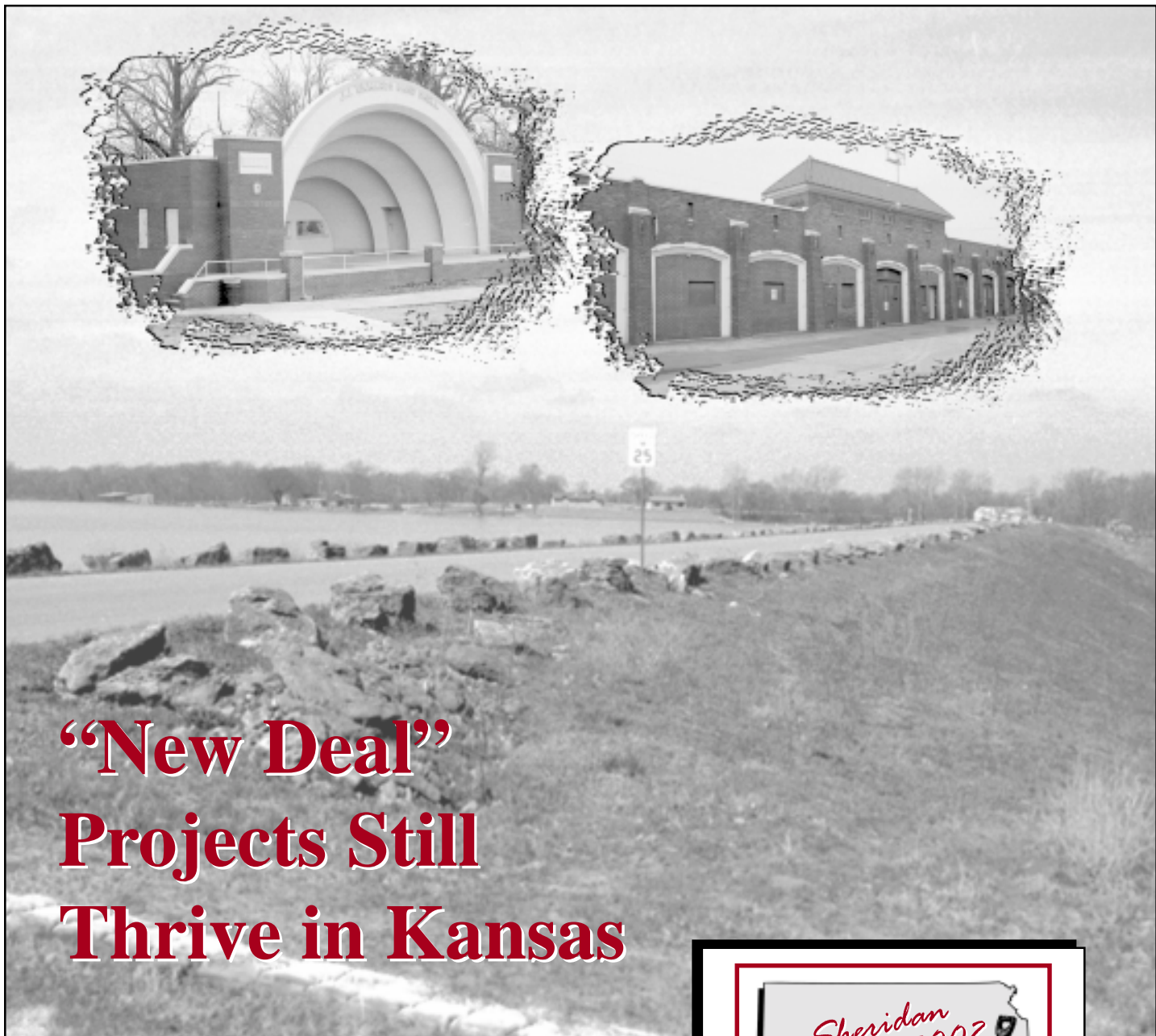


# Kansas Preservation

Newsletter of the Cultural Resources Division ▪ Kansas State Historical Society



## “New Deal” Projects Still Thrive in Kansas

*In the 1930s and 1940s “New Deal” construction helped the nation recover from the Great Depression by creating jobs and restoring hope. Today, many of these projects are still Kansas landmarks.*

*Article on page 7*



**KANSAS**  
**ARCHEOLOGY**  
Training Program

July 1 - 16, 2002

**Also in this issue, information about  
the annual KATP field school.**

# The New Deal in Kansas

The Great Depression was a bleak time for the United States. People from all walks of life and in all parts of the country felt the effects of the nation's dire economic conditions. Over the course of a decade (1933-1943) state and federal government agencies assisted the nation by creating programs that provided work for the unemployed and that funded public improvement projects.

Like the rest of the nation, the Kansas economy was severely hurt by the unemployment, bank closures, and business failures that followed the stock market crash of 1929. The subsequent drought of the 1930s further impacted the Kansas economy, which was largely dependent upon agricultural production. From 1934 through 1937, as the Great Depression worsened, the western part of the state became a Dust Bowl. Along with its urban workers, the state's farmers faced tough times.

Prior to the Depression, different combinations of private and public funding provided assistance to the poor in Kansas. Managed at the county level, the system was inefficient and varied. In rural Kansas counties, the county clerk administered relief efforts. Some areas employed a Commissioner of the Poor, while others delegated relief work to private organizations like the American Red Cross. Beginning in 1924, counties obtained funding for relief efforts through property tax assessments. However, the Depression forced the State of Kansas to lower the property tax rate in the early 1930s, thereby reducing the money available to fund county relief programs. By 1932, the counties needed additional financial assistance in order to sustain the local populace.

In July 1932, nearly three years after the onset of the Depression, President Herbert Hoover signed the Emergency



Figure 1 – Lobby, Herington Post Office, PWA 1935, Herington, Dickinson County.

*At the end of his first 100 days in office Roosevelt had created an “alphabet soup” of New Deal programs that provided the nation with millions of dollars for public improvement projects and job creation.*

Relief and Construction Act. This limited measure provided federal loans to the states to finance day labor and the construction of public works. To oversee state relief efforts and to manage these new funds, the State of Kansas established the Kansas Federal Relief Committee. The state's initial allotment for one month in the fall of 1932 was \$450,000.

Following his inauguration in March 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt ushered in a new era of hope. At the end of his first 100 days in office Roosevelt had created an “alphabet soup” of New Deal programs that provided the nation with millions of dollars for public improvement projects and job creation.

In accordance with the federal initiatives, state governments established agencies to identify and select worthy projects and to manage the work relief rolls. In Kansas the Kansas Federal Relief Committee

changed its name to the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC) to fulfill this function. The KERC also administered and distributed state relief funds. Millions of unemployed workers nationwide began constructing government buildings, libraries, schools, auditoriums, parks, waterworks, dams, roads and other public projects, which dotted the American landscape. Small communities and large benefitted from improved infrastructure, educational buildings, and recreational facilities. Public buildings in most communities were refurbished and modernized, if not replaced by grand new structures.

## Survey of New Deal Resources

In 2001, the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS) contracted Historic Pres-

ervation Services (HPS) of Kansas City to research the history and impact of New Deal programs in Kansas. HPS staff conducted general research about state and federal relief programs at repositories including the KSHS archives in Topeka; the Spencer Library at the University of Kansas in Lawrence; and the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Subsequently, HPS surveyed the specific results of the New Deal and KERC programs in two randomly selected Kansas counties, Dickinson and Crawford. The project culminated with the preparation of a National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submission for *New Deal Resources of Kansas* and a National Register nomination for the *Abilene City Park Historic District*.

## Historic Resources of the New Deal

The surveys of Crawford and Dickinson counties revealed the extent to which the New Deal programs affected the complexion of Kansas communities. While these projects were wide ranging in scope and form, all used funds or labor from one of the myriad of federal New Deal agencies or the KERC. Many of the resources surveyed embody the distinctive architectural styling associated with this era. These characteristics include the use of hand labor and an emphasis on craftsmanship, local building materials and construction methods, the use of standardized building plans, and local adaptations of popular architectural styles, in particular Craftsman, Art Deco and Moderne. Formal civic buildings were often designed with a blend of Beaux-Arts and Moderne styling, often referred to as PWA Modern, while park buildings typically embraced elements of Craftsman styling and folk vernacular construction, sometimes called Government Rustic. Constructed by public agencies for the public, these resources generally continue to serve their intended functions.

**Civic** resources included all construction related to the operation of municipal, county/regional, or federal government. Properties might include grand public structures, such as courthouses,

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*This article was prepared by Elizabeth Rosin of Historic Preservation Services under contract to the Kansas State Historical Society. The historical information was originally researched and compiled for the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form on the New Deal Resources of Kansas with the assistance of historian Jon Taylor. All photos are by Elizabeth Rosin.*

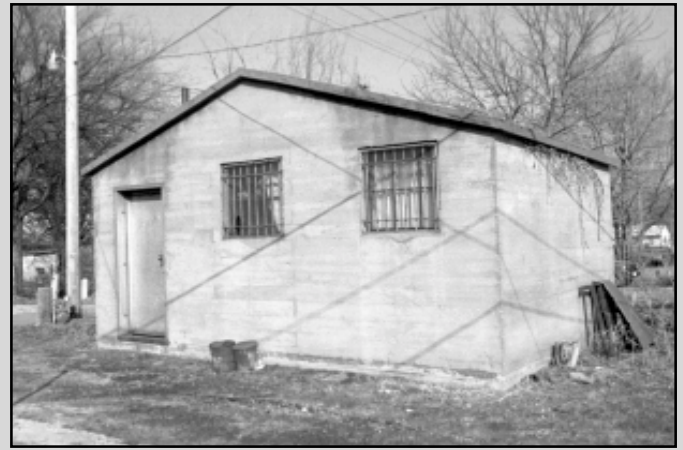


Figure 2 – City Jail, CWA 1933-34, Chapman, Dickinson County.



Figure 3 – Waterworks (Black & Veatch Engineers, Kansas City), PWA 1935-36, Pittsburg, Crawford County.

city halls, police and/or fire stations, and post offices with high style expressions of Classical and/or Moderne architecture. Smaller towns included more moderate examples of these building types. Many of these properties included murals or other works of art funded through the New Deal programs. The National Register-listed post office in Herington was constructed with PWA funds and includes a mural by H. Louis Freund entitled “Arrival of the First Train in Herington in 1885” (Figure 1). More utilitarian buildings of masonry construction with minimal architectural styling included jails (Figure 2), public works buildings, armories and other military facilities. Many civic buildings were constructed during this period, and often replaced civic structures erected in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. Other civic buildings were remodeled or rehabilitated using New Deal funds.

Resources related to **public utilities** included buildings and structures constructed to improve the general living conditions of the local community. These utilitarian, engineered facilities included waterworks (Figure 3), power and heating plants, storm sewers and sewage treatment plants, sanitary privies, and telephone systems. An emphasis was placed

*New Deal projects are considered in eight categories:*

*Civic Resources*

*Public Utilities*

*Educational Facilities*

*Social & Recreational Facilities*

*Institutional & Social Welfare Facilities*

*Transportation-related Systems & Structures*

*Conservation-related Projects*

*Cultural Landscape Elements*



on extending basic services, such as electricity and telephone service, to rural areas and to improving sanitary conditions and reducing the risk of disease. The majority of these resources were of concrete or masonry construction with little, if any, stylized ornament.

Where distances were too great to extend water lines to rural areas, New Deal programs constructed sanitary privies for individual property owners. These were generally small square or rectangular buildings of wood frame construction (although some might be masonry) with a shed or gable roof. A square window was a distinctive feature of the New Deal privies.

School buildings, libraries, museums and auditoriums were typical of **educational** facilities erected through the New Deal programs. Public school buildings and college buildings were constructed, added on to, or remodeled in many communities in an effort to modernize facilities and enhance educational opportunities. Constructed in 1942 with WPA funds, the Garfield School in Abilene is an excellent example of Moderne architecture (*Figure 4*). Combination auditorium/gymnasiums were frequently constructed, usually in association with or adjacent to school buildings, and typically served the needs of the community as well as those of the specific school. Many educational buildings and building additions included restrained elements of Moderne styling, such as the gymnasium/auditorium addition to the public school in Hope (*Figure 5*). Often these elements were limited to decorative cast stone medallions with stylized imagery or lettering. Additions usually matched the original building in materials (typically brick) and often in styling. New Deal work at schools also included the construction or enhancement of related athletic and maintenance facilities, such as the stadium at Roosevelt Middle School in Pittsburg (*Figure 6*) or the bus garage in McCune.

**Social and recreational** facilities constructed with New Deal funds and labor included large and small parks (municipal, county and state) often with band shells (*Figure 7*), picnic facilities (shelters, tables and benches, picnic ovens), toilet facilities and/or camp grounds; fairgrounds; bathhouses and swimming pools; and athletic fields with stadiums and field houses (*Figure 8*). The configuration of groups of buildings,



(Top) *Figure 4 – Garfield School (Joseph Radotinsky, Kansas City, with Murray & Cayton, Abilene), WPA 1942, Abilene, Dickinson County.*

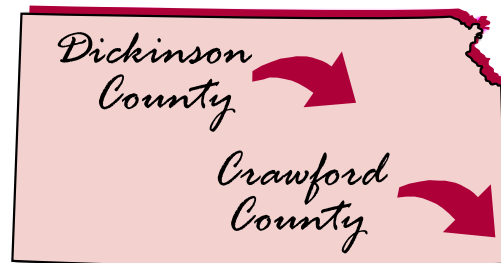
(Left) *Figure 5 – Hope Public School, 1912 with 1936 WPA Addition, Hope, Dickinson County.*

paths and/or roads (cultural landscape) is often key to the significance and integrity of resources in this category. The styling of these resources varied from rustic to Moderne and, like other resource types, these facilities were generally constructed in a manner that was more labor intensive than might otherwise be typical. For instance, while fairground barns were typically unornamented structures resting on concrete footings, New Deal edifices, such as those in Crawford County (*Figure 9*), often rested on stone foundations. Likewise, picnic facilities in public parks were constructed of concrete and stone rather than of wood. (*Figure 10*)

**Institutional buildings and social welfare** projects included hospitals, county poor farms and welfare offices, housing projects, and work camp buildings and structures. Hospitals were large permanent buildings whose construction and design were similar to that described above for civic buildings. Facilities for transient workers, whether through the Resettlement Act or works programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, were

designed to be temporary, although concrete slab foundations and wood frame construction were typical. In some locations railroad boxcars provided housing for transient groups. The buildings at these complexes were often barracks-like in nature and, when found in context, were typically arranged in military-like compounds. While it is unlikely that any of the New Deal institutional housing remains extant, it is very possible that the these camps remain as archaeological sites.

**Transportation-related** systems and structures might include airport facilities (runways and hangars); highway, street and sidewalk projects; and bridges. Additional highway-related infrastructure included road paving and culvert and bridge construction. This work was intended to raise the populace out of the mud of the rural back roads and to provide access to larger markets for goods and services. These resources were utilitarian in design. Concrete was the typical paving material and was also used for bridges, while steel typically framed and clad larger structures.





(Top) Figure 6 – Athletic Stadium, WPA 1940, Theodore Roosevelt Middle School, Pittsburg, Crawford County.

(Right) Figure 7 – Bandshell, WPA 1936-37, Lincoln Park, Pittsburg, Crawford County.

(Below) Figure 8 – Ray Tripp Field House, WPA 1935, Herington, Dickinson County.



and after the Depression. Crawford County received a significant share of New Deal funds and many projects were constructed. However, since then at least 14 of these resources have been demolished.

Only 26 remained extant, including the multi-building county fair ground complex east of Girard. Most notably, a number of schools in small crossroads mining camp towns that were built or remodeled using New Deal funds have long since vanished along with their associated communities. Also notable was the presence of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Crawford County. Camps located near Farlington and Frontenac were respon-

sible for improving two county parks, one of which was reclaimed from former strip mining pits in the late-1920s. Other resources extant in Crawford County include city parks, athletic stadiums, a water treatment plant, schools, and civic buildings.

## The New Deal in Dickinson County

The economy of Dickinson County, although agriculturally based, was much more stable during the Depression than was that of Crawford County. The county received a smaller share of New Deal funds but retains a much higher percentage of those resources than does Crawford County. Only two improvements could not be located – a school addition in Manchester and a remodeled school in Solomon. The 20 extant New Deal-era resources in Dickinson County include schools, parks, swimming pools and bathhouses, a jail, and a post office with a mural. These remaining resources are generally well cared for and typically continue to serve their original functions.

The Abilene City Park, nominated to the National Register as part of this project, wonderfully illustrates how one community took advantage of the many programs available during this period. Like many communities nationwide, the City of Abilene made extensive use of

**Conservation-related** properties were typically large resources, such as lakes, dams and reservoirs (Figure 11); wildlife refuges and fish hatcheries; forestry stations; reforestation projects; shelterbelts, terraces, contour lines and pasture furrows. These projects aimed to protect natural resources and reclaim farmlands lost during the Dust Bowl. For instance, in southeastern Kansas extensive efforts were made to reclaim land violated by strip mining. Thousands of acres of strip mine pits were partially filled, planted with trees, and stocked with fish to create recreational parkland. Likewise, in southcentral Kansas shelterbelts planted on over 16,000 acres of farmland began to reverse the effects of the Dust Bowl within three years.

New Deal projects that affected **cultural landscape** elements included everything from construction of sidewalks,

curbs and gutters to designed parks, fairgrounds and cemeteries, and reforestation and reclamation projects. These projects included informal natural landscapes as well as highly formal arrangements of paths and structures. In addition to the conservation-related resources described above, landscape elements might include entrances, walls or fences and/or a designed network of paths or roads that in some cases encircled a natural or manmade body of water. Additional efforts included grading, clearing or planting trees, and other landscaping efforts.

## The New Deal in Crawford County

Crawford County, in southeastern Kansas, was very poor during the 1930s. Its economy was based on mining, an industry that suffered significantly before





*Figure 9 – Animal Barns, Crawford County Fair Grounds, WPA 1936, Girard Vicinity, Crawford County.*



*(Above) Figure 10 – Picnic Table and Benches, City Park, WPA 1937, Abilene, Dickinson County.*



*(Left) Figure 11 – Dam (Paulette & Wilson Engineers, Salina), Crawford County State Park Number 2, CCC 1934-38, Farlington Vicinity, Crawford County.*

New Deal funds (Civil Works Administration, KEREC, Public Works Administration, and Works Progress Administration) between 1934 and 1939 to improve the existing fairgrounds and to develop the remainder of the property as a municipal park. In the spirit of the New Deal, the project was undertaken as a labor-intensive effort that would employ a large number of individuals currently receiving public relief. Following its construction the park would provide the community with an enduring public amenity.

During a presentation to the Abilene Rotary Club on June 4, 1938, Dr. Bruce Thayer, a member of the City Park Board, urged the community to take advantage of available public funding to make the desired park improvements. He noted that the proposed improvements could be maintained using existing city equipment, this was not a project that would drain future resources from the already stretched city budget, and it would provide an on-going source of pride to the community.

The city hired civil engineers

Paulette and Wilson of Salina to design the park infrastructure. A local architectural firm, Murray and Cayton, designed the buildings, and another local architect, Charles Brainard, laid out the formal garden.

Work included grading the land; installing water and sewer lines; and

building roads, paths, curbs and gutters; as well as a series of larger amenities including a bandshell, fair ground stadium, swimming pool and bathhouse, formal garden, picnic amenities, and a playground. (The original bandshell burned in 1992 and was replaced by a new structure in the late 1990s.)

The completed park represented the ideals of park planning and design during this period, offering both active and passive recreation opportunities. Of the resources surveyed in both counties, the Abilene park was singular both in the quantity and quality of New Deal construction it originally received and in its retention of the vast majority of those elements, including buildings and cultural landscape features.

## Conclusion

Dating only to the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their recent vintage has helped preserve many New Deal-era resources. However, with each passing year, the number of surviving resources dwindles. Fortunately, as this survey showed, many of the remaining New Deal-era resources in Kansas are well cared for and retain sufficient integrity to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Listing on the National Register will offer these resources the recognition necessary to cultivate creative preservation alternatives and to attract the funding necessary to ensure their long-term preservation. The National Register Multiple Property Submission for *New Deal Resources of Kansas* now provides a vehicle that will help local communities recognize, protect and preserve their resources from the New Deal for the benefit of future generations.

## National Conference on the New Deal to Meet in Chicago

*“The New Deal: Past, Present and Future” is the title of the program of the National New Deal Preservation Association scheduled for May 3 and 4, 2002, in Chicago. Conference sessions will be held at the Art Institute of Chicago and Roosevelt University.*

*The keynote speakers are Francis V. O’Connor, author of Art for the Millions, and Studs Terkel, author and participant in Federal Writers’ and Theater Projects.*

*Among the topics included on the agenda are New Deal history, labor history, Social Security, Federal Theater Project, post office murals, oral history, curriculum development, mural tours, and many others.*

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