morehead Consolidated School. A packhorse library was organized whereby books were placed in saddlebags and delivered to isolated houses-- a forerunner of the bookmobile. Jean Thomas directed a local old time

music concert that lasted as an institution long beyond the days of the New Deal. In addition she was instrumental in collecting ballads in Floyd and Rowan counties. Some may remember the singing McGuire sisters.

By late 1939 the WPA had spent \$570,000 in Rowan County, nearly 38% of the total for New Deal agencies in the county. The Morehead Independent put it in human terms by stating that nearly three quarters of all Rowan County men ". . . received subsistence employment under WPA. Without such aid there would have been starvation."

There seemed to be an agency for every purpose. To keep high school youth out of the already glutted job market, the NYA was created. The National Youth Administration performed a variety of services including the building of low cost sidewalks (fifty feet for six dollars), constructing a rock wall by Mays Hall and erecting the Board of Education building. In late 1935, 75 MSTC students held NYA workshops which were ". . . sufficient for board," according to the campus newspaper, and which was "proving a boon to needy students."

Nor was this the end to federal dollars. Area farmers by October 1936 had obtained \$198,765 through the Production Credit Corporation, \$34,600 from the Land Bank Commission, \$24,809 from the Farm Debt Administration, \$23,824 through the Agricultural Adjustment Act and some \$14,400 split among Crops and Feed Loans, The Rural Rehabilitation Program, and the Federal Land Bank. World War I veterans received total bonus payments of \$142,741.88 while the Social Security Act of 1935 led two years later to benefit checks averaging ten dollars per person per month.

In short, by the end of 1939 more than \$1,500,000 had been spent in Rowan County, FERA, PWA and WPA accounting for 84% of the total. If one includes funds put up by local governments, bonus payments and social

security, the figure would reach \$2,000,000. The government placed a fourteen carat carrot in front of a hungry county, and it led city, county and college administrators to think big and boldly. Expenditures meant jobs and patronage, and this was an added incentive to spend. The New Deal got the county out of the mud with its roadbuilding. What is more, it provided up-to-date public buildings and it enhanced the stature of the county judge. Most importantly, it put people back to work.

Many structures--from voting houses to schools to the Morehead Post Office (complete with mural) to bridges and sidewalks--remain from the thirties. One can argue that the reason the New Deal accomplished so much permanent good in Appalachia is that (1) the region was not viewed as a special "problem," (2) needs were known, (3) neither relievers nor the community viewed the projects as being of the "leaf raking" variety. George H. Goodman, Kentucky Director of the WPA, boasted that all projects under his control were to be ". . . in thorough keeping with President Roosevelt's original idea that all projects should be highly constructive, permanent and add to the wealth of the state." To a great degree, this was accomplished in Rowan County.