

FEDERAL AID TO COMMUNITIES, OCTOBER 1934.

Franklin D. Roosevelt inaugurated the New Deal in March 1933. Roughly 13,000,000 workers, most of them heads of households, were unemployed. The price of cotton, this area's staple, was an all-time low.

By 1934 Federal attempts to revive the economy were visible in York, Lancaster and Chester counties. There were numerous newly-established federal agencies but the main ones that directly affected local employment were: W. P.A. (Works Progress Administration), P.W.A. (Public Works Administration), and C.C.C. (Civilian Conservation Corps).

On October 5, 1934 it was announced by the Department of Interior that 50,000 acres of farm land in the watershed area of Fishing Creek in York County was to be part of a special soil erosion project.

The allotment was \$150,000 for establishing terraces and reforesting worn out cotton fields. In less than a week soil erosion experts had met with 225 farmers and drawn up a plan of action. A. F. Ruff, the project head, set up an office in Rock Hill's Citizens Bank Building and hired "telephone girls."

Agriculture Department workers began mapping each farm. The mapping included the first aerial photographing in American history. Notes were made of the type of soil in each field and how badly the field was gullied. After individual conferences with farmers, a plan of action was laid out. W. L. Poe's farm was the first one to be listed in the records.

Within four days five "terracing men" were on the scene. They had taken a ten-week course in Spartanburg that would allow them to direct farmers and farm laborers who were to operate the trucks, tractors and other equipment needed to carry out the project. The Barron Motor Company on E. White St., Rock Hill was rented to store the equipment and barbed wire for the project.

Meantime, the National Reemployment Service had hired men to build a new bridge across Sugar Creek between Fort Mill and the Lancaster-Charlotte highway. Concrete and creosote timber replaced a 17-year-old all-timber bridge.

Rock Hill's sewerage ran in an open ditch to the Catawba River. Federal money was used to lay a sewer line 7 miles long. For the first time, Emmett Scott School was to have indoor toilets and connect with the Rock Hill sewer system.

The Rock Hill sewer project is a good example of the work of the P.W.A. Federal money paid private contractors (in this case, Blythe Bros. of Charlotte) to carry out a project that would improve the lives of citizens. It was not an outright gift to the local government. Rock Hill would eventually pay back the \$263,000 the sewer project cost but at

low interest rates. Again, all of the workers would be drawn from the rolls of the National Reemployment Service.

Not everyone liked the idea of “work relief” or “make-work,” as some called it. Oddly, there were those who argued in favor of government charity or “the dole” rather than government employment of the unemployed. They believed the dole would be less costly to the federal budget with less overhead cost in the long run.

Those who favored work relief argued that it was better for morale and the projects were really needed. Besides, it was believed that men with jobs were more likely to live with their families and support them. Some thought that it was all right to provide jobs for men but drew the line at “make-work” for women. And there were those who protested government jobs designed to allow college students to work and remain in school. A few thought that assistance to the needy was not a function of government at all.

But most of the people were grateful for government assistance. And, except for bringing in kudzu, the soil erosion programs, including the C.C.C. camps, were the most popular of all the New Deal projects.

Correction: The October 16th story on Fannie Wilson erred in stating that Miss Wilson was buried in Ebenezer Cemetery. She was buried in Rose Hill Cemetery, York.