

The University of Southern Mississippi
The Aquila Digital Community

Master's Theses

Fall 2013

Legislated Landscape: A Comparison of New Deal Farm Communities in Hattiesburg, McComb, and Tupelo, Mississippi

Joy Delaine Rhoads
University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/masters_theses



Part of the [Geography Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rhoads, Joy Delaine, "Legislated Landscape: A Comparison of New Deal Farm Communities in Hattiesburg, McComb, and Tupelo, Mississippi" (2013). *Master's Theses*. 543.
https://aquila.usm.edu/masters_theses/543

This Masters Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

The University of Southern Mississippi

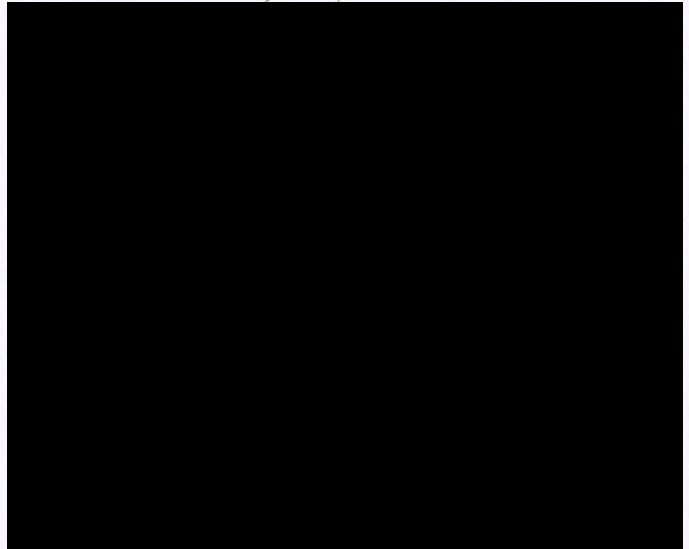
LEGISLATED LANDSCAPE: A COMPARISON OF
NEW DEAL FARM COMMUNITIES IN HATTIESBURG,
MCCOMB, AND TUPELO, MISSISSIPPI

by

Joy Delaine Rhoads

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science

Approved:



Dean of the Graduate School

December 2013

ABSTRACT

LEGISLATED LANDSCAPE: A COMPARISON OF NEW DEAL FARM COMMUNITIES IN HATTIESBURG, MCCOMB, AND TUPELO, MISSISSIPPI

by Joy Delaine Rhoads

December 2013

Government New Deal farm policies of the 1930s changed the realities of farming and the landscape in Mississippi. This research endeavors to compare three farm communities created by New Deal legislation in the state: Hattiesburg, McComb, and Tupelo. The economic crisis that was the Great Depression created a highly politicized environment as citizens looked to the government for economic relief. A crisis this severe would require an exceptional effort to mitigate the economic hardships it created, in varying degrees, for millions of Americans. The actions of the federal government during the Great Depression were an interesting mix of paternalism, desperation, and experimentation. The paternalism of the New Deal demonstrates, to a degree, the lack of economic and political leverage of the subjects of this study, tenant farmers and sharecroppers. Herein lies one of the significant implications of this research. How did these underrepresented constituents fare with regard to government policy?

The federal government purchased land and chose people to inhabit subsistence farm communities. This interaction, dictated by factors such as location, government requirements, individual knowledge, and economic conditions, reshaped the landscape. The government's creation of these communities and the individual homesteaders who participated left imprints on the landscape. My intent is to examine each of the three

communities in the study area on the basis of variables which helped define them historically and to evaluate, to the extent possible, the changes wrought by this action on the contemporary landscape.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Otis Heard, my father and the best teacher I ever had.

1939-2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I had the very good fortune of being accepted into a department at the University of Southern Mississippi full of enthusiastic and diverse faculty who challenged me to achieve my goals. My advisor, Dr. J.O. "Joby" Bass, deserves my sincerest thanks for his tireless assistance and encouragement. Dr. David Cochran and Dr. Clifton "Skeeter" Dixon, members of my committee, were forthright and generous with their time and vast knowledge. Dr. Mark Miller and Dr. Andy Reese both provided me with excellent opportunities to learn from the best, and I very much appreciate the benefit of their knowledge. I learned a great deal from them all and hold them in the highest regard. Ms. Shannon Davis, Administrative Assistant, helped me in ways too numerous to mention, and I am grateful for all her efforts on my behalf.

It would not have been possible for me to have completed the requirements of this degree without the support of my family. My mother, sisters, and in-laws were unfailingly helpful and encouraging. My husband, Chuck, and my son, Christopher, always encouraged me and inspired me to succeed. I am genuinely thankful for their unconditional support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Reading the Landscape	
Historical Context	
II. METHODOLOGY.....	16
Study Area	
Archival and Historical Data	
III. HOMESTEADS.....	19
Hattiesburg	
McComb	
Tupelo	
IV. ANALYSIS.....	42
V. CONCLUSION.....	45
REFERENCES.....	47

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. New Deal Communities in Mississippi.....14

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

1.	Poster promoting resettlement.....	11
2.	Father and son in Pike County, MS.....	12
3.	New Deal farm communities.....	20
4.	Hattiesburg Homesteads.....	23
5.	Current view of Hattiesburg Homesteads.....	24
6.	Map of Pinehills.....	26
7.	Current view of McComb Mill.....	28
8.	McComb Homesteads.....	31
9.	Current map of Homestead area in McComb.....	34
10.	Current view of McComb Homesteads.....	35
11.	Tupelo Homesteads.....	38
12.	Current view of Tupelo Homesteads.....	39
13.	Plot of Tupelo Homesteads.....	40
14.	Current view of Tupelo Homesteads with plot imposed.....	41

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reading the Landscape

The landscape tells a story. That story, more often than not, is quite complex. Careful observation of what is evident leads to investigation of why it looks as it does. Although not as concrete or easily observed as an historical marker or statue, past land use and its purpose is, nonetheless, equally revealing. The challenge is often to understand if a landscape was impacted intentionally, by whom and for what reason.

All human landscapes have cultural meaning, and the evidence is in the kind of people who were there, are there, or in the process of being there. It comes down to the fact that history matters, and that history has a manifestation on the landscape (Lewis 1979). The job of the cultural-historical geographer is to ask the appropriate questions: what does the landscape look like?; how does it work?; who designed it?; when and why did they design it in this fashion?

Pierce Lewis's "Axioms for Reading the Landscape" certainly lends itself to this endeavor. He introduced a "corollary of lumpiness" which presumes that huge events or sudden leaps such as wars or depressions immediately change the landscape (Lewis 1979, 23). One could argue that these changes, which are often abrupt, have long-term consequences and create wholly different landscapes than may have been intended. Also important is the fact that pre-leap landscapes factor into the whole and influence what remains.

Reading this landscape is crucial to the understanding of the totality of places. Everything a person sees on the landscape is a part of something greater. Observing

vegetation, structures, land divisions and house types can dove-tail into a greater understanding of the human purpose of these landscapes. Form reflects function, and fences, fields, farmsteads, and other structures afford insight into how the built landscape reflects the human landscape (Hart 1998). Does it reflect prosperity, technological competency, government intervention or other factors of society? Could it, perhaps, reflect all of these?

It is difficult, if not impossible, to assess the cultural landscape without a reconstruction of its past. Historic events are a collection of occurrences which shaped the community (Sauer 1941). It is necessary to look at how settlements, their people and their economic activities evolved. This is a sequential development in time and on the ground. To understand it appropriately requires some knowledge of the culture, an observation of the contemporary evidence and a familiarity with the place (Sauer 1941).

Often, though, there is question as to the impetus of historical events or changes in settlement. For example, some major shifts in settlement are the product of the necessity for making a living (Sauer 1940). Some major shifts though, are the product of intervention, specifically government policies designed to mitigate economic crisis (Whittesley 1935). What happens when those events appear to be the confluence of both of these factors?

What happens is an unprecedented remaking of specific and intentional landscapes. Federal government policies of the New Deal established guidelines for house types, resident requirements, economic activities and much more. It appears, then, it was both economic crisis and government policy which created homesteads in Mississippi. Borrowing Lewis's "Axiom of Landscape Obscurity," it is imperative to

determine who designed it, when and why to answer that question (Lewis 1979). In the case of this research, the who is the federal government. The when and the why are the Great Depression.

Historical Context

The Great Depression. The economic depression ushered in by the stock market crash of 1929 is often considered the most severe economic crisis in American history. There are many significant factors which contributed to the crisis. It is important to understand the origins of the depression in order to grasp the severity of its consequences. The United States waged war alongside her European allies from 1917 until the armistice was signed in November 1918, although Europe had been at war since 1914. The war ended with the negotiation of the Treaty of Versailles, and this is the point at which the conditions for an economic depression in Europe were most likely. The European countries devastated by the war, physically and economically, were America's trading partners. None of the three major players, Great Britain, France, and Germany, were able to shift effectively from a war-time economy to a peace-time economy. Each of these countries, plus most of the rest of Europe and their colonies, went directly from the Great War (World War I) into what would become the Great Depression (Goldfield 2007). America's political isolationist policies in the post-war period did not protect against the economic trade imbalance with European countries. This depression in Europe, the imbalance of trade between America and foreign countries, and American tariffs imposed on European countries were certainly contributing factors to and resulted in one cause for the Great Depression in the U.S (Kennedy 1999).

Another cause of the Great Depression was the over-extension of domestic consumer credit. The 1920s was a period during which companies encouraged the use of credit to increase consumer buying power. American consumer debt was around \$8 billion in 1929 (Boyer 2008). Unfortunately, this credit also extended to the stock market; at the time of the stock market crash in 1929, more than nine million Americans had stock purchased on credit. This would, obviously, contribute to the instability of the stock market as stock holders attempted to liquidate their stocks. These sales snowballed and perpetuated a collapse resulting in the loss of billions of dollars' worth of stocks in a very short period of time (Goldfield 2007).

Although the level of industrial productivity and corporate profits had increased in the 1920s, the wages of workers and the incomes of farmers had failed to keep pace (Kennedy 1999). This resulted in a great disparity between the "haves and have nots." This damaging unequal distribution of wealth was another cause of the Great Depression. For instance in 1929, the wealthiest 0.1 percent of American families had as much total income as the bottom 42 percent of American families combined (Goldfield 2007).

Yet another cause of the Great Depression was the lack of regulation of banks, lending agencies and the stock market. Although warned by the Federal Reserve to more closely scrutinize lending practices, lending institutions continued to loan money with little regard for potential consequences of over-extension of credit and speculation in the stock market (Boyer 2008).

Agriculture was a significant factor in the coming of economic crisis. Overproduction combined with declining prices resulted in an unstable and precarious situation for the roughly 45 percent of the population who depended on farming, wholly

or in part, for their livelihoods (Conkin 2008). Additionally, the majority of southern farmers did not own the land they farmed and usually were heavily indebted. Southerners also lagged behind in per capita income. At the start of the depression, per capita income in the South was 40 percent below the national average (Lester 2004).

The interaction of these factors combined resulted in an unprecedented period of bank failures, unemployment, agricultural collapse, and industrial decline. Historically, American individualism would have caused most to view the Depression as they viewed acts of nature and ride it out (Boyer 2008). However, this was a situation whose severity would challenge not only the American philosophy of individualism, but also the optimism of a nation.

A crisis this severe required an exceptional effort to mitigate the economic hardships it created, in varying degrees, for millions of Americans. President Herbert Hoover, elected in 1928, was slow to directly intervene. He believed the best course of action to be a voluntary effort on the part of industry, local governments, communities and private charities. For instance, he believed it the role of the federal government to encourage business through the use of voluntary pledges to forestall layoffs and maintain pre-crisis wage levels rather than legislate corrective measures for business and industry (Goldfield 2007). Unfortunately, for Hoover and the American people, volunteerism did not work in this case. Business leaders and industrial owners enacted massive layoffs and cut hours and wages of those who remained employed in spite of pledges they had made. Private philanthropic organizations exhausted resources for helping the needy in record time with little hope of replenishing their coffers. Local governments could not keep pace with the enormity of unemployment and need. When faced with this failure, Hoover said,

"You know, the only trouble with capitalism is capitalists; they're too damn greedy" (Goldfield 2007, 781). As the Depression worsened, Hoover did take more direct action. However, by then, it was too little, too late. Hoover's successor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, is credited with establishing the most activist federal government economic remedies in American history to that date.

The New Deal. Roosevelt campaigned on the promise of a new deal for the American people. Given the severity of the Depression during the 1932 presidential campaign, it is not surprising that a majority of American voters supported him and this new deal. Interestingly, FDR had not explicitly outlined the nature of this new approach to the Depression. In regard to the philosophy of the New Deal, Roosevelt said, "the legitimate object of government is to do for the people what needs to be done but which they cannot by individual effort do at all or do as well for themselves" (Humphrey 1970, 54). That statement would certainly create a firestorm of political criticism for the President and his advisors. Although attacks on the New Deal had to be tempered with restraint in the face of such appalling conditions, many politicians and observers were still quick to opine that such philosophy and subsequent actions were, or at least bordered on, socialist, communist, and un-American. On the surface, the New Deal looked like an alphabet soup of agencies (i.e. AAA, CCC, WPA) and an unfathomable maze of bureaucracies. In retrospect, the actions of the federal government during the period of Great Depression were an interesting mix of paternalism, desperation, and experimentation. What was the alternative? Faced with the most debilitating economic conditions in American history, the federal government seemed for many the last, best hope for survival (Boyer 2008). To that end, much of society was as willing as the

administration to experiment with government programs designed to afford relief from the suffering wrought by the Great Depression. The presence of growing social unrest and the resulting protests from groups like the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, sometimes spectacular and violent, also did much to encourage unprecedented government intervention (Cohen 1986).

By the time Roosevelt was inaugurated, the depression had produced unprecedented levels of economic decline, individual poverty, and human suffering. Roosevelt surrounded himself with a brain trust of advisors who were responsible for helping him to formulate the most effective way of pulling various sectors of American society and the economy out of the crisis. The hundred days, the period between March and June 1933 in FDR's first administration, for many refers to the most legislatively productive period in American government (Boyer 2008). Although many of the laws were controversial and some would be declared unconstitutional, the majority of American people believed that, at last, someone was doing something to help them.

New Deal legislation was specific to various sectors of the economy primarily because there was no single way to address a crisis as pervasive as the Great Depression. The earliest policies of the New Deal were aimed directly at relief. The Unemployment Relief Act (March 1933), for instance, created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) as a way of creating jobs for young men in conservation and public works projects. The Emergency Banking Act (March 1933) was established to prevent continued failure of banks and, thus, the further loss of individuals' savings and their confidence in the banking system (Boyer 2008). And, although banking, unemployment, and industry were

certainly at the top of the list of priorities, it was absolutely imperative to forestall any worsening of America's agricultural and food crisis in 1933 (Holley 1975).

Within FDR's circle, however, there were disagreements on the best course of action with regard to establishing agricultural recovery. One approach recommended that the federal government purchase agricultural surpluses and sell them overseas. The other approach was to establish quotas through which a reduction in farm yields would increase crop prices and also increase farm income (Boyer 2008). This is the approach which gained the most Congressional support and, to that end, Congress passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) in May, 1933. There was guarded optimism that this would rescue American farmers, but the AAA would become one of the most controversial and incongruous measures of the entire New Deal program.

There was plenty of misery to go around in American farming communities of the Great Depression but little immediate remedy. Agricultural overproduction, low crop prices, and poor land conditions had created an environment of despair and repeated failed ventures, especially in the South (Holley 1975). In Mississippi, for instance, annual farm incomes went from \$287.00 to \$117.00 in a period of approximately four years (Lester 2004, 3). Probably one of the most poignant ironies of the agricultural crisis was the intentional destruction of crops, born of the desperate hope to raise crop prices, in the face of such tangible and widespread need. When the AAA went into effect, it mandated that farmers plow under crops and slaughter livestock to meet the quotas established by the government (Boyer 2008, 844). Essentially this law provided subsidies, in the form of cash payments, for landowners to reduce production of crops such as corn, cotton, hogs, wheat, and dairy products. Arguably, this program would ultimately help the

segment of the farm population which was most prosperous to begin with at the expense of the poorest segment that was most negatively affected by the agricultural crisis. These farmers, overwhelmingly the majority of farmers in the South, were tenants and sharecroppers who depended on land owned by others. Landowners prospered with the AAA, but the landless suffered displacement (Biles 1994). The AAA was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1936, but it would quickly be replaced with another AAA. The second AAA had the same goals; maintaining or raising farm income and adjusting production to demand but its methods were more palatable to Congress and the courts (Cohen 1986). For instance, a part of the second AAA was the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, which would focus on better ways to increase soil fertility and decrease erosion (Holley 1975).

Why did a government policy established to alleviate the suffering of poor farmers actually increase hardship in many cases? In part, hardship increased because landless farmers, especially blacks, had the least amount of political and economic leverage prior to the crisis. This translated into a lack of opportunity to politically redress their complaints and achieve legislative or other government action. Ultimately, it was the federal government which determined methods of addressing the crisis and, perhaps more importantly in the South, the state and local governments which administered these programs (Holley 1971). The political reality was that the most influential and powerful constituents in the South controlled, to a great extent, what was available to the least powerful (Biles 1994).

Another reason for the failure of AAA to address the problems of the poorest of farmers was that the money from these subsidies paid out by the federal government was

not circulated in the economy, but rather was pocketed by landowners. For instance, in one year, Delta and Pine Land Company in Mississippi (reportedly the largest plantation in the state at that time) received federal government subsidies in the amount of \$114,840.00 of which the majority spent was used to purchase machinery. This resulted in the displacement of tenants and sharecroppers (Biles 1994). Where did they go? What was their chance of finding another means of employment? One of the great ironies of the New Deal is the answer to both those questions.

FDR and his Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace, cautiously investigated a way to take action that would provide relief for the poorest farmers: those farmers displaced by the AAA. Their remedy, the Resettlement Administration (RA), would do much to change the realities of farming, especially in the South. The irony was in the intent of the AAA compared with the intent of the RA. These two programs existed side by side, one restricting agricultural production, the other increasing production (Conkin 1967). Fundamentally, these two legislative mandates to agricultural economic recovery were contradictory, and to varying degrees, counterproductive. So, how would it work?

The Resettlement Administration was created as a way of establishing aid to farmers without resorting to direct payments to farmers (Schlesinger 1959). The concept was to rehabilitate the tenant farmers and sharecroppers by affording them the opportunity to retire exhausted land while the government retrained and equipped farmers (Schlesinger 1959). FDR chose Rexford G. Tugwell as his administrator for the RA. Tugwell had been an outspoken critic of the cycle of eroded land and worn out farmers which, he believed, contributed to a persistent agricultural crisis (Schlesinger 1959). His opinion was that poverty and issues of conservation were inextricably bound. He wrote,

"redistribution of our essential wealth, the land, in order that the more tangible wealth of money, health, education and useful possessions may flow into the hands of these disadvantaged farm families," was the most important function of the RA in the current crisis (Tugwell 1959, 160). However, he did not necessarily agree with the methods through which resettlement programs such as subsistence homesteads were founded (Schlesinger 1959). Further, there was credible opposition from many quarters.



Figure 1. Poster promoting resettlement (Library of Congress 1935).

With overproduction and erosion crippling the agrarian sector, could simple relocation work? M.L. Wilson, another of FDR's farming experts, believed the resettlement program should relocate farmers from poor land, but they should also have the opportunity to find industrial jobs. The best case scenario, then, would be to have part-time farmers who were also wage earners (Cohen 1986). This created criticism of the high cost of government expenditures for very little in the way of payoff for the expense

incurred (Sternsher 1964). In other words, critics argued that the purchase of land for resettlement communities was not a good real estate investment. Critics also charged that with the staggering numbers of poor farmers, the selection process would be nothing short of social engineering. In this case, criticism would likely follow the selection process (Conkin 2008). The homesteaders would have to be persons who could realistically succeed in the part-time farming/part-time industrial vocation, but not so successful that they did not qualify for residency. There was also the quite real problem of racism against black farmers and racial politics which could, and often did, influence the selection process (Holley 1971).

New Deal Farm Programs and the Great State of Mississippi

According to virtually any economic and social criteria, Mississippi entered the Great Depression well behind the rest of the U. S. Industrial jobs, a national low at 52,000 in 1929, had fallen by almost half in 1933. Bank deposits plummeted by more than half and farm income declined by as much as 64 percent in the same period (Lester 2004, 3). Statistics do not always convey the human suffering accompanying these economic declines. Children went hungry and adults actually died from malnutrition in Mississippi. Many Mississippians survived on the "3 Ms," meal, meat and molasses, the staples of poor families (Smith 2004). Life for tenant farmers and sharecroppers in the state had been hard since Reconstruction; it got dramatically harder in the 1930s.



Figure 2. Father and son in Pike County, MS (Library of Congress 1935).

In 1930, the Mississippi farm population numbered approximately 1.3 million, or two-thirds of the population. In fact, more Mississippians were farmers than all other vocations combined. Given the overwhelmingly rural and agricultural nature of Mississippi's economy, several New Deal programs were critical to the state's economic recovery. The federal government poured more than 300 million dollars into the state between 1933 and 1939. While that sounds considerable, it was well below the average national per capita expenditure, as the federal government spent \$226.00 per Mississippi farm in 1933 as opposed to \$312.00 per farm nationally in the same year (Tate 1978). Additionally, a disproportionate amount of money was spent in the Delta compared to other farming regions in the state (Tate 1978).

Obviously, the AAA benefited some Mississippi landowners. However, their benefit almost certainly came at the expense of the vast majority of Mississippi farmers who were not landowners. In 1933, for instance, cotton farmers in the state received \$10 million dollars which displaced sharecroppers and tenant farmers since the AAA payments were made to take acreage out of production (Tate 1978).

Mississippi became the home for more than seventy Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, which employed young men and initiated public works projects such as

reforestation efforts and national park maintenance. These camps not only benefitted those employed, but also the surrounding communities from which supplies and other necessities were purchased (Lester 2004). There were not nearly enough, though, to make up for the staggering loss of employment opportunities in the state.

Rural electrification became a program closely associated with hopes for recovery in the state. FDR staunchly supported creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority which would serve several counties in Mississippi as well as counties in Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee. Congress appropriated the monies (\$4.8 billion) and Roosevelt established the Rural Electrification Administration by executive order in 1935 (Biles 1994). Still, was that enough to help push the state toward economic recovery?

Most argued this was not enough, and a concerted effort to establish resettlement and subsistence homestead communities in the state was undertaken. Although Mississippians had traditionally shunned federal programs, hardship and need caused most to support New Deal farm programs enthusiastically (Lester 2004). In November, 1933, Jackson's *Clarion Ledger* published an article stating that Mississippi was to be the third state to get a federal subsistence homestead project. This project was to be modeled after Wilson's approach to resettlement in which residents would farm part-time, not commercially, and earn industrial wages. In fact Wilson, who was now head of the Rural Rehabilitation Administration, visited Mississippi to promote the program (Tate 1978). New Deal agencies like the RA would ultimately purchase more than 50,000 acres of land in Mississippi and build more than 824 homes over the next decade at a cost of \$5 million (Tate 1978) (see Table 1).

Table 1

New Deal Communities in Mississippi

Community	County	Acreage	Number of units	Total cost	Average unit Price
Cruger	Holmes	9,350	106	730,510	5,283
Hattiesburg	Forrest	130	24	75,648	2,521
Hillhouse	Bolivar	2,138	40	167,749	4,193
McComb	Pike	264	20	91,452	3,898
Meridian	Lauderdale	233	25	73,556	2,851
Terry	Hinds	5,404	73	296,421	3,518
Tupelo	Lee	171	35	139,247	3,469

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

This research focuses on three specific communities in Mississippi: Hattiesburg, McComb, and Tupelo (Figure 3). For each of the three, records of land tract purchases by the federal government (or its emissaries) for New Deal farm programs exist. The three communities were, by design, located near existing cities in order to help achieve the intent of the subsistence homestead program, ownership of land. I chose these three communities based on their proximity and accessibility to the sites that had once been homesteads.

Land purchased by the federal government in Hattiesburg numbered 130 acres. The land was on the southwest side of town, and was considered appropriate for truck farming, vegetables, certain fruits and some second generation types of timber. This was actually the smallest of the New Deal land purchases in Mississippi, but was considered one of the most promising because of Hattiesburg's proximity to potential industrial jobs for homesteaders.

The local board responsible for purchasing land in McComb was quite specific in land they deemed appropriate. The board purchased 364 acres of undeveloped land on the southeast side of the city from a local farmer at the bargain price of \$2,200.00. The geographic location of McComb with regard to the railroad and textile industry also played a role in its selection as a subsistence homestead community.

Tupelo, Mississippi was regarded in the 1930s as an example of the "New South," which led it to also be ideal for a New Deal farm community. The government purchased

170 acres about six miles north of the city, which was bisected by Highway 45. A virtue of the Tupelo Homestead's location was its proximity to the Tennessee Valley Authority project, another New Deal program designed to create jobs and electrify rural locations.

Archival and Historical Data Collection

Data for this research is derived primarily from historical and archival records. The federal government, in appropriating funds for New Deal farm programs, generated thousands of pages of documents from which the specific information for this research can be mined. These records are available through the Mississippi Department of Archives and History as well as the U.S. Farm Home Administration (FHA). Although there have not been geographic examinations of these communities that I can find, there are many general and specific historical accounts of these communities in scholarly journal articles, academic theses/dissertations, and books. To answer the research questions, a thorough examination of the available records was necessary, as was field observations of the present state of the three communities and an understanding of the historical accounts available.

Answering the questions of this research will be based primarily on recording the number of acres purchased, the number of units constructed, the total cost, the cost to the individual homesteader for purchase, the number and types of supplies and livestock provided to the homesteader, the length of occupancy, and the number of purchases by homesteaders given available data. As archival records are mined for this information, I also took note of any exceptional differences; as in requirements of the local governing body, political factors, and selection for occupancy which could impact the success of homesteaders. By definition, this is qualitative and will require a judgment call from me

as to what would be "exceptional." I intend to be transparent in any judgment made during the research process as I deliver my results and conclusions (Montello and Sutton 2006). I will be guided by these judgments with regard to what is reasonable and prudent to assume in a situation such as this. I have consulted several historical geography articles to get a sense of what is appropriate in the way of making these judgments. My understanding is that transparency and articulation of the way in which I approached the problem are paramount for maintaining credibility.

CHAPTER III

HOMESTEADS

Hattiesburg

Situated at the confluence of the Leaf and Bouie rivers and perched in the middle of a huge longleaf yellow pine forest, the region that became Hattiesburg was in a unique position to embrace the shift from an economically depressed semi-agricultural region into a boom town in the late 19th century. Hattiesburg was incorporated in 1884, the same year the first rail line was completed through the area to connect the cities of Meridian, MS and New Orleans, LA (English 2000). The lumber industry and the development of the railroad around Hattiesburg ushered in increased settlement. Eventually, four major railroads traversed the area and Hattiesburg became the center of these rail routes connecting timber producing areas to ports on the Gulf Coast, in Mobile, in New Orleans and to other primary market cities. In a relatively short period of time, the state of Mississippi ranked third nationally in lumber producing states, only exceeded by Washington and Louisiana (Howe 2001).

Inevitably, the frenetic pace and growth of lumber and railroads was destined to slow down. The railroads initially came to Hattiesburg primarily to facilitate the lumber industry. Since it was extractive, there was a point at which lumber output would decline along with the importance of the railroad. That point began around 1925 and would continue until the beginning of the Great Depression. By the time of the stock market crash in 1929, the output of lumber and its dependence on the railroad had all but ceased (Kelley and Spillman 1976). What is left in the wake of such significant industries as the

railroad and lumber? One of the most obvious consequences was the destruction of the

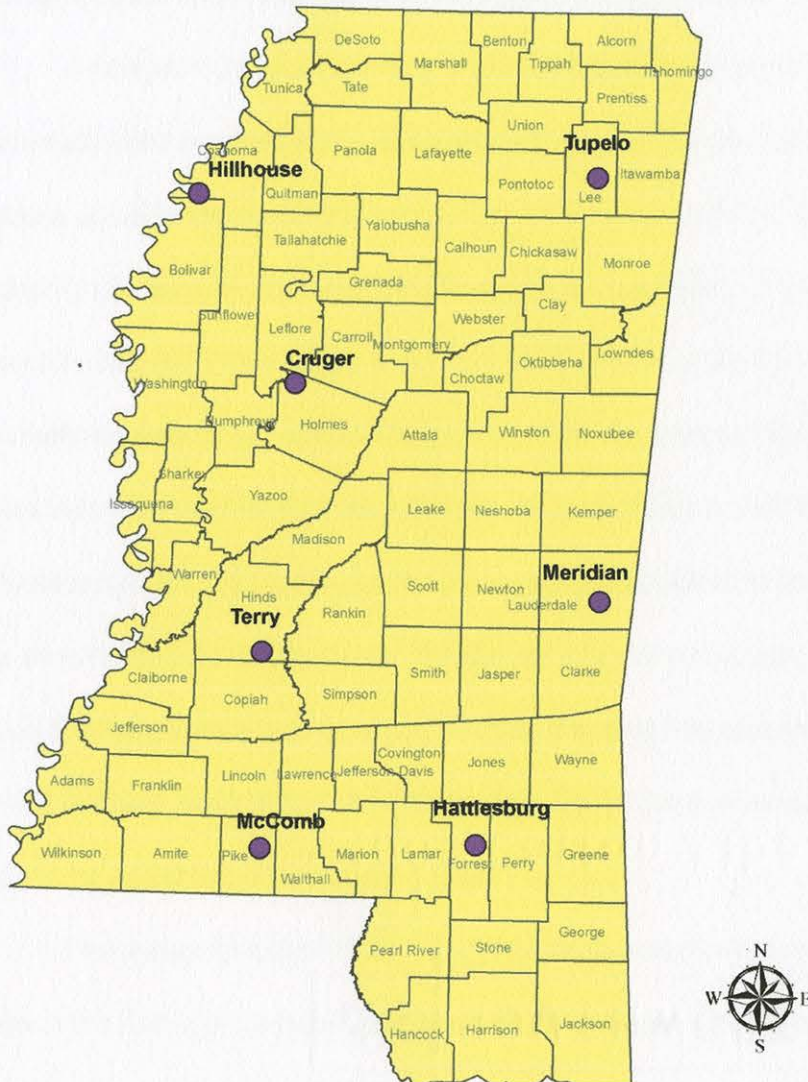


Figure 3. New Deal farm communities (Johnson 2010).

forests themselves. Thousands of acres of longleaf yellow pine had been cut, much of it in the “cut out and get out” fashion. Since the timber was gone and operations moved out of state to regions like the Pacific Northwest, the necessity for rail lines declined in proportion to the lumber industry. Many rail lines were either abandoned or recycled in a way of pulling up rails and either reusing them at other locations or selling them. The

number of miles of rail line began to decline rapidly after 1925. Statewide, rail lines fell from more than 4,500 miles in 1910 to just more than 3,600 by 1968 (McLemore 1973).

Attempts to mitigate the loss of the lumber industry were not very successful. Earlier attempts at reforestation had been ridiculed by lumbermen since many believed farming could be profitable on cutover land (McLemore 1973). That belief was in error, primarily due to poor soils, and the attempt to convert thin soil pinelands into farms was a complete failure. Other efforts to use the waste left from the lumber industry focused primarily on extracting resin and turpentine from the stumps. These turpentine operations were said to have the worst working conditions of all the forest products industries and did not employ nearly the number of workers as had lumber (Fickle 2004). The development of the Masonite process which used young timber for manufacturing pressed wood products had potential, but there was not enough second growth forest yet for this industry to rival the lumber industry. Hattiesburg was experiencing an economic bust cycle, and it was about to get worse.

The economic crisis of the 1930s had an unprecedented impact on Hattiesburg. There were few opportunities in a state that had no money to help the poor and little industry on which to rely. Mississippi agriculture, already depressed, worsened as many lost their land to foreclosure and non-payment of taxes. By 1932, one-quarter of real property in the state, some 20 percent of all farms, had been sold to pay taxes (McCarty 2000). Hattiesburg was fortunate enough to be chosen as a location of a CCC camp. It was established as a soil conservation camp and would have a positive impact on the local economy. The construction of the camp relied on materials from local businesses and subsequent purchases by the camp put several thousand dollars monthly into the local

market for food, clothing and other items (Harper 1992). The conservation efforts of the Hattiesburg camp included planting trees for reforestation, improving thousands of acres of timberland, and introducing kudzu as an erosion prevention measure (Harper 1992).

Another New Deal program which received widespread support in Hattiesburg was the establishment of Subsistence Homesteads. In 1935, for \$2,400.00, the government purchased 130 acres on the southwest side of town and created Hattiesburg Homesteads (Holley 1975). Although the smallest of the subsistence land purchases in the state, Hattiesburg was considered very promising. Much of that promise associated with the Hattiesburg Homesteads was owed to increased local support of the Balance Agriculture With Industry Act. The plan, eventually passed by the state legislature, was designed to allow local government to foster industrial expansion (Kelley and Spillman 1976). This fit in with the concept of resettled farmers who earned industrial wages (Tugwell 1959).

Construction of twenty-four clapboard houses was completed within one year of the land purchase. The homesteads had a park but no lake or other community facilities (Holley 1975). Each homestead did include the main house, garage, storage room and chicken house. Additionally, each unit also had two apple trees and two pear trees. They ranged from three to five acres per unit (HAHS 2000). The average price for the units was \$2,075.00, with an average monthly payment of \$18.08 (Holley 1975). Even though the RA and local officials agreed the price was fair, the Hattiesburg Homesteads had trouble attracting families and even more trouble keeping them (Holley 1975). The property was considered too far from town, especially since the roads were unpaved and there was no public transportation impeded filling the units (HAHS 2000). Another factor

in the inability to fill the units was the objection by some potential homesteaders that the terms of the contracts they had to sign were unfair, particularly the forty-year clause families had to sign if they did not have the resources for a significant down payment. Many believed the creation of the Hattiesburg Homestead Association, a cooperative created when the RA reorganized the property, imposed unnecessary management expenses (Holley 1975). Some homesteaders also objected to restrictions on their activities in modifying the units such as having to seek permission to paint their property or to cut trees (HAHS 2000).

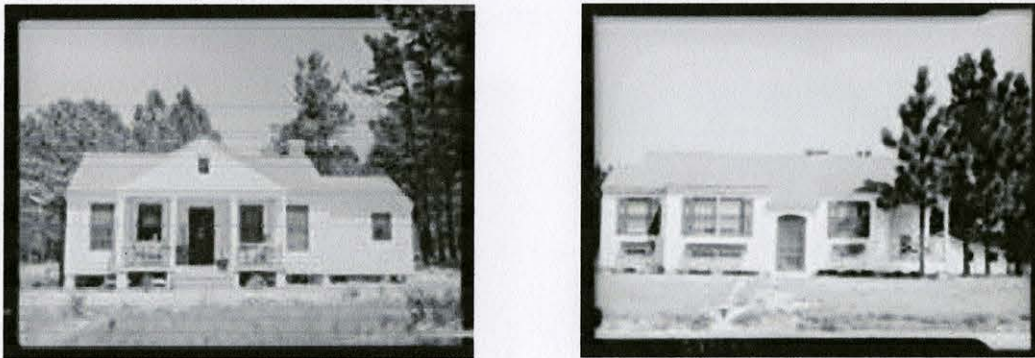


Figure 4. Hattiesburg Homesteads (Library of Congress 1935).

Regrettably, the Hattiesburg Homesteads experienced a 92 percent turnover rate in a period of three years. And, by 1938, only six families lived there (Holley 1975). The RA's regional office determined that, if the units continued to be vacant, the entire project would become insolvent. They decided the best course of action was to lower the selling prices to \$1,579.00 per unit with a monthly payment of \$14.74 (Holley 1975).

Sadly, the intent of the Homestead Subsistence didn't work in Hattiesburg. The homesteaders in residence didn't renew their rentals, and the government was left with what it created. The biggest problem was the land; what would happen to the 130 acres the government set aside? In Hattiesburg, by 1940, the government had all but abandoned

the idea that the subsistence community would be viable. The stimulus of war production created greater demand for housing in the area, but it was temporary. By 1942, the federal government had placed the remaining subsistence homesteads in Mississippi under the purview of the Federal Public Housing Authority since the residents did not earn their primary income from agriculture. At this point, Hattiesburg, McComb, and Meridian were the only remaining projects (Holley 1975). In 1946, the government closed its Hattiesburg office after selling all the units and declaring the homestead association dissolved. Notably, the units were not sold to farmers, rather to semi-skilled and skilled labor and returning soldiers (Holley 1975).

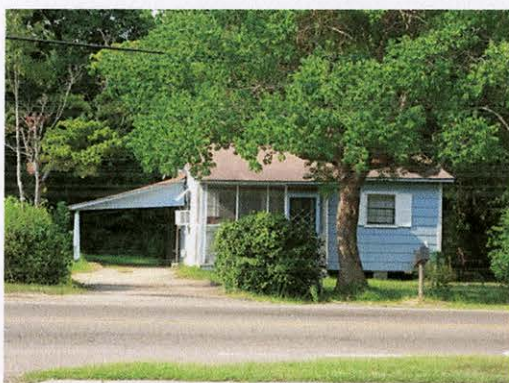


Figure 5. Current view of existing structures from the original homes in Hattiesburg Homesteads (Rhoads 2010).

Today, what was Hattiesburg Homesteads, also known as Pinehills (Figure 6), is a middle income neighborhood. It is close enough to the main highways to be well travelled, but it is enough of a neighborhood to be distinct.

My observations and field work were noted, and it was evident to residents that a person who did not belong there was taking pictures. I engaged in conversation with several residents, none of whom knew about the history of the homestead. However, there was a consensus that this neighborhood was better than some because of the size of

the lots. I took pictures, talked to residents (willing ones). What I don't know is whether or not residents of the homestead and current residents actually benefitted from government intervention. It is true that the lots in the neighborhood are bigger than most suburban developments created later. Did the change in landscape born of government intervention benefit residents? If so, in what way? What I observed was a neighborhood that was not necessarily in high demand because the houses were older and smaller. The upside of that government intervention was the lots are much larger than traditional suburban lots. Another trait of Pinehills is that it is on the outskirts of Hattiesburg, a distance from downtown and from the current growth west of the city. Many of the houses remain from the original homestead as do several of the outbuildings. Most of them have been painted colors other than the original white, but the structures remain otherwise unmodified in most cases.

Does it matter? I'm not sure, but I am convinced that the landscape created by the establishment of Hattiesburg Homesteads is tangible and recognizable although maybe not as much as can be seen in McComb and Tupelo.

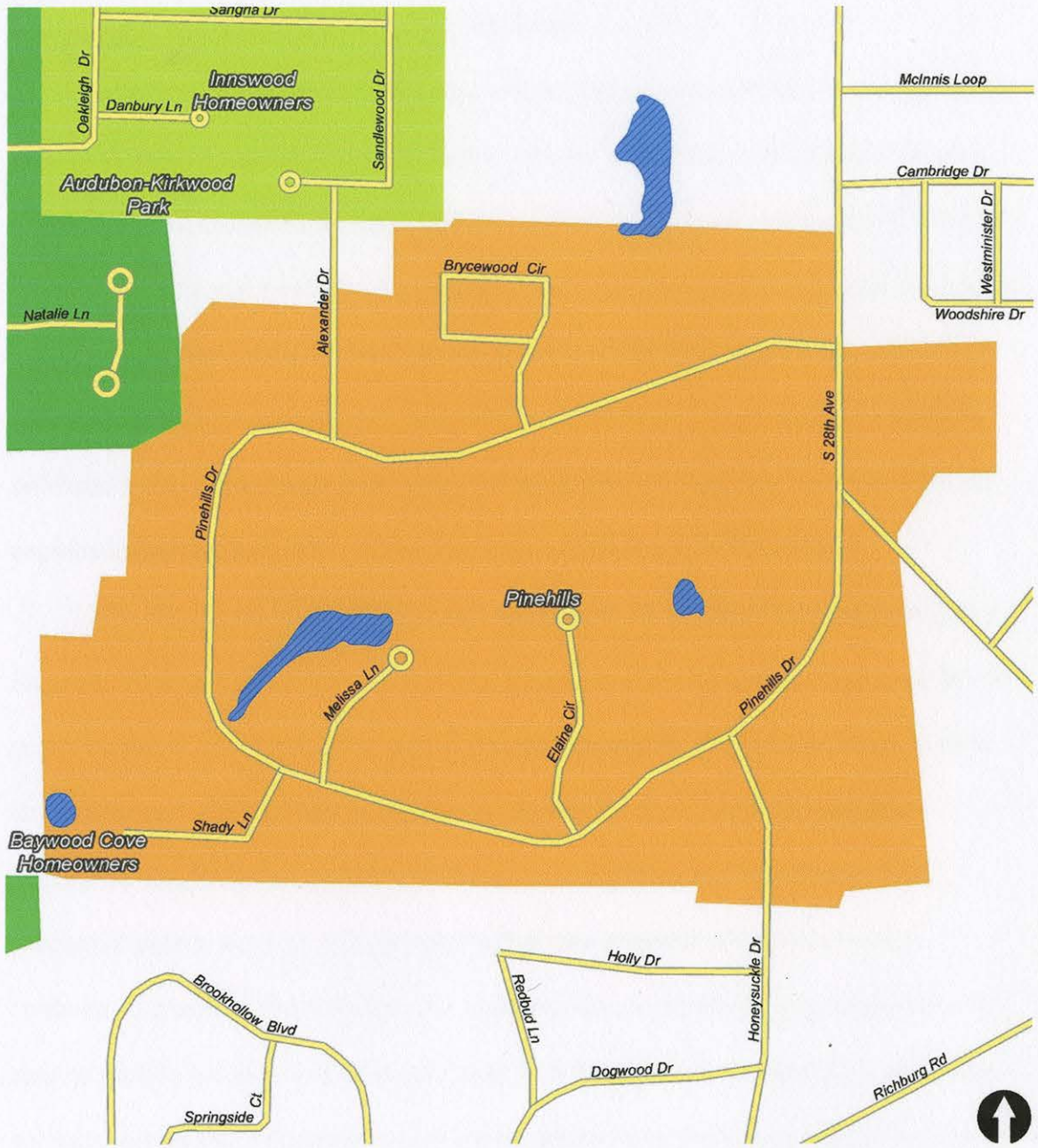


Figure 6. Map of Pinehills formerly Hattiesburg Homesteads (City of Hattiesburg 2012).

McComb

McComb is similar to other south Mississippi cities established in the late 1800s in several ways. First, the railroad industry played a major role in its physical location. Second, a boom economic cycle based on a particular industry or industries dictated its initial settlement and migration into the city. And, farming was economically significant for many as either a supplemental form of income or, for some, their entire livelihood. McComb benefitted from the fact, too, that it boasted some very vocal and influential politicians who never forgot from whence they hailed. This proved to be critical in the unprecedented political intervention that was the New Deal in Mississippi.

The city was founded in 1872 and was named for railroad company man Henry Simpson McComb. The importance of the railroad is evident in much more than the city's name. In fact, it was the construction of the Jackson and Northern Railroad from New Orleans through the area that provided the impetus for three small communities-- Elizabethtown, Burglund, and Harveytown-- to consolidate and incorporate their communities into one city. The railroad built a new terminal which became the commercial center of the new city. The railroad also constructed a large maintenance shop to service trains travelling to and from New Orleans and Jackson. This shop drew workers and settlers from neighboring communities along the Bogue Chitto River to the east and more distant cities such as New Orleans to the south (Holley 1975).

One of the first major economic booms for the city came with the construction of a sawmill in south McComb around 1900. The sawmill became the single largest employer for a period. The availability of thousands of acres of longleaf yellow pine fed the mill and its employees, at least until the pine was gone. Within a roughly twenty year

period, the sawmill and timber industry were no longer economically viable because of the scarcity of remaining timber to harvest (Tate 1978).

Around the same time as the construction of the sawmill, J.J. White built a large cotton and textile mill which enjoyed modest success. The mill was bought in the 1920s by a New York company that expanded the operation considerably. In fact, it had become the largest such mill in the state by 1928. Unfortunately, McComb Textile Mill suffered from the ill effects of the Great Depression and by 1932, was operating barely above bankruptcy. The mill managed to survive both the decline in production and labor union trouble through the 1930s, but eventually closed its doors in 1942.



Figure 7. Current view of McComb Mill (Rhoads 2010).

The only other significant economic activity in the area was agriculture. McComb was not well suited to cash crop agriculture like cotton, although it was still quite prevalent. Farming of truck crops like tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and strawberries was vital to residents (Strange 2010).

By the time of the depression, one of McComb's primary industries, the lumber trade, had all but disappeared. This is one of the reasons the city was well suited for the subsistence homestead project (Tate 1978). Tenancy was not as concentrated in piney woods areas like McComb, and loss of population that accompanied the collapse of the

lumber boom meant that the city had a decent chance of achieving success with homestead projects (Tate 1978). In December, 1933, the Federal Subsistence Homestead Corporation, acting under the authority of the Resettlement Administration, created the McComb Homesteads of Mississippi, Inc. (Holley 1975). This board was responsible for the implementation of the project on the ground. Their responsibilities included borrowing money from the federal government, acquiring land, constructing buildings, selecting residents, and managing the project at completion (Holley 1975). The board consisted of influential McComb residents such as Mayor X.A. Kramer and Oliver Emmerich, editor of the local paper. There was such enthusiastic support for the decision to approve a homestead in McComb, several community leaders asked the Mississippi State Democratic Committee chairman to invite Mrs. Roosevelt to tour and dedicate the project (Holley 1975).

The board purchased 264 acres of undeveloped land on the southeast side of the city from a local farmer for \$2,200 (Holley 1975). The project got underway in earnest. A crew of surveyors, an engineer, horticulturists, and the state extension service helped the board develop the official plans for the homestead in a matter of weeks. The board approved plans for an initial twenty-five homes, with the room and plans for more in the future. The *McComb Enterprise* announced that this homestead would bring to fruition the President's dream of providing modern homes in the best surroundings near the city for part-time industrial workers (Emmerich 1934). The homes were all wooden clapboard ranging from four to six rooms each. They also had what was considered in Mississippi at the time an extravagant luxury: indoor plumbing (Tate 1978). Initially, each house was also to be equipped with gas, electric and telephone connections,

however, these were dropped because their installation made the houses too expensive (Holley 1975). The homestead acreage ranged from four to twenty-four acres per unit. Additionally, each plot had the house, a garage, a well-house, a multi-purpose shed designed for cow stalls, chicken house, and storeroom. Each homesteader also had a garden for personal consumption, some wooded land, and an orchard. The whole homestead community shared a thirty-seven acre pasture for grazing livestock and a park and lake for recreation. Upon selection, homesteaders would receive livestock including a cow and horse, twenty-five to fifty hens, and basic farm equipment (Holley 1975). How could such a project fail to thrive? What many did not fully comprehend was that the offerings of the subsistence homestead community were not free. The concept all along had been to give farmers the opportunity for economic independence by affording them reasonably priced homes, the chance for achieving real wages, and the tools they needed for the job. What was required of homesteaders was a commitment to working toward saving money, using their resources (gardens and the like) more effectively, and maintaining both their agricultural and industrial activities.

The Eleanor Roosevelt (McComb) Homestead opened for business in June, 1934. However, as early as April there had been already more than 500 applicants for the twenty five available units (Holley 1975). For the project to succeed, the applicants had to be selected carefully. According to some critics, those accepted were not really poor but were skilled laborers making as much as \$1,200.00 per year (Tate 1978). A committee of locals was formed to interview the applicants and make recommendations to the board. This served two purposes; first it spread out the blame, and, second, it involved citizens whose support could help determine the success of the project (Holley

1975). The board then made its own selection of applicants and forwarded them to the state committee for final selection. This state agency was the final word on all subsistence homestead applicants in Mississippi. Then, that list of recommendations went to Washington D.C. for absolute final selection (Holley 1975). If the most frequently cited criteria for acceptance was "reliable" who would make the cut in that complex process? And, given the pervasive legally sanctioned segregation and overt racism, did any blacks have an opportunity for acceptance (Holley 1971)?



Figure 8. McComb Homesteads (Library of Congress 1935).

Guy Betz became the first homesteader in McComb Homesteads in June, 1934. He was not, however, a displaced tenant or sharecropper; he was a mechanic and night watchman (Tate 1978). He was followed by two other families in short order. Sadly, almost before the project started, there were problems with the promise of the homesteads. Oliver Emmerich, the enthusiastic manager of the homestead project, had told applicants months prior to opening that the cost of the homesteads would be around \$2,500.00 give or take. But, as construction neared completion and moving day came and went, Emmerich told the three families (now in residence) that the agreement they were to sign was based on a purchase price of \$3,200.00. Betz refused to sign the agreement as did the heads of the other two families claiming the price unreasonably high (Holley 1975). On orders from the Division of Subsistence Homesteads in D. C., Emmerich

evicted the first three families from their homesteads. This was not an auspicious beginning to what had been hailed as McComb's best hope for economic recovery.

Unfortunately, the project was also plagued with other problems that would interfere with its success. The homestead's lack of utilities, distance from industrial jobs, and generally poor agricultural soil made it difficult to attract the sort of residents Emmerich and the board wanted (Tate 1978). The official response from Washington was to reorganize. The new head of the Federal Subsistence Homesteads Cooperation determined the best course of action was to build ten more homes in McComb reducing the average cost and, thus, reducing the price for homesteaders (Holley 1975). Timing is often crucial, and this was no exception. Political shakeups in Washington had resulted in greater criticism and scrutiny regarding the entire Division of Subsistence Homesteads. This led to a temporary suspension of all activity in McComb. The program of homesteads in Mississippi had been ambitious, it suffered its share of obstacles, and many began to question its viability (Conkin 2008).

According to city demographic records, most of the residents of Eleanor Roosevelt (McComb) Homestead in the 1940s were not the original inhabitants. In fact, the Farm Security Administration (yet another agency heading the homestead program at one time) transferred the McComb Homestead to the Federal Public Housing Authority. The philosophy behind the move was that any projects on which residents did not earn their primary livelihood from agriculture should not fall under the purview of the agency. McComb, Hattiesburg, and Meridian were the only Mississippi homesteads left and were maintained until the end of World War II. After the war, they were all liquidated, and any remaining homesteaders who chose to bought their deeds (Holley 1975).

According to some, the experiment at McComb failed miserably (Holley 1975). For instance, by July 1938, four years into the project, only five homesteads were filled, and those remained on a temporary status. What had gone so horribly wrong? Officials at the local, state, regional and national level decided that, perhaps, too much government intervention was preventing the success of the project. They decided to come as close as possible to eliminating government control. The remaining homesteaders were offered the outright sale of their homesteads with a deed and a promissory note stating their obligation to the debt (Holley 1975). This ended up being too tall an order for many families in light of the fact that most, if not all, came to the program with no liquid assets. Owning their own homes and farms was the goal of most homesteaders, but reality was different than the theoretical plans of New Deal politicians and advisers. The bottom line was that there was no magic cure for the Depression in McComb or anywhere else.

There was a significant migration of skilled and unskilled labor during the period between 1940 and 1945 to cities such as Pascagoula and Mobile in search of good-paying industrial jobs. When the war was over, a return of veterans and some of the industrial labor now displaced from jobs created a housing demand (Farrell 2001). Open land in the original homestead, left for future development, was made into residential home sites and sold. And, by 1946, the federal government divested itself of responsibility for McComb Homestead by declaring the association dissolved (Holley 1975).

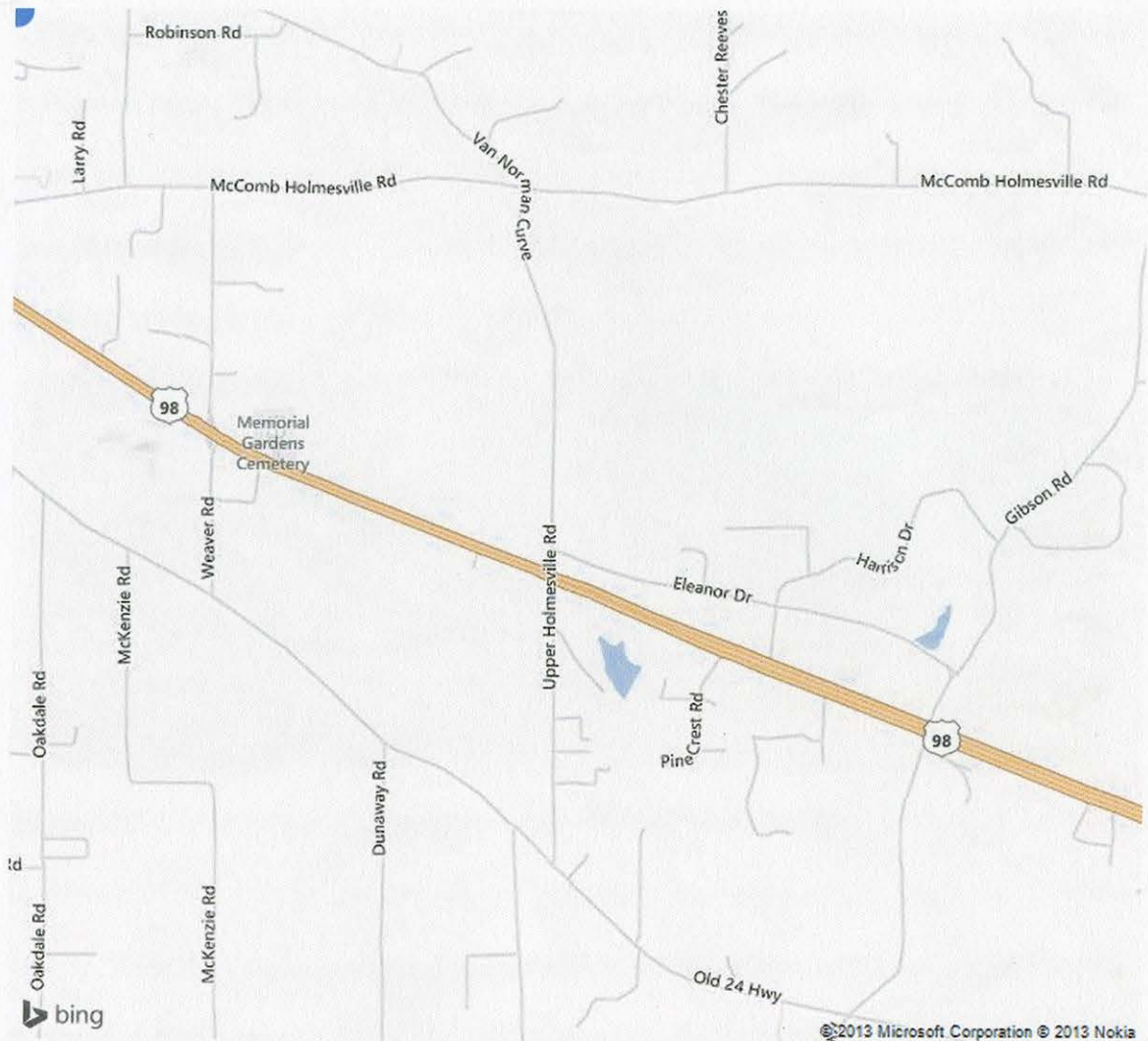


Figure 9. Current map of the Homestead area in McComb (Bing Maps 2013).

The land that was Eleanor Roosevelt (McComb) Homestead is currently a low to middle income neighborhood. Field observation combined with archival research revealed that many of the original houses constructed on the site still stand just off Highway 98 on the outskirts of McComb. There are a couple of notable exceptions to size and style of home, but the basic units established by the McComb Homestead Subsistence Charter are still quite evident. However, there is no evidence of agricultural activity, even backyard gardens. The common pasture and individual orchards are no longer discernible. Further, there is very little industry near the site. Since the early

1980s, migration has been away from the southeast of McComb in favor of the west and northwest areas. These areas are closer in proximity to the main interstate (I-55) and the urban growth has resulted in a different settlement pattern (Strange 2010). A major shopping mall, big box store and other amenities have drawn residents to the northwest outskirts of the city in a much more suburban residential pattern.



Figure 10. Current view of McComb Homesteads (Rhoads 2010).

Tupelo

Prosperity for many towns in antebellum Mississippi was tied to navigable water or the fledgling railroad. The history of Tupelo is inextricably bound to the railroad. Decades before it was incorporated, the town attracted Mobile & Ohio Railroad surveyors with cheap land (Miller 1999). Upon completion of the tracks through town in 1860, Tupelo became a typical railroad town with its main road, Front Street, running parallel to the tracks and boasting brothels, boarding houses, and saloons (Miller 1999). Unfortunately, within a year, the Civil War began. Tupelo's railroads were destroyed as Union forces gained control of the area towards the end of the war, and virtually all economic activity in the town ceased until the war was over.

As the area struggled to reconstruct after the Civil War, Tupelo incorporated in 1870 and became the seat of Lee County. However, it was the reconstruction and expansion of the railroads that gave the city its best opportunity to prosper again. The Mobile & Ohio Railroad began rebuilding its tracks in 1886. The Kansas City, Memphis & Birmingham Railroad was persuaded to build tracks through the town primarily through the efforts of locals John Allen, U.S. Representative, and John Miller, editor of the *Tupelo Daily Journal* (Miller 1999). Construction was completed in 1887, and settlers from surrounding towns began to relocate to Tupelo. The city was once again on the road to prosperity.

Agriculture in the area was primarily cash crop cotton farming (Lester 2004). However, in 1890, the development of the pulpwood industry gave area residents another economic opportunity. Additionally, a planing mill and furniture factories developed on the back of the pulpwood industry (Miller 1999). Regrettably, by the turn of the century, neither of these industries was able to compensate for agricultural decline. Decades of cotton farming had depleted the soil and the significant decline in cotton prices by 1890 combined to encourage many to look elsewhere for jobs. In an effort to prevent further exodus from the city, John Allen and other local investors established the Tupelo Cotton Mill in 1901. The mill was located close to the intersection of the two railroads and employed hundreds of workers. Adjacent to it, the Tupelo Garment Company employed hundreds more area residents. Allen also used his considerable political influence to persuade the U.S. Congress to fund a fish hatchery to Tupelo (Miller 1999).

In the years preceding World War I, Tupelo prospered from its various industries and was considered one of the most progressive cities in the state. Tupelo's prosperity

could not, however, survive the coming economic crisis. The continued decline in cotton prices and collapse in demand for manufactured goods contributed to layoffs, farm foreclosures and an overall economic decline for the city and its residents (Smith 2006).

In part, due to political connections, FDR's administration was convinced to include Tupelo in two very important New Deal programs. Both the Rural Electrification Act and the Bankhead Jones Farm Act would change Tupelo's economic course through the years of the Great Depression. Tupelo was regarded in the 1930s as an example of the "New South," which would help make it a location for a New Deal farm community. The government purchased 171 acres about six miles north of the city and bisected by Highway 45. Agriculture in the area was deemed suitable for truck and fruit farming by the federal government. It also contained a fair amount of harvestable timber (Holley 1975).

The years of the New Deal forever changed Tupelo. The Tennessee Valley Authority rural electrification project in the area made Tupelo a confluence of the best the federal government had to offer during the Great Depression. Rural electrification was considered by some to be the salvation of depressed economies. The purpose was two-fold: to electrify rural areas and create jobs in the process (Smith 2006). Tupelo benefitted from the TVA and subsequent construction, but it was not enough. The establishment of subsistence homesteads was heralded as a way to establish economic recovery for the many who relied on agriculture for their economic mainstay. With much fanfare, to include a visit by the President and his wife, the Tupelo Homesteads opened for business in 1934. Not much went right after that (Holley 1975). The Tupelo

Homesteads had the same trouble filling vacancies as did the other homesteads in Mississippi.



Figure 11. Tupelo Homesteads (Library of Congress 1935).

Much of the problem with the Tupelo Homesteads had to do with government selection and individual expectation (Smith 2006). These homesteads were similar to others in that the available tools, equipment and land were made a part of the resident requirements. As great as the promise of a homestead sounded to potential residents, the selection process proved to be more than many could navigate (Holley 1975). There were more people interested in the opportunity created by the TVA than those interested in the subsistence homesteads. That lack of interest would determine the fate of the homesteads. In 1940, the homesteads were appropriated by the National Park Service. The subsequent disposition of these homes would create an environment where they were frozen in time.

Going into the area that was the homestead requires permission of the National Park Service because the agency took ownership of the Tupelo Homesteads after World War II. Although some of the homes were maintained as housing for park rangers early on, the houses have been vacant of residential occupants for years. The current rangers gave me permission to enter, and going into the homestead is much like stepping back in time. The houses have been maintained to a degree, per US government policy. But, since

the Park Service took control, very few outsiders have ventured in the neighborhood. An interesting historical note was the visit of First Lady Roosevelt to the Tupelo Homesteads. The home she visited is much as it was in 1936.



Figure 12. Current view of Tupelo Homesteads (Rhoads 2010).

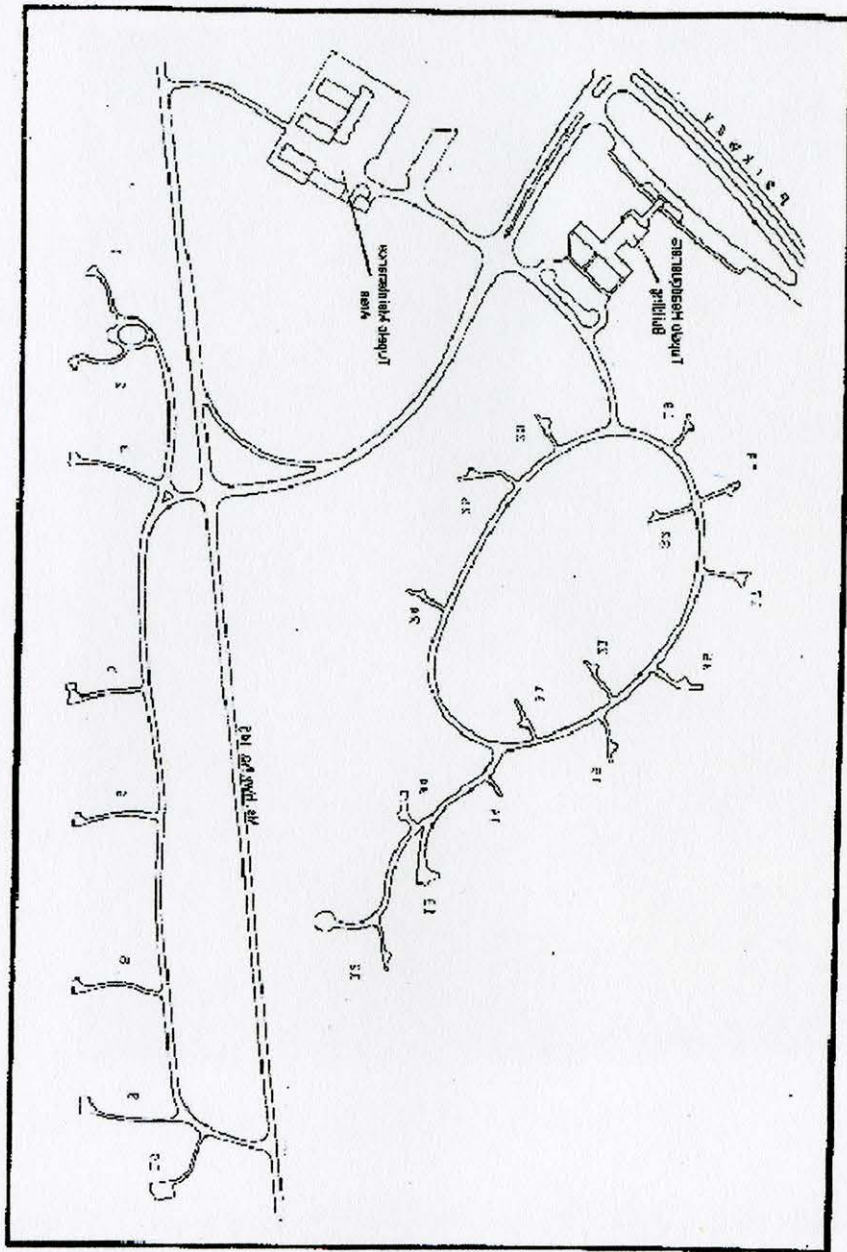


Figure 13. Plot of Tupelo Homesteads (National Park Service 1940).



Figure 14. Current view of Tupelo Homesteads with plot plan imposed (Murphy 2011).

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

According to available records, no one who started in any of the three communities studied ended up as landowners in those communities (Holley 1975). Further, the land that began as simple farmsteads in Hattiesburg and McComb has been filled in to become a typical American residential landscape. In Tupelo because the land is owned by the National Park Service, the homes are unoccupied and the homestead retains its original look.

This leads to questions regarding the success of the program. The federal government failed in its attempt to relocate farmers to areas where they could farm part-time and earn a wage (Holley 1975). Was it the land on which they were relocated? This research indicates that the three homestead sites were selected as much for pragmatism as any other criteria such as soil type (Holley 1975). The land purchased was selected because it was available, it was a good deal, and often because of political connections.

The government's intended objective in the creation of these three communities was the purchase of homesteads by people negatively affected by the economic crisis that was the Depression. As stated, none of the original homesteaders achieved ownership. The facts prove there were many reasons for the failure to meet the government's intended objective. First, it is necessary to understand the scope of the Great Depression. It is unlikely, if not impossible, to establish means of economic recovery suitable to all. Further, the economic crisis was so pervasive that any attempt at recovery was, to a degree, contingent on another segment of the economy. Third, agriculture had been, and remained during the Depression, an economic activity that was iffy at best.

New Deal programs, especially agricultural programs, were a mix of experimentation, paternalism, and desperation. The federal government tried many programs to alleviate the crisis and many Americans voluntarily became part of this experimentation. No one, single program could have forestalled the crisis that was agriculture in the 1930s. Additionally, the fact that government policies established arbitrary guidelines, many of which could not or would not be met, contributed to further problems. The fact that these neighborhoods, former homesteads, are still discernible is testament to the fact that they changed the landscape. That change was not necessarily the intent of the government programs that designed them, but they did have lasting impact on the physical and human landscapes in Hattiesburg, McComb, and Tupelo.

Hart defines the word landscape as the things we see (Hart 1995). Using that definition, what you see in Hattiesburg, McComb, and Tupelo are neighborhoods that are distinctive from others in those cities precisely because they were legislated. All three share similar characteristics that exist because of the way they were established. For instance, in all three communities, the lots are larger than average residential lots in later years. The larger lots are quite evident in the pictures of the homesteads, both historical and current. The lots were larger, most ranged from three to five acres, to accommodate federal guidelines mandating orchard trees, livestock, and other provisions included in the homestead. The architectural style in each of the three neighborhoods was the same as were the building materials and paint color.

Each of the communities was established on the outskirts of their respective cities. The location certainly was a factor in another objective of the homestead program – to allow homesteaders to earn a wage while farming part-time. The availability of wage-

earning jobs during the Depression combined with the distance of these communities from industry meant that there would be limited opportunities for homesteaders to meet this objective.

Despite failing to meet the government's objective, these homesteads certainly did change the landscape. According to Lewis, huge events such as the Depression immediately change the landscape but they also have long-term consequences and may create wholly different landscapes than were intended (Lewis 1979). This is certainly the case in Hattiesburg, McComb, and Tupelo.

The immediate change is evident in the historical photographs of the three homesteads. The construction of homes and outbuildings, subdivision of the land, establishment of orchards, and selection of residents resulted in previously undeveloped land being occupied. The guidelines created by the federal government dictated how these homestead communities looked and who lived there. The experiment to provide affordable homesteads to poor farmers created a whole new and intentional landscape.

Long-term change is equally evident. The three communities are distinctive from surrounding neighborhoods primarily because of the size of lots and size and age of the homes. The distance of the homesteads to current urban growth in each location is also a distinguishing characteristic. In Hattiesburg and McComb, neighborhoods are low to middle income and there is a discernible sense of community.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The potential and real impact of public policy on the citizenry and landscape are evident in this research. The government did much to change farming, the landscape, and the economy during the Great Depression and New Deal. An evaluation of this is significant to not only historical accounts, but also to the current conditions.

Many important questions were addressed in this research. Among them whether or not an underrepresented group (tenants and share croppers) achieved success through government legislated change. Another is the comparison of the government's objective with the success of the individual. These issues have relevance for evaluating our past success as a nation and anticipating future success.

A study of these three homesteads is an exercise in trying to understand the human structures on the landscape. With regard to intent, each of the three began the same. With regard to origin, each was a creation of federal government programs. With regard to the success of individual landownership, each was a failure in the government's objective.

According to Hart, we must attempt to understand human structures such as these in terms of their creators, inhabitants, and custodians (Hart 1995). These vestiges of government established subsistence homesteads give us insight into what was important to the government with regard to farming, what was important to inhabitants with regard to attraction, and what was important with regard to local economic development with regard to a combination of wage earning and farming.

What is much more difficult to ascertain is the impact this experiment had on the landscape in perpetuity. Although this research could include many disciplines, the study of the human and physical geography of these homesteads is valuable. It serves to afford us a fuller understanding of the landscapes around us.

Just as the New Deal did not end the Depression, homesteads in Hattiesburg, McComb, and Tupelo did not resolve home ownership for poor Mississippians in these communities. These homesteads did, however, have a permanent impact. The neighborhoods in Hattiesburg and McComb are distinctive and are a physical reflection of the federal program that created them. The larger lots, house types and distance from current urban growth distinguish them from other neighborhoods established later. Tupelo Homestead became a static relic bypassed because it is now owned by the National Park Service and residence there is prohibited.

Future research comparing homesteads in Mississippi with homesteads in other states could be valuable. Research could help to determine whether distinctive conditions existed in Mississippi to prevent home purchase by homesteaders. Another direction of future research should compare homesteads established for African Americans with homesteads established for whites in Mississippi and in the South. Racial segregation and the prevalence of legally sanctioned racism did influence federal policy, and it is valuable to evaluate the ways in which that affected the success of New Deal farm programs for African Americans.

REFERENCES

- Biles, Roger. *The South and the New Deal*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994.
- Bing Maps. <http://www.bing.com/maps/print.aspx?mkt=en-us&z=14&s=r&cp=31.223936,-90.416986&poi=McComb%2C%20MS&pp=p66vv07fvy84&pt=pb>, (accessed October 15, 2013).
- Boyd, Robert. "A migration of despair: unemployment, the search for work, and migration to farms during the Great Depression." *Social Science Quarterly*, 2002:554-567.
- Boyer, Paul S., C. E. Clark, J.F.Kett, N. Salisbury, H. Sitkoff, N. Woloch. *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008.
- City of Hattiesburg. <http://www.hattiesburgms.com/city-maps>, (accessed October 11, 2013).
- Cohen, Wilbur J. *The Roosevelt New Deal: A Program Assessment Fifty Years After*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 1986.
- Conkin, Paul K. *A revolution down on the farm: the transformation of American agriculture since 1929*. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2008.
- , *FDR and the Origins of the Welfare State*. New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967.

Dubay, Robert. "The Civilian Conservation Corps: A study of opposition, 1933-1935."

The Southern Quarterly, 1968: 341-358.

Emmerich, Oliver. "Homesteads come to McComb." *McComb Enterprise*, 1934: 2.

English, Andrew R. *A History of the early Hattiesburg, Mississippi area: All off for*

Gordon's Station. Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 2000.

Farrell, Sean "Not just farms anymore: the effects of World War II on Mississippi's

economy." *Mississippi History Now* (2001), [http://mshistory.k12.us/articles/247/](http://mshistory.k12.us/articles/247/not-just-farms-anymore-the-effects-of-world-war-ii-on-mississippi-s-economy)

not-just-farms-anymore-the-effects-of-world-war-ii-on-mississippi-s-economy

(accessed February 1, 2009).

Fickle, James E. *Timber: a photographic history of Mississippi forestry*. Jackson, MS:

University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

Goldfield, D., C. Abbott, V. D. Anderson, J.E. Argersinger, W.L. Barney, R. M. Weir.

The American Journey. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.

Gregor, H. *Geography of agriculture: themes in research*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ:

Prentice-Hall, 1970.

Harper, Andrew C. *The Civilian Conservation Corps and Mississippi: a New Deal*

Success Story. Hattiesburg, MS: University of Southern Mississippi, 1992.

Hart, J. F. *The changing scale of American agriculture*. Charlottesville, VA: University of

Virginia Press, 2003.

-----."Reading the Landscape." *Landscape in America*. Austin, TX: University of Texas

Press, 1995.

-----. *The look of the land*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975.

-----. *The rural landscape*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Hattiesburg Area Historical Society. *The history of Forrest County, Mississippi*.

Hattiesburg, MS: The Hattiesburg Area Historical Society, 2000.

Hickman, Nollie. *Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt 1840-1915*.

University, MS: The University of Mississippi, 1962.

Hoffman, Gilbert H. *Dummy Lines Through the Longleaf: a history of the sawmills and logging railroads of southwest Mississippi*. University, MS: The University of Mississippi, 1992.

-----, *Steam Whistles in the Piney Woods. A History of the Sawmills and Logging Railroads of Forrest and Lamar Counties, Mississippi*. 1, *The Newman and Tatum Lumber Companies and the Mills at Lumberton*. Hattiesburg, MS: Longleaf Press, 1998.

Holley, Donald. "The negro in the New Deal resettlement program." *Agricultural History*, 1971: 179-193.

-----, *Uncle Sam's Farmers: The New Deal Communities in the Lower Mississippi Valley*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1975.

Howe, Tony. "Growth of the Lumber Industry (1840 to 1930)" *Mississippi History Now* (2001), <http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/articles/171/growth-of-the-lumber-industry-1840-1930> (accessed February 5, 2009).

Humphrey, Hubert H. *The Political Philosophy of the New Deal*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1970.

Johnson, Tracey. 2010. Map not published.

- Kelley, Arthell and Spillman, Robert C. "Sequent Occupancy of the Piney Woods of Southeastern Mississippi, 1805 to 1976." *The Mississippi Geographer*. 1976: 25-42.
- Kennedy, David. *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Lester, Connie. "Economic Development in the 1930s: Balance Agriculture with Industry." *Mississippi History Now*, 2004: 1-6.
- Lewis, Pierce F. "Axioms for reading the landscape: some guides to the American scene." *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Library of Congress. Prints and Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, 1935.
- Martin, G. *All Possible Worlds: a history of geographical ideas, Fourth Edition*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- McCarty, Kenneth. "Depression and Hard Times in Mississippi: letters from the William M. Colmer Papers." *Mississippi History Now*, 2000: 1-12.
- McLemore, Richard Aubrey, editor. *A History of Mississippi, Volume II*. Hattiesburg, MS: University & College Press of Mississippi, 1973.
- Miller, Mary C. *Written in the Bricks: A visual and historical tour of Mississippi hometowns*. Brandon, MS: Quail Ridge Press, 1999.
- Montello, D. and P. Sutton. *An Introduction to Scientific Research Methods in Geography*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2006.
- Murphy, Lindsey. 2011. Map not published.
- National Park Service. U.S. Department of the Interior, 1940.

- Rhoads, Joy D. 2010. Photographs not published.
- Rowntree, Lester B. *The Cultural Landscape Concept in American Human Geography*,
Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996.
- Sauer, Carl O. "Foreward to historical geography." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 1941: 1-24.
- Schlesinger, Arthur. *The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal*. Boston, MA:
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959.
- Smith, Fred C. "Cooperative Farming in Mississippi." *Mississippi History Now* , 2004: 1-9.
- . Shadows over Goshen: plain whites, Progressives and paternalism in the depression South. Doctoral dissertation. Department of History, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS., 2008.
- . "The Tupelo Homesteads: New Deal agrarian experiment." *Journal of Mississippi History*, 2006: 85-112.
- Sternsher, Bernard. *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal*. New Brunswick, NJ:
Rutgers University Press, 1964.
- Steiner, M. "Regionalism in the Great Depression." *Geographical Review*, 1983, 73(4):
430-446.
- Strange, Pearl R. Interview conducted by Joy D. Rhoads. March 3, 2010.
- Tate, Roger D. *Easing the Burden: The Era of Depression and New Deal in Mississippi*.
Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1978.
- Tugwell, Rexford. "The Resettlement Idea." *Agricultural History*, 1959.

Whittlesey, Dewrwent. "The impress of effective central authority upon the landscape."

Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 1935: 85-97.